

Motion to Compete: UWLA's Trial Team Has Their Day in Court



While most were recovering from a brutal final examination period, a few UWLA students spent the holidays chartering a law students' association and preparing for battle in the courtroom.

It all started when Aasha Ealy '19 reached out to WRBLSA Competition Chair, Austin Barnum, for information about an upcoming Mock Trial Competition. *"Knowing Austin was nationally ranked, I had second thoughts because I had no experience. Austin encouraged me to get a team together. His enthusiasm assured me that this was something I wanted to pursue,"* Ealy shared.

Mock trial is a rewarding experience. It offers an opportunity to hone trial skills before a supportive audience and forces you to think on your feet. *"It's better to make a hundred mistakes here [mock trial]*

than to make even one with a real client," Barnum added. Ealy took Barnum's advice, and joined forces with Jennifer Thorton '20, and Leah Schoen '20 to charter a chapter and recruit a team. *"I had always wanted a BLSA chapter on campus. The fact that the competition was only open to chartered institutions was just motivation to get it done sooner,"* Ealy said.

Recruiting team members in between Thanksgiving and Final Exams, proved to be an extraordinary challenge. *"The deadline was approaching fast, so we chose not to vet prospective members. Instead we welcomed anyone who wanted to participate,"* Schoen said. But—that proved to be a mistake when intense practice sessions resulted in fast attrition. The team started with 5 members but by mid-December, had only 3 left with the competition just 3 weeks away. Then, along came Janet Kerobyan '20. *"She was a life-saver!"* Schoen boasted. Kerobyan proved to be the member whose quirky confidence carried the team through when it mattered most.

The final roster (Aasha Ealy, Darvi Bell, Janet Kerobyan and Leah Schoen) made its debut at the Constance Baker Motley Mock Trial Competition at UNLV, Las Vegas, NV. The team competed in four 75-minute mock trial rounds over two days, and progressed to the semi-final round, finishing 4th overall. Each team of 2 witnesses and 2 attorneys was responsible to prepare and present from memory Pre-trial Motions, Opening Statements, Direct and Cross-Examinations and Closing Arguments for both sides of a fictional civil lawsuit. Knowledge of the hearsay rules and Mock Trial Rules was crucial to scoring well and avoiding point deductions.

Darvi Bell, the only member with any mock trial experience exclaimed, *"They laughed when we told them our trial skills came from YouTube videos."* The team nonetheless managed to tie the no. 2 team in the quarter final round and didn't even know it. *"We thought we'd lost the round. But then they announced that both teams had scored high enough to advance to the semifinals!"* Bell explained.

The team plans to compete in the upcoming American Association for Justice Student Trial Advocacy Competition on February 28th in Santa Monica and UCLA's Cyber Crime Moot Court Competition on March 16th, but **ADDITIONAL MEMBERS ARE NEEDED**. Many competitions require an invitation to participate and others are closed to non-ABA schools. Ealy explained, *"We were ecstatic when STAC and UCLA invited us, but I wasn't sure we'd have enough students to participate..."*