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Mock Trial description

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Rhodes College

—1848—

MOCK TRIAL

The Rhodes Mock Trial program has set a standard of excellence typical of many programs at the college. Mock Trial began at Rhodes in 1986, when the national tournament consisted of only 56 teams. Since that time, the tournament has grown to include more than 500 teams. In the years that Rhodes has competed, our teams have created an impressive reputation. They have placed in the Top 10 16 times since 1989, made it to the national final round seven times and won the National Championship on four separate occasions. Rhodes is one of only four schools to have won consecutive National Championships—a feat it has accomplished twice. Rhodes also has seen more than 30 of its members win All-American awards, which are given to students who have excelled in their particular roles.

Philosophy

Rhodes Mock Trial strives for excellence in every component of the competition. In doing so, each student is challenged to improve to the limits of his or her ability. We fiercely strive to compete, while also maintaining a high degree of integrity and collegiality.

Our competitive goal continues to be to win both our regional qualifier and the national tournament. Given the ever-increasing quality of the competition and the inevitable subjectivity of scoring, we cannot stay dominant if we are simply good. We have to strive to be so clearly superior that no judge can possibly give a round to the other team. At the 1994 and 1995 National Tournaments, our top team did not lose a single ballot, winning 22 of 22 ballots.

Instruction

In the classroom, students receive instruction from professors who not only hold doctorates in Political Science, but who have pursued legal studies at the graduate level and through later research. Such legal research has included a reference book on civil rights law, work on municipal charters and comprehensive work through criminal justice agencies. Professors have received grants through the Department of Justice for projects in which students have been able to participate. These have included studies of the effect of mandatory sentencing for drunk drivers, pretrial risks, pretrial release and money bail and the relationship between drug use and pretrial crime.

Educator/coach Marcus Pohlmann founded the Rhodes Mock Trial program in 1986 and actively continues to coach the team. He has had the good fortune of being assisted by highly talented local litigating attorneys.

Several of these attorneys were themselves former members of the college's Mock Trial program. Theater professors as well as physicians and other professionals from the area also regularly work with the teams.

Preparation

Prospective Mock Trial participants begin by taking Interdepartmental 262: Trial Procedure. Besides learning basic trial elements and the Federal Rules of Evidence, students also join with returning Mock Trial participants to form practice teams for in-class practice rounds. If ultimately chosen to continue, students compete in a series of intercollegiate invitational tournaments in October and November. Thereafter, the college's "regional teams" are chosen, with, hopefully, two of them qualifying for the national tournaments.

Courtroom

Thanks to the generous gift of a former Mock Trial participant, Rhodes has been blessed with a practice facility unmatched outside a well-equipped law school. This beautiful and functional practice courtroom allows in-class rounds to occur in a realistic setting, facilitating a better working understanding of how to try a case in an actual courtroom.

The Students

The Rhodes Mock Trial program attracts a variety of students from virtually every major on campus. Some are preparing for law school, while others simply enjoy the excitement of the competition and the camaraderie that such team activity generates.



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Internships

Students interested in attending law school may choose to take advantage of law-related internships. Rhodes students working as legal interns for a law firm may attend trials with supervising attorneys, interview potential witnesses and do legal research. Internships have placed students in the offices of the prosecutor, public defender, probation, parole and many others. In addition, internships also have been available in the local offices of elected representatives, with interns working on special projects, responding to constituents and interacting with staff members in Memphis, Nashville, and Washington, DC.

Careers

For those continuing in the law, the college has enjoyed a law school acceptance rate of better than 90%. This far exceeds the national average rate of 70% reported by the Law Council. Increasingly, law schools look for well-rounded applicants who have been involved in activities such as Mock Trial. Rhodes Mock Trial alums have been accepted into outstanding law schools including Virginia, Harvard, Yale, Georgetown, Duke, Texas, Tulane, Chicago, Columbia

and Vanderbilt. Beyond law school, our students have clerked for numerous federal judges, including United States Supreme Court justices. They have ultimately settled into private practice and/or worked for county attorneys, prosecutors, public defenders and attorneys general, to name a few career paths chosen.

Those students not proceeding to law school have pursued careers in business, industry, governmental service, the military and academia. They have held positions such as research analyst, professional athlete, real estate manager, political party field coordinator, fund raiser and professional musician.

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