

Law students face a 'hot bench' during court competition

March 23, 2018 12:30 PM Alina Hernandez
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From left, the Hon. Sarah Vance (L '78) of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana; the Hon. Luis Felipe Restrepo (L '86), a judge of the 3rd Circuit in Philadelphia; and the Hon. Eugene Davis (L '60) of the 5th Circuit in New Orleans, preside over the Tulane Moot Court Competition. (Photos by Tracie Morris Schaeffer)

For more than 80 years, Tulane law students have participated in annual moot court competitions during the spring semester. The winners have had their names etched into marble tablets hung in the Wendell H. Gauthier Appellate Moot Court Room.

On those tablets are several well-known Tulane Law School graduates, many of whom went on to have distinguished careers that enabled them to influence legal

cases around the globe. In recent years, however, the competition had faded to become a shadow of its former self, usually with judges and competitors the only attendees.

All that changed Tuesday, March 20.

Two students – Jay Jensen and Emma Moppert – argued a federal death penalty case (*Hidalgo v. State of Arizona*) in the final Moot Court Honorary Round in view of a packed auditorium and before a panel of three distinguished federal judges: the Hon. Eugene Davis (L '60) of the 5th Circuit; the Hon. Luis Felipe Restrepo (L '86), a judge of the 3rd Circuit in Philadelphia; and the Hon. Sarah Vance (L'78) of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

During arguments and rebuttals on the constitutionality of Arizona's application of the death penalty in first-degree murder cases, both students faced tough challenges to their arguments from the judges. In the end, it was Moppert who took the win as the top-performing appellate student advocate.

The final two competitors, winnowed through a series of moot court rounds in the fall semester, will both have their names engraved on "the marble." The honorary round is less about securing a spot on the tablet than it is about honoring the tradition of oral advocacy at the law school.

The panel of judges – all Tulane law school alumni – proved to be a "hot bench." They barely allowed arguments to begin before peppering both Jensen and Moppert with questions and challenges.

The revival of Tulane's Moot Court Honorary Round was made possible through a gift from law school alumna and trial attorney Evan Trestman (L '77).

