

The Fraternity of Jessup

Students compete to develop advocacy skills.

By Jensen Simons

Each year, the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition presents law students with the opportunity to expand their international law knowledge and develop their advocacy skills by arguing a dispute between fictional countries before the International Court of Justice, the judicial organ of the United Nations. One of the largest and most prestigious moot court competitions in the world, prior to the pandemic the Jessup involved close to 600 universities from over 100 countries. Eligible teams, comprising five students from each university, begin with regional rounds before advancing to national rounds and then the global round, customarily held in Washington D.C. The Jessup, named after a famous American diplomat, scholar, and jurist, is organized by the International Law Students Association, an American non-profit association of students and lawyers.

Craig Martin, professor of law and co-director of Washburn's International and Comparative Law Center, said the Jessup "develops advocacy skills like no other competition can." He should know; Martin has coached each Washburn team since 2011 and competed in it himself as a law student.

"International and comparative law is important to many features of the practice of law and the conduct of business in Kansas, especially relating to the agricultural, aeronautical, and energy industries. We are part of a global trading system, and so Kansas lawyers should have some familiarity with international and comparative law," Martin said. "The Jessup is one of the great vehicles for developing that knowledge."

Preparation for the competition is grueling. Planning for the Jessup begins at the outset of the fall semester when the team is

chosen by Martin via a competitive process in early September. From there, students begin working to research "the problem," which is released by ILSA in September. For four months, the team, comprised of two students as applicants, two as respondents, and one as of counsel, conducts research and writes their written briefs, or "memorials." After those are submitted in early January, there is a month and a half of practice rounds for the oral argument, during which previous Washburn Jessup participants are invited to judge. With the preparation phase over, the regional/national rounds commence in February or March.

The 2021 Washburn Jessup team included: Desi Smith, Pam Saenz, Tyler Laudick, Christina Brunton, Brett Combs, and Jennifer Collier, the "1L rep" from the team. The problem involved legal issues relating to a pandemic, the shooting down of a civilian aircraft, and refugee and asylum issues, among others.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ILSA updated its 2021 programming to allow for a completely virtual competition through its own proprietary platform, featuring online courtrooms and breakout rooms created specifically for the Jessup. Over six weeks of virtual competition, 574 teams from 90 countries competed in 2,036 matches accounting for more than 3,000 hours of argument. More than 1,100 lawyers, judges, and law professors from all over the world served as volunteer judges.

Ultimately, the Washburn team competed in 10 rounds against teams from the U.S., Ukraine, Pakistan, Australia, Slovenia, Brazil, and China. The team finished with a record of three wins and one loss in the global round, ending up 157 out of 574. The University of Sydney, Australia, won the top prize, the White & Case Jessup Cup.

What is more, the Washburn students are now members of the global Jessup fraternity, an august group that includes an ever-growing number of Washburn alumni.

"The Jessup and the International and Comparative Law Center have reaffirmed my desire to work in the governmental/foreign relations sector post-law school, and the Jessup specifically has provided a built-in network of like-minded individuals situated across the globe in those kinds of positions who recognize and care for one of their own," Brett Combs, 2L, said. "All in all, through all of the work and the struggle, I am looking forward to competing again next year."



The Jessup Team in Denver, February 2020. Left-to-right: Brett Combs, Ivan Moya, Pam Saenz, Lillian Chin, Tyler Laudick, Desi Smith, Professor Craig Martin. Photo submitted