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Moot Court course helps prepare pre-law students

BY ALEX GROVES – POSTED ON OCTOBER 30, 2012
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While the vast majority of courses are riddled with in-class lectures and tests, Moot Court stands apart by putting students right in the action of a simulated Supreme Court Mock Trial.

Cal State Fullerton is one of more than 250 universities that participates in American Collegiate Moot Court Association (ACMA), although there may be many more colleges and universities that participate on an intramural basis.

Although the class is primarily composed of pre-law majors, anyone can join. Students' majors run the gamut from criminal justice to liberal studies.

Teams of students are judged based on their knowledge of the case by individuals who come from experienced law backgrounds.

The Moot Court session lasts for around 40 minutes, with each group of individuals taking up about half that time to argue the case from their perspective.

Of the 20 minutes a group has to win the judges over, each of the members must take up at least seven minutes.

Moot Court has been a class at CSUF for six years now. Every year, the class has successfully qualified a group for nationals.

In 2011, new ground was broken when political science major Brian Del Vecchio, who has since graduated and currently helps coach the team, was named the seventh best orator in the country, an impressive accomplishment for a state college with a relatively new team.

Del Vecchio said he stayed involved in Moot Court because it helped him decide what he wanted to pursue in his career.

"The reason that I do it is (because) it's really changed my life," said Del Vecchio. "Prior to finding Moot Court I was a pretty good student, but it wasn't until I took the class that I decided I wanted to do this for the rest of my life."

Del Vecchio is not alone when it comes to being so passionate about the Moot Court class.

Current president Amy Bailey shares his passion and enthusiasm for the course.

Bailey said she loves how she's moved from the role of forming her own arguments into the role of a teacher, but she also said the thing that drives her most is her passion for the same subject as her peers.

"My favorite part of the Moot Court experience is being able to go on Facebook at 3 a.m. in the morning and share a piece of information that you find with your fellow classmates, and then you find that they were equally enthusiastic as you were," Bailey said.

Pamela Fiber-Ostrow, the professor in charge of teaching POSC/CRJU 471, said the team has put in many hours to be accomplish their goals in competitions.

In addition to weekend practices, students enrolled will spend anywhere between 15-20 hours in the library for additional practice during the week.

"I've often wondered how I get away with asking so much of (the students)," said Fiber-Ostrow. "It's because we have a lot of competitive people. It's not one of those things for people who think, 'Yeah, I'm just going to dabble.'"

Fiber-Ostrow said before she admits students to the class, she interviews them in a "couch talk" to make sure they're serious and committed about taking the course. She said this is important because once students have a partner, it would be unfair for them to leave the class.

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Fiber-Ostrow also checks transcripts to verify that students are capable of devoting the necessary number of hours to practice and class sessions without interfering with other coursework.

With the semester already well underway, the class is inching closer to the tournament at the end of the year. For many students this is just the start of a longer process, with nationals right around the corner.

The qualifier round for the National Moot Court Competition will be held Nov. 30 and last through Dec. 1 at Cal State Long Beach.

Students who move on to nationals will compete at Regent University's School of Law on Jan. 18.

The case will be in regard to whether or not a preferential admissions program violates the Fourteenth Amendment of equal protection under the law.

TAGS: American Collegiate Moot Court Association, law, moot court, pre-law, Supreme Court

About Alex Groves

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