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Wayne Law moot court team makes 'best showing ever' in international tournament

Wayne State University Law School's five-member team, dubbed "the famous ladies of Wayne State," finished 18th in the world, and third-year student Rachel Hom of Shelby Township, chancellor of the team, finished seventh in the world as best speaker in the Philip C. Jessup International Moot Court competition held earlier this month.

The Wayne Law teammates -- Kaitlyn Cramer of Frankenmuth, Jessica Wayne of Northville, Bonsitu Kitaba of Missassauga, Ontario, Klaudia Nikolli of Windsor, Ontario and Hom -- competed against 111 other law school teams from 82 nations, from Afghanistan to Venezuela, in Washington, D.C., where the final round of the 2013 Jessup competition took place. In February, the Wayne Law women won the Midwest regional tournament in Chicago. The final 111 teams in Washington were honed from 631 law schools in 92 countries that competed in preliminary Jessup rounds.

This year, the 54th season for the world's largest and most prestigious moot court competition, teams from Bahrain, Iran, Macau, Sierra Leone and Trinidad and Tobago participated for the first time.

"The Wayne team came away from the Jessup tournament with a set of remarkable accomplishments," said Professor Gregory Fox, faculty advisor to the team and director of the Program for International Studies at Wayne Law. "After finishing 18th in the world in the preliminary rounds, they faced India in the first elimination round. Unfortunately, we lost the round by one point out of nine possible points. But the loss had an important post-script: The Indian team went on to win the entire tournament. So we came very close to beating the world champion. As far as we know, this is the best showing ever by a Wayne Jessup team."

Wayne Law Interim Dean Jocelyn Benson thanked the students and the many faculty members who worked with the team all year for their hard work and contributions to the team's preparation. The team also was assisted by Miller Canfield senior litigation partners Frederick Acomb, Thomas Cranmer, Joseph Galvin (a 1971 Wayne Law alumnus) and Clarence Pozza, who judged several of its practice rounds.

"I am immensely proud of these exceptional students who have earned a great achievement," Benson said. "They have mastered some very difficult international law issues and developed skills they will use for the rest of their careers."

The teammates are still "ecstatic," and were "incredibly overwhelmed" when their names were called during the awards ceremony, Hom said. "It was the best time of my life," Nikolli said.

"The executive director of the International Law Student Association (which administers the competition) referred to us as 'the famous ladies of Wayne State,' a nickname she gave us at the regional rounds in Chicago," Hom said. "As proud as I am to be a member of this all-female team, it was amazing to see similar all-female teams from countries such as Taiwan, Ethiopia and Iran, in particular."

Wayne Law has a long tradition of success in the Jessup competition, where students represent countries in a fictional case before the International Court of Justice, the judicial organ of the United Nations. This year's Jessup "problem" addressed the consequences of global climate change on statehood, migration and sovereign debt. The scenario focused on a debt-ridden island nation that was swallowed by the ocean, forcing its people to relocate and causing its remaining funds to be seized.

For the competition, students prepare oral and written pleadings arguing both the applicant and respondent positions of the fictional problem case, engaging the teammates in legal research as well as preparing written submissions to a court and presenting oral arguments in a courtroom setting. Wayne Law's team finished 19th in the world this year for best brief.

"The Jessup is something much larger than a moot court competition," Hom said. "It represents the evolving world realities and the direction that international law is heading, leaving it up to the students to implement the changes we'd like to see. At the onset of the week, we were all given notebooks with this reminder: 'In the future, world leaders will look at each other differently because they first met here as friends.'"

And after all the hard work, the competitors got a chance to unwind and socialize during several events, including the Go National Ball, where team members dress in traditional garb from their home countries.

"Friends from Uganda, Indonesia and many Asian and African teams went all out in full traditional dress, and were teaching us some of their traditional dance moves," Hom said. "In return, we were teaching them how to 'Dougie.' We recognize that was not a fair trade. The Wayne team dressed up as the Tigers baseball team, and Professor Fox held out as a Red Sox player. It was just a great event to observe and be a part of.

"We just feel lucky to be a part of this whole experience, and give endless thanks to the Wayne Law faculty and Detroit area attorneys for volunteering their time, effort and financing to allow us to get here."

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