

Mock Trial Competition

Testimonials

Past coaches and judges talk about their experiences with the Law Society's Mock Trial Competition

Natasha Clark

Politics and Law Teacher,
Chisholm Catholic College

My most rewarding experiences in the Mock Trial Competition:

- 1) Our first ever win (2006).
- 2) Gradually getting better until we made it into our first final (2008).
 - a. Making finals for nine consecutive years – to get that kind of consistency was a huge feat.
 - b. And during those years, waiting to see each round what new suit Arpad Ollari-Hazy (the then-Coordinator) would be wearing!
- 3) Narrowly beating top guns Mount Lawley SHS in the semi-final to get into our first ever Grand Final in 2016, after they had knocked us out of finals several times before.
- 4) Being part of a high standard Grand Final against Carey Baptist College where every team member (on both teams) did their role well, before Chief Justice Martin – and after a nail-biting wait, finding out we had won!

What is the value of the Mock Trial Competition to the Law Society, its members and the wider community in your opinion?

The competition is well organised, rewarding and fun. Leo Simoens (2007) recalls a flurry of research to find out what a “schooner” of beer was, for a criminal trial; he went on to be part of UWA’s outstanding 2015 Jessup Moot team. Other former students have gone on to start groups including Envoy at UWA, and AlphaMotivate (David Castelanelli, SF 2014). For many students the competition is a highlight of their school years; and it builds camaraderie – we had former students Cassandra Chu Yu Chee and Georgina Due (QF 2012, pre-law UWA)

and Coraline de Zilwa (SF 2009, Law at Murdoch and Judge’s Usher) come along to watch the 2016 Grand Final. A big thank you to all the people involved in Chisholm’s teams, past and present, including our lawyer coaches (especially Paul Pascoe and Jackie Musk in 2016), and all the judges who have given us tips along the way. Even if we lost, we always learned something. Our Grand Final win was very much based on contributions from all those who have been involved over our 11 years in the competition.

Would you recommend the Mock Trial Competition to others? (and if so, why?)

Definitely! I started a team at Chisholm when I began teaching. As a former lawyer turned teacher (there’s lots of us out there) I was interested to get involved... and haven’t regretted it since. It has been and remains the most fun I have had as a teacher. It’s addictive too – one of my students commented after our Grand Final win that “I won’t know what to do with myself now”. You get hooked on the contest of legal wills and skills, and it’s a great opportunity for teachers and lawyers to train up the next generation, without the worry of billable hours or imprisonment! It’s also entertaining to watch – especially cross-examination, when you never quite know what a witness will say.

Sam Pack

Articled Clerk, State Solicitor’s Office

This is the first year I’ve been involved with the Mock Trial Competition. It’s been both entertaining, because there are always amusing moments in a mock trial, and rewarding. I know how much I learned over the years from countless mock trials, moots and other competitions. It’s fantastic to be able to give back.

I think volunteering is a smart move for a junior practitioner. I found it eye-opening, transitioning from competitor to judge.



Sitting in the judge’s chair is an entirely different experience. While it’s only a glimpse of what life is like up on the bench, as I move out into the world of real courtrooms and real judges I think even the smallest insight is invaluable.

Being part of the grand final case working group was a great experience. I enjoyed collaborating to produce an interesting, challenging and somewhat ridiculous scenario. The biscuits at the meetings were a bonus. While I was disappointed I couldn’t make it to the grand final this year, I hope to have better luck next time around.

Magistrate Elaine Campione

Magistrates Court of
Western Australia

Having never expressed any interest in law as a career, I was surprised when my son Caelan told me he was applying for the school mock trial team. I was secretly delighted that he would get an opportunity to better understand my profession and my passion for the law. He was a witness in all but one of the trials and I enjoyed assisting him to memorise his evidence in chief and prepare for cross examination – when he would let me. I am very proud of him and his team mates, the Chisholm Challengers, for winning the 2016 Law Society Mock Trial Competition.



Right from the outset I was struck by how well run and organised the competition was. It is regarded as a very prestigious competition, as evidenced by over 130 participant teams from public, private and independent high schools. Some schools even fielded two teams, such as the level of interest from their students.

The competition was well supported by the supervising teacher, Ms Natasha Clark, student coaches, other school staff at Chisholm College and of course parents. The success of the Chisholm Challengers became a whole of school experience and I am sure piqued the interest of other students that law may be a worthwhile area of study.

I have had the privilege of watching the Chisholm Challengers and their opponents at all seven of their keenly fought trials. I was very impressed by the high standard set by all competitor teams and the way in which they grasped difficult legal concepts. In particular, the advocacy skills were worthy of an appearance in my court. The development of these skills is in no small way due to the support and nurturing of their coaches and the “judges”. Such a wonderful group of dedicated lawyers prepared to be so generous with their time, knowledge and experience to assist these aspiring lawyers. I was particularly struck by the kindness of the “judges”, always taking the time at the conclusion of the mock trial to provide constructive feedback to every team member even when the hour was late.

I was impressed by how dedicated and disciplined the Chisholm Challengers were – early morning meetings with their legal coach, after school meetings and even giving up part of their October school holidays to prepare as a team. They then met to prepare each recess and lunch break as they got closer to the grand final. An outstanding level of commitment when you consider that

some participants are only 15 years of age and the Year 11s were also juggling their ATAR commitments.

No matter what stage of the competition a participant reached it was a rich and rewarding experience and I am sure each student left with a sense of achievement. The participants were fortunate to have exposure to legal principles and process at a micro level. They learnt skills that will assist them in their future endeavours, even if a career in law is not their goal. They learnt how to analyse a legal problem and construct a case consistent with their case plan. They gained advocacy skills and learnt how to deliver a persuasive argument. They developed confidence in public speaking and also the ability to think on their feet. They learnt that it was OK to argue their point (even in front of the Chief Justice!) and when to concede the objection. They worked co-operatively as a team no matter their individual role and were supportive of each other.

The Mock Trial Competition provides a wonderful opportunity to students to have in-depth exposure to the legal process. It inspires a passion for law and also for social justice. It is obviously a useful exercise for those who are considering studying law, but its benefits extend even to those who are not. The Law Society and its members can be justifiably proud of this event. Even though my son has told me that he wants to be something “way cooler” than a lawyer, the benefits of the competition to him are immeasurable.

Zia van Aswegen 2013 Murdoch Scholar

What has been your most rewarding Mock Trial Competition experience?

The most rewarding Mock Trial Competition experience for me was being able to work with a real lawyer. It was a great opportunity to learn how they think and approach legal problems and to be taught the same skills.

What impact did the Mock Trial Competition have on your decision to work towards a career in the legal profession?

The Mock Trial Competition had a significant impact on my decision to work towards a career in law. Participating in the Mock Trial Competition is what initially sparked my interest in the legal profession and allowed me to explore a new set of skills I hardly knew existed.

The Mock Trial Competition allowed me to have the confidence to apply for the Mock Trial Scholarship at Murdoch University.

What is the value of the Mock Trial Competition to the Law Society, its members and the wider community in your opinion?

I believe the value of the Mock Trial Competition to the Law Society, its members and the wider community is significant. It is a great opportunity for the Law Society to introduce the legal profession to high school students in a more creative and interactive way. This allows the students to gain a valuable insight into the profession at a time when they have to make decisions for their future careers.

Lorraine Finlay Law Lecturer and Alex McVey, Tutor, School of Law, Murdoch University

When you are practicing law it is all too easy to get caught up in the day-to-day minutiae and to forget why you wanted to actually be a lawyer in the first place. Judging the Mock Trial Competition provides a perfect antidote to this. It gives you the opportunity to witness enthusiastic and dedicated high school students engaging with the law for the first time. From opening statements to cross-examinations, these students try their hands at each part of a real-life trial, including acting as witnesses, associates and orderlies. The volunteer judges then grade student participation, and provide feedback so that they may hone their trial advocacy skills.

The trials themselves are not only a great learning experience for the students, but are also enjoyable to judge. Providing feedback to these students allows practitioners to pass on their legal knowledge and experience to a group of enthusiastic students who might, one day, become lawyers themselves. Even if practitioners have limited experience in courtroom advocacy, students are grateful to receive guidance on issues of substantive content and argument structure.

We would highly recommend judging the Mock Trial Competition to other law graduates and practitioners. It is such a pleasure to mentor young high school students through what might be their first exposure to a career in law, whilst incidentally refreshing yourself with trial advocacy process.