For more than five decades, Sally Falk Moore has been writing about law and legal cultures in deeply original ways, producing profoundly influential work that crosses fields and continents.

Professor Moore completed her law degree at Columbia in 1945 at the age of 19, as one of only two women in her graduating class. She worked for a year as a lawyer for a Wall Street firm—one of the few firms that would then hire women as attorneys—before leaving to become a staff attorney in the Nuremberg trials.

Professor Moore has written that she was “the youngest and least important lawyer on the prosecution staff,” but the experience inspired a change in career path. On returning to the United States, Moore entered graduate school at Columbia University, with the plan of studying anthropology for just one year while she waited for a position to open up as a human rights lawyer at the United Nations. Sally Falk Moore did not leave anthropology in a year but went on to become one of the world’s most influential scholars of legal anthropology.

By her own description, it was not always an easy road. After writing an award-winning dissertation that subsequently became her first book, Moore had difficulty finding a university position. She has written movingly about pursuing her career in phases as she juggled research and writing with family life, and also as she encountered discrimination against women in the academy. After relocating with her family to Los Angeles, Professor Moore was hired at University of Southern California, where she helped to found the anthropology department. She then made the bold decision to learn Swahili and embark on fieldwork on law among the Chagga and Meru peoples of Tanzania.

It was in connection with her study of African law that Professor Moore developed a series of far-reaching insights on law, history, and culture.

Among Professor Moore’s most significant works is her stunningly original 1973 article on the “semi-autonomous social field,” a term that she coined to describe diverse, overlapping arenas of legal and social action that stood in dynamic relation to state law. The concept, which continues to be influential, formed part of Moore’s “processual approach” to the study of law and legal systems, further outlined in her 1978 book *Law as Process; An Anthropological Approach*.

After describing the theoretical foundations for a fully historicized approach to legal culture, Professor Moore went on to model that approach in her 1986 book *Social Facts and Fabrications: “Customary” Law on Kilimanjaro, 1880-1980*. Harvard anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff write that the book was a “magisterial work” that “charted a way in which to analyze vernacular legal orders in all their openness, complexity, and historicity.” Stanford Professor Richard Roberts notes that the book continues to appear on every graduate syllabus in legal anthropology and African legal history.
Sally Falk Moore complemented her devotion to scholarship with deep engagement in teaching. She moved from USC to UCLA in 1977, then in 1981 took up a position at Harvard, where as the Victor S. Thomas Professor of Anthropology and Affiliated Professor of International Legal Studies at Harvard Law School, she has taught generations of students how to analyze legal cultures. Princeton Professor Emeritus Larry Rosen describes Moore as the ideal colleague: “Always interested in others’ work, always forthcoming with her own ideas, always sensitive to how others were having to make their way in the discipline.” That collegiality extended to the many African scholars with whom Professor Moore collaborated on research and, in the 1990s, on policy work in West Africa.

In 2016, a collection of Moore’s essays appeared, with a partly autobiographical introductory essay by her, under the title *Comparing Possibilities*. The book gathers some of her most influential work, much of it centrally related to methodological and theoretical questions of legal history.

The Society recognizes Sally Falk Moore as an honorary fellow for her extraordinary career and for scholarship that transformed fields, inspired other scholars, and helped to lay the foundations for African legal history.