Moot Court and Other Competitions

The reason this article is called "Moot Court and Other Competitions" is not to downplay the significance of other competitions. Many law schools have programs where first-years can compete in a variety of settings. One of the most significant of these other competitions is mock trial. In mock trial, law students are assigned to one side of a civil or criminal case and actually question mock witnesses in front of a student jury and a judge. Another major event in some law schools is the negotiation competition. In that competition, students are given conflicting clients with different interests. After the students negotiate against each other, judges score the teams or individual students based on a variety of parameters, such as style, preparation, technique, and so on. Students with the highest scores move on to the next round. Other competitions include client counseling and essay writing. These other competitions, however, are usually not as extensive as the moot court competitions offered in law schools nationwide.

WHY MOOT COURT?

As a first-year, I applied to NYLPs Moot Court Board without a complete understanding of what the Board was all about. Having served on the Board for two years, I now realize the extraordinary benefits of joining a moot court board or other journal-type organization during law school. First, these organizations are great social outlets. Second, they provide opportunities for students to sharpen their legal research, writing, and/or advocacy skills by writing and/or arguing on current legal issues, usually of the students' choice. This effort may even result in publication of the students work. Third, participation in these organizations helps to break up the monotony of the classroom experience. Finally, employers are generally impressed with student involvement in these organizations, and students can converse about their experiences during job interviews. -JEFFREY GLICKMAN, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL

Some opinion surveys have shown that the fear of public speaking has been ranked higher than the fear of death. Indeed, the thought of standing in front of three accomplished attorneys/professors/judges and being interrogated for 15 minutes on a complex area of law is enough to send anyone running straight into the library to read three hours of torts and feel grateful. Yet, the truth is that moot court competitions develop distinct skills in individuals who compete in them, skills they may not be able to acquire in any other activity in law school.

The first skill developed during the course of a moot court competition is the ability to write a brief. Whether one intends to be a litigator and write briefs for a living or to work primarily on transactions and write only when necessary, the ability to perform competent research and successfully convey a written message is a valuable skill in every area of the law.

The second skill developed in a moot court competition is, of course, the ability to argue. Now, we're not talking about the run-of-the-mill, give-me-the-remote-so-I-can-change-to-football argue, either. The arguing we are referring to is the kind that takes place in an appellate court. It is a unique kind of arguing: you are given a limited factual pattern, and you are forced to develop a familiarity with a broad array of case law. Yet, this skill of presenting complex arguments and presenting them well is one that a seasoned moot court competitor will take with him or her into every future public speaking engagement

In my second year of law school, I took Federal Income Tax and also competed in my school's moot court competition. While I now have only a hazy recollection of the federal tax code, I can definitively cite you at least 10 cases I relied on when I argued in the competition finals. The experience of arguing in moot court competitions is one of the most intellectually exciting experiences at law school. While it may be difficult, daunting, and at times downright scary, you should definitely take advantage of the unique opportunities offered by a moot court competition. -RICHARD S. LOBEL, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL

BEYOND FIRST-YEAR COMPETITIONS

The purpose of most moot court boards goes beyond sponsoring competitions for first-years and producing casebooks. Moot court boards also run competitions for competitors from their school or from schools across the country.

As a second-year student on the moot court board, I represented my law school at the largest moot court competition in the country. It was an exciting weekend, for after writing a 40-page brief and practicing over 25 oral arguments; my teammate and I were finally ready to put all of our hard work to the test. Although we did not come in first place (or tenth place for that matter), it was still a wonderful and memorable weekend. -MICHELLE WILCK, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL

www.lawcrossing.com
While there may be a number of first-years who do not make it onto a moot court board their first year, they should not be discouraged. The in-school competitions sponsored by moot court boards allow a large number of students to participate and are often quite prestigious competitions, with final rounds judged by district court judges, appeals court judges, and even Supreme Court justices. For moot court board members, there will usually be opportunities to compete in national competitions on a variety of legal topics. The bottom line is that participation in moot court is something that any legal practitioner will look upon favorably; it has been compared with journal experience as one of the most important factors potential legal employers examine. But regardless of how it may help you in the occupational setting, moot court experience will likely add to the quality of your experience at law school and hopefully beyond as well.

Learn the 10 Factors That Matter to Big Firms More Than Where You Went to Law School