

Chase students compete nationally

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It's like an episode of "Law & Order."

At least, that's how Jay Vaughn, an attorney and one of the coaches of the Chase National Trial Advocacy Team described it.

Vaughn was referring to the National Trial Competition in which Salmon P. Chase law students participated. The competition included law students from around the nation who argued cases in a mock trial format. The students on the Chase National Trial Advocacy Team walked away as finalists this year.

Kathleen Hughes, assistant professor of law and the director of clinical programs started the National Trial Advocacy program in 1999. Hughes is involved with the training of the students, and was the coach of Vaughn when he attended law school at Chase. She still coaches and is the faculty adviser.



Media Credit: Shannon Sexton
Members from the Chase National Trial
Advocacy Team.

Assistant Kenton County commonwealth attorney, Shannon Sexton also helped with the coaching of the National Trial Advocacy Team. Sexton is an adjunct professor in litigation skills at Chase. Sexton feels that the competitions can help students get ready for the real world. "If anyone wants to be a trial lawyer, there's no better way to learn," he said. "It's the real world experience in a fictional setting."

Sexton said he has been involved in mock trials for years and that Chase got "the hardest draw I've ever seen," and did a "phenomenal" job in the competition.

According to Hughes, the success of the Chase law students on the national level can be attributed to many different people, from faculty to adjunct professors such as Vaughn and Sexton.

"They'll learn how to do exceptional opening statements from one person, and the competition rules from another," Hughes said. "Those students are trained as a whole by a number of practitioners. Competing at the National Trial competition was the final highlight of their career."

Chase law student Melody Bennett agrees. "Most important to me was that the University of Akron is considered No. 1 in the region; that's who beat us last year," she said. "This year we beat them."

When it was announced that Chase beat Akron, Bennett said she felt great. "I couldn't help myself, I was about to cry," she said. "At that point I was emotionally drained, but you have to keep going. I was just proud of going as far as we did."

It took a lot of hard work, though. At the beginning of the semester, the school has try-outs for the team. Once the teams are selected, they meet twice a week and one day of the weekend.

They only had four weeks to prepare for this competition, held in Lansing, Michigan.

To get ready for the competitions, the students practice being the prosecutor, then switch to the defense. They

examine and cross-examine witnesses, make opening statements and are critiqued by their coaches.

"Our role is to tell them how to do it, but to help them keep their own creativity and style," Vaughn said. "It's just like a real trial; you don't know what you're going to get. It's tough."

The students on the Chase Trial Advocacy Team were Melody Bennett, Sharif Abdrabbo, Rob Calabrese, and Jennifer Wilkerson. Bennett, Abdrabbo and Wilkerson won more than \$1,000 a piece in scholarship money for their performance at the competition.