

Actors bring mock cases to life during law school boot camp

January 11, 2018 3:00 PM

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Christine Tonry, a local actor, plays the role of Roberta, a senior citizen who witnessed a shooting in a neighborhood bar. In this mock case during Tulane Law's Intersession Boot Camp, Roberta has vision and memory problems, and Tulane Law students are tasked with conducting a deposition to determine whether she is a credible witness. (Photo by Alina Hernandez)

The hottest acting roles in New Orleans every January just might be at Tulane Law School.

During the first week of January for the past six years, a crash course called the Intersession Boot Camp is held the week before classes resume. The boot camp gives students the chance to learn from attorneys and judges who travel to Tulane Law from around the country to create an intensive simulation of law practice in one of three alternative tracks: civil litigation, criminal practice and business transactions.

Tulane law professor Tonya Rhodes Jupiter, assistant director of Tulane Law's Pro Bono Program, coordinates the scheduling and booking of many of the actors during boot camp. She said using real actors gives students a much more realistic experience.

"We have used students in the past and volunteers to play the roles, but the actors are far more effective," said Jupiter. "The simulations are very real, and the students forget these are actors."

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Tonya Rhodes Jupiter

Actors play a major part in the boot camp, taking on roles of witnesses, clients or other characters in the mock legal matters. Students learn how to ask questions in depositions, handle belligerent witnesses and protect their own clients under questioning. The actors make cases come alive.

Holly Rochelle, an actress from New Orleans, arrived on Monday to play the role of a pregnant inmate awaiting trial for a crime she did not commit and meeting her ‘lawyer’ for the first time. During her interview with students in the criminal law track, she cried and demanded to know how old the students were and whether they’d ever tried a case before.

Then there was Mark Watson, an actor from Picayune, Mississippi, who played a role for the civil litigation track students — that of a bar owner who was about to be sued following a shooting at his establishment. Disregarding his potential liabilities, the bar owner at one point demands that his lawyers “make this thing go away” and in turn, sue the families of the shooter and victim because “they’re both bums.”

[Click here](#) for video footage from the event.