

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION
The University of Michigan
Law School

Sonja B. Starr, assistant professor of law, Law School, is recommended for promotion to professor of law, with tenure, Law School.

Academic Degrees:

J.D. 2002 Yale Law School, New Haven, CT
A.B. 1998 Harvard University, Social Studies, Cambridge, MA

Professional Record:

2009-Present Assistant Professor, Law School, University of Michigan
2008-2009 Assistant Professor, University of Maryland School of Law, Baltimore, MD
2006-2008 Climenko Fellow and Lecturer on Law, Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA
2005-2006 Law Clerk, Judge Mohamed Shahabuddeen, Appeals Chamber, International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda
2003-2005 Associate, Goldstein & Howe, P.C., Washington, DC
2002-2003 Law Clerk, Judge Merrick Garland, U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Starr teaches Criminal Law, International Criminal Law, and a seminar on Collateral Consequences of Criminal Conviction (C4). She has poured enormous effort into her teaching, and she is now a popular and effective teacher. Thus, in the student evaluations from last semester, she received median scores in the top quartile for the school, and most of the comments were quite favorable. Students speak of how well organized, enthusiastic, and helpful she is, that they have learned great deal from her, that she pushes them to think deeply, and that they would gladly take another class from her.

Research: Professor Starr's recent work examines disparities in criminal sentencing. Underlying the project is construction of a massive data base that, for the first time, allows quantitative study of large numbers of cases from arrest through sentencing, and so enables scholars to examine the effects of decisions made before sentencing. This groundwork has already produced three significant papers. One shows that racial disparity is attributable in large part to prosecutors' tendency to charge blacks, significantly more frequently than similarly situated whites, with crimes bearing mandatory minimum sentences. Another analyzes in depth the reasons why women tend to serve substantially lighter sentences than similarly situated men. A third explores the effects of the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court holding that the federal sentencing guidelines are merely advisory. It demonstrates persuasively that a report of the U.S. Sentencing Commission, which concluded that the decision augmented racial sentencing disparities, was analytically flawed, and that the consequences of the decision, including its effect on prosecutorial choices, are much more complex than had previously been recognized.

Professor Starr has also written an influential article contending that in some cases sentence reduction rather than acquittal is an appropriate remedy for prosecutorial misconduct. Even before this article was published, a federal district court relied heavily on it in adopting this remedy. She has also written papers on international criminal law, one contending that rigidity in remedies might cause tribunals to construe rights too narrowly, and the other presenting a useful analysis of the causes of defense counsel incompetence in international criminal trials.

Recent and Significant Scholarship:

- Sonja B. Starr & M. Marit Rehavi, "A New Approach to Estimating Sentencing Disparity: Bringing Prosecutors Into the Picture" (submitted for publication).
- Sonja B. Starr, "Estimating Gender Disparities in Federal Criminal Cases," *Univ. of Mich. Law & Econ. Empirical Legal Studies Ctr.*, Paper No. 12-018, 2012 (submitted for publication).
- M. Marit Rehavi & Sonja B. Starr, "Racial Disparity in Federal Criminal Charging and Its Sentencing Consequences," *Univ. of Mich. Law & Econ. Empirical Legal Studies Ctr.*, Paper No. 12-002, 2012 (on revise & resubmit, *JOURNAL OF POLITICAL ECONOMY*).
- Sonja B. Starr, "Ensuring Defense Counsel Competence at International Criminal Tribunals," International Criminal Procedure Symposium Issue, *UCLA J. INT'L L. & FOREIGN AFFAIRS*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring 2009, pg. 169-206.
- Sonja B. Starr, "Sentence Reduction as a Remedy for Prosecutorial Misconduct," *GEORGETOWN LAW JOURNAL*, vol. 97, 2009, pg. 1509-1566.
- Sonja B. Starr, "Rethinking 'Effective Remedies': Remedial Deterrence in International Courts," *N.Y.U. L. REV.*, vol. 83, June 2008, pg. 693-768.

Service: Professor Starr has sat on a range of committees within the Law School, some but not all with an international orientation. She has performed three valuable, and very different, services for the University. She is on the dissertation committee for a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science. Drawing on her extensive debate experience, she is a member of the Advisory Committee on the University's debate team, and was instrumental in restoring the team to a sound footing after the sudden departure of its head coach. She helped fill a significant void by starting the New Faculty Social Group in 2009.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: "[Starr] possesses . . . the ability to produce ideas likely to contribute to new thinking about the law."

Reviewer B: ". . . very high quality empirical work that should easily meet the standards for tenure at any top American law school."

Reviewer C: "Professor Starr has demonstrated the highest quality of scholarship and . . . I have every reason to believe that Starr will continue to produce first-rate scholarship."

Reviewer D: "Her work combines methodological, substantive, and institutional nuance and insight that makes it some of the strongest research in criminal justice by a junior scholar that I've had the fortune to read. . . . I'll be looking forward to reading her work for years to come."


Reviewer E: “Early on, I was quite skeptical of Sonja’s decision to switch her research methods In Sonja’s case I was wrong. Sonja’s use of quantitative, empirical work has been extremely successful. She speaks the language like a native. In part this is because she seems to have a particular talent for quantitative work, and in part it is because of her dogged work in acquiring this new set of skills.”

Reviewer F: “I regard Starr as a first-rate legal scholar with immense potential. She has already written numerous important articles. In addition, she has acquired a combination of skills that are highly suited to advancing scholarly knowledge of criminal procedure. I am convinced that she will emerge as a leading figure in that field and in the broader movement generally to synthesize legal scholarly insight with the innovative empirical methods being developed in economics, political science, and related disciplines. I have no doubt that she would merit tenure at any of the U.S.’s premier law schools”

Reviewer G: “[T]hese papers . . . represent significant contributions, and they bode well that future work will possess the same qualities of creativity, thoroughness, and relevance. These are papers that any empiricist at any elite law school would be very glad to have in his or her tenure file. I imagine that they would help greatly advance a case for tenure at any elite law school.”

Reviewer H: “I think she is the best of her generation. . . . [H]er command of the field is superb, her insights and questions are original, and her analysis is potent. You are fortunate to have such a brilliant Assistant Professor, and if I were you I would be chafing at the bit to promote her to tenure.”

Summary of Recommendation: Professor Starr has done remarkable work that, in a very short time, has established herself as a leading figure in empirical study of the criminal justice system. She has worked hard to make herself an effective teacher, and she has rendered very useful service, to both the Law School and the university as a whole. With the support of the Law School faculty, I recommend Sonja B. Starr for promotion to professor of law, with tenure, Law School.



Evan H. Caminker
Dean and Branch Rickey Collegiate Professor
Law School

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