

Dialing Into Jessup

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On 11 March 2020, right after the completion of most National Rounds, the International Law Students Association (ILSA) issued an [unprecedented announcement](#): The cancellation of the 2020 Jessup International Rounds due to the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though ILSA expressed their commitment to reconvening again in April 2021, as the pandemic year of 2020 progressed, it became ever more obvious that most in-person National Rounds, let alone an International Rounds event with more than 1000 participants, would be impossible by spring of 2021. Therefore, in August 2020, ILSA made a second [unprecedented announcement](#): the entire 2021 Jessup Competition would be conducted as a global, fully online event.

Traditionally, the Jessup Moot Court comprises qualifying competitions on the national or regional level. Only the best few teams from each qualifying competition earn the right to participate in the International Rounds, traditionally held in Washington, D.C., to compete against teams from all over the world. In this respect, the Jessup Moot Court – the world’s largest moot court competition – differs from other international moot courts, which convene all participating teams to compete against each other.

For the 2021 Jessup competition, this changed. ILSA invited *all* participating teams to compete in the online Global Rounds without having to qualify through National or Regional Rounds first. Notwithstanding, national and regional competitions were allowed to take place. The decision how these were to be carried out was left with the respective administrators – most, if not all of them, equally adopted the digital format.

Given that the Jessup is not only the world’s oldest and largest moot court competition but also deals with questions of international law, simulating proceedings between States before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), many of our editors are involved in the Jessup in one way or another. Faced with the pandemic situation and the general shift of significant parts of our professional and private lives to the virtual sphere, [we took this opportunity](#) to take a closer look at what the switch to a digital competition means for the organization and the inclusivity of an event that in its traditional mode presents significant financial and logistic hurdles for many participants. In times that are characterized by a constant physical distance between friends and colleagues, we also wanted to give a platform for the collective reflection of the individual experiences of administrators, judges, coaches and team members. Lastly, our symposium may hint at which lessons can potentially be learned from this year for future competitions. In this sense, we hope that the symposium may inspire not only those involved in the Jessup but that it is also of interest to many of our readers who are involved in other (online) moot courts and online events more generally.

The series of articles that will be published throughout this week ranges from more general assessments of the impact of the virtual format on various aspects of the Jessup competition to very personal accounts on how to forge friendships and a team spirit in a time where in-person meetings are not possible.

We begin, however, with an exclusive interview with the author of the 2021 Jessup Problem, Peter Tzeng, who as early as February 2020 envisaged a [topic](#) covering, among other things, the legal consequences of a global pandemic. In the interview, you will learn about the drafting process of a Jessup case, which specific events inspired the 2021 Problem, the similarities and differences between the Jessup and proceedings before the ICJ and how Peter comes up with all those proverbial names of persons and places in the Problem.

The unusual format of the 2021 Jessup required a specific set of rules on how to conduct virtual pleadings. The co-author of these rules Andrew Holmes details the main considerations that went into drafting a rule set for the online Jessup – among those ensuring fair play and a ‘balanced’ diversity among the teams advancing in the Global Rounds – and his view on how those rules fared in practice.

From the perspective of judges in the Global Rounds, Lena Riemer and Sabrina Schäfer not only share their experience of how the rules regarding ex parte pleadings played out but also the impact of the virtual Global Rounds on the composition of the benches. Regarding both aspects, they draw parallels between the Jessup and proceedings before the ICJ, picking up a thread started by Peter Tzeng in his interview. Also writing from the perspective of a judge, Diego Mejía-Lemos argues that the maintenance of some form of a hybrid model in the future would facilitate more diverse benches, with more members with a distinct international legal expertise. This, he argues, could favor an increased focus on the quality of the legal arguments put forward by teams and less focus on their rhetorical skills.

Turning to the national level of the Jessup competition, Martin Gronemann and Rachel Hoepfner describe their experience organizing the online German National Rounds in a volatile and ever-changing regulatory environment and the creative solutions they found. This is followed by the account of Liliana Oliva Bernal, national administrator of the Mexican National Rounds which in 2021 registered a record number of participating teams. Nevertheless, significant hurdles remain for many Mexican students to participate in the Jessup, among those a lack of information about the competition.

At this intersection between the international and national levels, and representative for many contributions we have received following our call, Valentin von Stosch formulates his suggestion to introduce virtual Global Qualification Rounds, which would give all participating teams a guaranteed chance to compete internationally.

Patrick Chen’s contribution gives us an idea what the Jessup competition means for Chinese students, who traditionally have to compete against nearly fifty other teams on the national level to qualify for the International Rounds. For him and the

team he coached, the 2021 Global Rounds meant a true ‘internationalization’ of the competition.

Our Symposium will end with the more personal accounts that have reached us. Martin Prokopek as the coach of the Jessup team from Nuremberg, Germany gives an honest account of the technical and personal challenges online pleadings and remote teamwork meant for the academic work and personal interactions with and between his team members. Teamwork was also a challenge for Aleksandr Popov who, based in Estonia, remotely coached a Ukrainian Jessup team, forging a distant nudging relationship with them accompanied by a constant fear of letting his team down (and having to go back to his old job as a bouncer). Finally, our symposium ends with the jointly written account of the German Hamburg Jessup team, who despite all odds and with the help of many memes managed to experience what so many Jessup participants remember from their active days: the complete immersion in the most peculiar and unresolved questions of international law and, above all, friendship and the Spirit of the Jessup.

