

# MOCK TRIAL: SHARPENING ADVOCACY SKILLS

By Sharon Driscoll

I

t was a standard repositioned gone wrong—the sorry tale of “Mr. Simpson,” a man in over his head and unable to make his car loan payments, and the muscle man, “Dakota Smith,” who was shot and killed while trying to repossess the car. But did Mr. Simpson kill Mr. Smith? • Officer “La Duke,” aka Josh Weddle ’10, described the crime scene for the judges, and a (paper) gun he allegedly found at the scene was presented as evidence. The attorneys representing the plaintiff, Mark Baller ’08 and Kevin Rooney ’09, went in hard challenging the officer’s recollection of events. • “Counsel is trying to improperly impeach the witness,” objected Jordana Mosten ’10, representing the defendant. • But “Judge” Todd Theodora, founder and senior partner of the Southern California law firm Theodora, Oringher, Miller, and Richman and former attorney for Monica Lewinsky and for the Anaheim Angels, said he’d give opposing counsel leeway and reserved his ruling. • “Objection, your Honor,” said Mosten. “Counsel is reading the deposition improperly.” • And so it went. Testimony was given, evidence presented, cases made at the January SLS Mock Trial Invitational. The students, many of them members of Stanford Law School’s student-run mock trial program, had spent hours prepping for this moment—readying to try their hands at “real” trial work. With 64 students representing 12 law schools from across the country and 60 judges presiding, all volunteers who gave up their weekends to help train this next generation of lawyers, the competition was fierce—and realistic. • “Mock trial was by far the best part of my first year at SLS,” says Alisha Beltramo ’09, an aspiring trial lawyer. “It was wonderful stepping out of reading cases to do something that I knew I wanted to do. I also found it was something that I was good at, which was a respite during the first semester, when it’s hard to feel like you’re good at anything.” • The Stanford Law School Mock Trial Program was founded in 2003 by two students with mock trial experience to provide their fellow students with the opportunity to develop a high level of trial proficiency while still in law school. Each year, approximately 35 law students try out for this student-run organization, each submitting a video audition, which is then judged by “wizards”—former members of the program whose identity is kept secret. About 25 students make the cut. • “We are student-run and this is a small school, so it makes sense to have the judging done anonymously,” says Ben Ratner ’08, the program’s current president.

After putting in many hours training and developing their skills (more experienced students train new students and various experts are brought to the school for workshops), the teams—seven in all—spend the spring semester traveling to competitions including one of the oldest in the country, the Texas Young Lawyers Association (TYLA) National Trial Competition, and their own SLS-sponsored invitational. Last year, a Stanford team captained by Jeremy Presser ’08 won the regional TYLA competition and earned fifth place at the nationals. And SLS dominated the competition at this year’s invitational with its teams taking first and third place overall as well as the coveted “best lawyer” award, which went to Jonas Jacobson ’09. To prevent favoritism, the teams are not identified by their school but by a number, so it is a blind judging, according to Ratner.

While participation in the program requires a significant time commitment—with many students spending hours a day preparing for trials for weeks in advance—there are some tangible rewards.

PLEASE SEE PAGE 88



BEN RATNER '08 AND ALISHA BELTRAMO '09

I  
N  
T  
O  
O  
U  
S

**IN FOCUS****Mock Trial: Sharpening Advocacy Skills**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Beltramo, who took the “best attorney” award in her very first year of competition at last year’s SLS Mock Trial Invitational, was recommended for an internship at Quinn Emanuel in Los Angeles after news of her success spread.

“Kathleen Sullivan approached me last spring totally out of the blue and said there’s a spot at Quinn and she’d heard that I had done well at the invitational and she thought I’d be a good fit. It fell into my lap,” says Beltramo.

Mock trial also helped Ratner, who will be joining Latham & Watkins, LLP after he graduates this May.

“One of their first questions in the interview was about mock trial. And after I was offered a position, I said I’ve spent so much time in law school doing oral advocacy, doing mock trial, and I love it,” recalls Ratner. “I said I hoped to get better with real experience and asked if they could make that happen. And they said sure. So I’m thrilled.”

**This year’s SLS Mock Trial Invitational winners:****FIRST PLACE:**

Stanford Law (Mark Baller ’08, Elena Coyle ’10, Jonas Jacobsen ’09, Kevin Rooney ’09)

**SECOND PLACE:**

U C Berkeley School of Law

**THIRD PLACE:**

Stanford Law (James Alexander ’08, Samantha Bateman ’10, Rakesh Kilaru ’10, Jennifer Robinson ’09) **SL**

**PERSPECTIVES****At the Intersection of Law, Finance, and Faith**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

The second set of legal issues is directly related to the first. Religious doctrines may make strict demands on the financial transactions in which the funds engage and for this reason innovative legal mechanisms are often required to accommodate the specific religious restrictions imposed on the funds. Islamic funds offer a prime example: Islamic partnerships cannot collect interest, and so contractual provisions must be drafted that cast the transaction in a form that does not explicitly implicate the paying of interest.

I hope to someday work with investors and fund managers in building investment criteria and structuring partnerships that reflect the investors’ religious principles. Emerging legal, economic, and cultural trends are increasingly heterogeneous, containing disparate component parts that coexist in separate and distinct scholarly disciplines. Stanford Law School’s joint degree program fully supports this brand of inquiry and thereby better prepares its students for a world in which the study and practice of law are penetrated by an array of different disciplines, including economics, public policy, sociology, medicine, technology, business—and religion.

*The author has worked in the Private Equity Fund Group at Morrison & Foerster LLP and will work in the Private Funds practice at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP this summer. He is also conducting business ethics research at Santa Clara University’s Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. He is the editor-in-chief-elect of the Stanford Journal of Law, Business & Finance.* **SL**



## Log on to see more classmate photos.

Are you left wanting more after reading “Classmates”? Perhaps wishing that the editor had more room to print all the fun photos of your classmates. . . at Alumni Weekend. . .at weddings. . .on safari. . .or trekking around the globe?

Go to [www.law.stanford.edu/publications/stanford\\_lawyer](http://www.law.stanford.edu/publications/stanford_lawyer) to see a photo slideshow of all the photos submitted for this issue. You can also see more of your classmates’ photos from Alumni Weekend 2007 by going to: [www.law.stanford.edu/slideshow/alumniweekend2007](http://www.law.stanford.edu/slideshow/alumniweekend2007).