Shining a Light on Obstacles to Access in the South:
The Center for Access to Justice

“We are thrilled to have created a space at the law school that can support those working to improve access to justice and engage students with the issues that face lower-income civil and criminal litigants.”

—Lauren Sudeall Lucas, faculty director of the Center for Access to Justice
The Center for Access to Justice, founded in 2016, supports those working to ensure meaningful access to the courts and equal treatment in the civil and criminal justice systems, with a regional focus on the South. To that end, the center convenes stakeholders, engages in research and public education and trains the next generation of lawyers to serve the public interest.

Learn more about the center’s work and mark your calendar for our upcoming events. Your support makes a difference in furthering our mission. Thank you.

**Highlights**

The center offers regular opportunities for stakeholders to convene to explore existing obstacles to access to justice and discuss strategies for change. Highlights from the year to date include:

- Held an **Interdisciplinary Workshop** for graduate students and faculty members from across Georgia State University, giving participants an opportunity to discuss their access to justice research and share ideas for future collaboration.

- Co-sponsored a CLE program on **Eliminating Barriers to Access to Justice**, focusing on language access and the challenges people with disabilities face in navigating Georgia’s civil and criminal justice systems.

- Co-sponsored a conference, **Lawyering for Racial Justice in Georgia**, that detailed the history of racial-justice lawyering in Atlanta from the violence of Reconstruction to contemporary questions of voting rights and criminal justice.

- Engaged students through a **Public Interest Organizations Fair** and a three-part series on public interest careers that the center co-sponsored. Georgia State Law students heard from alumni and other local practitioners working in the public sector. Representatives from local community organizations and government offices discussed a variety of ways students can get involved in public interest and pro bono work and how to pursue those opportunities.
The 59th Henry J. Miller Lecture, featuring Lisa Foster, former director of the Department of Justice’s Office for Access to Justice. Foster will examine failures of our justice system — including the excessive imposition and unconstitutional enforcement of fines and fees, money bail, and the lack of legal representation in both criminal and civil cases — and potential pathways forward as we strive for truly equal justice under law. The lecture will underscore the importance of the work the center is doing to advance lasting change in the courts.

Upcoming Events

Thursday, March 9
Trans Justice, a lunchtime panel, co-sponsored with OUTLaw, will explore the name-change litigation in Georgia and challenges to North Carolina’s HB2, which, among other things, prohibits people from using the bathroom that corresponds with their gender identity.

Monday, April 3
A faculty workshop with Vicki Lens, co-sponsored by the center, Georgia State Law and Andrew Young School of Policy Studies’ School of Social Work. Lens, professor of social work at Hunter College, City University of New York, is the author of Poor Justice: How the Poor Fare in the Courts (Oxford). This event, open to faculty and select students, is just one example of the interdisciplinary collaboration the center seeks to foster.

Thursday-Friday, April 6-7
Overcriminalization and Indigent Legal Care Conference, with Georgia State’s Jean Beer Blumenfeld Center for Ethics, brings together scholars in philosophy, legal theory and related fields to present original scholarship on overcriminalization and lower-income people’s access to legal services. Sponsors include the Charles Koch Foundation, the Institute for Humane Studies at George Mason University and the Georgia State University Research Services & Administration Conference Grant Program.
Welcome

Stephen B. Bright, former president and senior counsel at the Southern Center for Human Rights, recently joined Georgia State Law and the center. “Steve’s addition to the faculty is an incredible asset to the law school, given his breadth of experience and knowledge of the law, and his deep understanding of the history of criminal justice in the South,” said Lauren Sudeall Lucas, faculty director.

Research & Working Groups

The center conducts and facilitates research to help identify and better understand the obstacles individuals face in securing meaningful access to the courts. Thanks to a $79,000 grant from the Charles Koch Foundation, the center is in the first stage of a two-phase study on the civil legal needs of indigent criminal defendants. In conjunction with the Georgia State Sociology and Criminal Justice and Criminology departments, the center is working with public defender offices in Fulton and DeKalb counties to assess the nature and pervasiveness of civil legal issues facing those who enter the criminal justice system.

The center is also working with the Mississippi Office of the Public Defender to research indigent defendants’ experience in state criminal courts. Through this project, five students have been selected to travel to Jackson, Mississippi, to engage in court watching and information gathering over spring break.

The center’s four student fellows have also been engaged on a number of research projects, ranging from the structure of indigent defense systems to the unique access to justice issues facing people in rural communities.

In addition to the center’s ongoing projects, Lauren Sudeall Lucas, faculty director, serves on the working group for the Justice For All grant awarded to the Georgia Bar Foundation by the National Center for State Courts and the Public Welfare Foundation. Georgia was one of only seven states — and the only one in the South — to receive the award, which provides $94,300 for strategic planning to expand meaningful access to justice in Georgia.
“Being a center fellow has significantly enriched my law school experience. I get to work on interesting projects that matter, connect my fellow students with pro bono opportunities and build a network in the Atlanta public interest community.” — Andrew Navratil (J.D. ’18), Center student fellow

Education & Service

The center seeks to create a supportive environment and serve as a hub for students interested in pursuing public interest or pro bono work, either during or after their time in law school. In addition to coordinating student research and writing, Lauren Sudeall Lucas, faculty director, and Darcy Meals, assistant director, will co-teach a yearlong course, Access to Justice: Law Reform, during the 2017-18 academic year.

A Public Interest Law and Policy Certificate program, administered by the center, is under development for students interested in learning more about social justice issues and lawyering skills pertinent to a career in the public interest or an active pro bono practice.

The center will also house a student-run pro bono program that connects law students with volunteer opportunities to contribute to access to justice and will coordinate alternative spring break trips that allow students to immerse themselves in a substantive legal area while engaging in pro bono service. This year’s trips are in Atlanta, focusing on landlord tenant law, and Jackson, Mississippi, focusing on the experiences of unrepresented indigent criminal defendants in state criminal court.

Congratulations

Megan Harrison (J.D. ’18) is the first recipient of a summer fellowship dedicated to the memory of Thomas “Jake” Waldrop (J.D. ’85). The fellowship was created to provide funding for a Georgia State Law student working with the Federal Defender’s Office for the summer.

“The center aims to create a supportive environment for students to think about these issues, to contribute to access to justice through public interest and pro bono work and to engage with those practicing in the field.” — Darcy Meals, assistant director of the Center for Access to Justice
Support the Center and Join Our Listserv

Help us continue this important work by visiting law.gsu.edu/a2j. Join our listserv to stay abreast of our work and events and click “Support the Center” to make a financial contribution. Your help ensures the center can continue to support these important discussions, engage in critical research, and provide meaningful opportunities to our students.

We are grateful for the support you’ve provided during our first year and look forward to having you as part of our community for years to come.

Lauren Sudeall Lucas  
Faculty director

Darcy Meals  
Assistant director

“The generous support of alumni and friends enables the Center for Access to Justice to fulfill its mission of facilitating equal and meaningful access to the justice system. Your support helps ensure the center is able to highlight the need and continue this important work in a region that often lacks the attention it deserves.”

— Lauren Sudeall Lucas, faculty director of the Center for Access to Justice