

University of Dayton

eCommons

College of Arts and Sciences Newsroom

College of Arts and Sciences Administration

7-16-2019

Mock Trial's Winning Season

Annette Taylor

University of Dayton, ataylor1@udayton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cas_blog

eCommons Citation

Taylor, Annette, "Mock Trial's Winning Season" (2019). *College of Arts and Sciences Newsroom*. 344.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cas_blog/344

This Blog is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts and Sciences Administration at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Arts and Sciences Newsroom by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlengen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

Mock Trial's Winning Season

udayton.edu/blogs/artssciences/2019-stories/19-07-16-mock-trial.php



Tuesday July 16, 2019

The University of Dayton's Mock Trial program ended its best year in decades with an April trip to the national competition in Philadelphia, where students held their own against prominent schools such as Harvard and Brown.

The University's veteran Team A was one of just 48 teams to compete at the American Mock Trial Association's National Championship Tournament from a field of more than 700 teams that started the season. Because of Team A's impressive performance, the University has been asked by this year's national winner, Yale University, to participate in its invitational tournament next fall.

"To have Yale, this year's champion, extend an invitation to Dayton is special," said Judge Dan Haughey of Butler County Area 3 Court, the team's outgoing head coach. "It shows that UD has really earned its spot nationally. And the team will be even stronger next year."

Students compare the rigor of preparing for mock trials to training as an athlete.

“We were working four hours a day during the week and all day on Saturdays,” said Maggie Ward, Team A co-captain and a senior political science major from the Chicago area.

The work of these “athletes” begins in August when the American Mock Trial Association releases a 200-page case problem that includes criminal charges or civil claims, relevant law, stipulations, jury instructions and affidavits. The association adds to the challenge by releasing updates to the case problem throughout the season. This year’s case concerned a hypothetical media company suing an animal trainer for negligence after his chimpanzee attacked and killed a television station employee prior to the animal’s appearance on a TV show.

Teams study and analyze case materials, develop themes and theories, work with “witnesses” and prepare presentations for both sides of the case. Students acting as attorneys deliver opening and closing statements, and conduct direct and cross-examinations of witnesses. Students acting as witnesses — such as experts and parties to the case — must know all information relevant to their assignment and develop a convincing character.

After working on one case for two semesters during regionals and sectionals, the 48 teams that compete at nationals get an entirely new case and only have about 17 days to prepare. This year’s case involved an athlete suing a company for defamation.

“Having such a short time to prepare was more challenging and intimidating than competing against the best of the best teams in the country,” said Team A’s Teresa LaBello, a junior history and Spanish major from Bellbrook, Ohio. “We had 90 pages of affidavits, evidence, rules, claims and counterclaims to learn.”

University students recognized for their special achievements in competitions this season were Team A co-captain Jenni Guerriero, a senior accounting major from Hudson, Ohio, who earned the Outstanding Witness Award, and Ward, who won the Outstanding Attorney Award with a perfect score during the Opening Round Championship Series (ORCS), the last stop before nationals.

The novice Team B’s Elizabeth Braun, a Pre-Law freshman from Buffalo, New York, earned an Outstanding Attorney Award, and Kyle Elderkin, a junior business economics major from Grand Rapids, Michigan, won an Outstanding Witness Award during ORCS. Elderkin also won an Outstanding Attorney Award at the Hoosier Hoedown Mock Trial Invitational competition.

The College of Arts and Sciences Office of the Dean supported all participating students with an operating budget for travel expenses.

The Mock Trial program is open to undergraduate students in any major and attracts about 15 students each year for the two teams. Students are placed on a team based on their current abilities, and are taught skills through Pre-Law fall term and spring term courses.

In addition to teaching them about law, students said the mock trial experience helps them to develop strong analytical skills, improve their public speaking and hold up to Socratic questioning.

“I love watching these students grow as individuals and develop as a team over the year,” said Laura Hume, associate professor of history and director of the Pre-Law program, which sponsors the Mock Trial program’s curricular and co-curricular activities. “They push the coaches to give them more. For me, mock trial has been the most satisfying experience of being Pre-Law director.”

Jade Smarda, a Cincinnati attorney who will take over as head coach after four years with the program, said students have begun recruiting and planning for next season.

“If these students work as hard as they did during the 2018-19 season, there is no limit to what they can do,” Smarda said.

For more information, please visit the [Pre-Law program’s website](#).

- *Annette Taylor*

