PLARC Advocacy Teams

For students interested in improving their public speaking and critical thinking skills, UTD offers several competition teams on which to participate. UTD is one of the few schools in Texas to field teams in all three major undergraduate legal advocacy competitions:

Moot Court

Moot Court (PSCI 4v67) is an exercise in appellate advocacy, and is modeled after the appellate procedure employed in state and federal courts. Students are given a hypothetical case and about 20-25 actual precedents with which to construct both petitioner and respondent oral arguments on a Constitutional Law topic to present to the Supreme Court of the United States. Students take a class to develop, practice and refine oral arguments for tournament competition.

Advocates will argue before a panel of judges (typically law professors, actual judges, or other students) and present their positions on a constitutional law issue. As with real appellate courts, judges on the panel may interrupt the advocate to ask questions about the facts of the case, precedent for or against the advocate's position, or greater policy issues that may arise from any potential rulings. Students learn to anticipate difficult questions about their positions and respond intelligently and persuasively. Moot Court is an excellent opportunity to develop the research, analytical, and advocacy skills necessary for success in law school, but will make even non pre-law students better logical and analytical thinkers. Moot Court is the closest equivalent to law school that an undergraduate student can experience in terms of skills and intellectual rigor.

UTD Moot Court has been very successful both regionally and nationally, ranking in the top 15 programs nationwide. UTD's Moot Court coach, Anne Dutia, also serves on the Executive Board of the American Moot Court Association. To participate on the team, students must be enrolled in the class, which is designed to run for an entire academic year, and has a limit of eight. Instructor permission is required to enroll, with the strong preference that the student have taken Constitutional Law or an equivalent class beforehand. Students interested in enrolling in Moot Court should contact the coach, Anne Dutia.

Mock Trial

Mock Trial (PSCI 4v66) supported by the Honors College, is a competition designed to simulate trial-level advocacy. Students are given a hypothetical case in the form of a 150-page packet with affidavits, evidence, case law and legal documents. Teams of six (three attorneys and three witnesses) compete against teams from other schools in rounds that are judged by practicing attorneys and law students. Rounds consist of opening statements, direct- and cross-examinations of witnesses, and closing arguments. Attorneys are judged on their ability to argue for inclusion or exclusion of testimony according to the Rules of Evidence, their advocacy skills, and their ability to think on their feet. Witnesses are judged on their knowledge of the fact pattern, and their ability to develop a consistent, credible characterization. Pre-law students develop the analytical and presentational skills necessary for success in law school advocacy and careers in litigation. Students interested in careers other than law benefit from enhanced public speaking skills and the ability to think strategically.
The program is not limited to pre-law students, and students with an interest in theater are especially welcome. Although some students enter the program with experience in high school mock trial, debate or similar activities, the program is structured so that no such experience is necessary. There are no specific academic prerequisites for participation in the program, although permission of the instructor/coach is required.

Students interested in participating in the program should contact the coach, Tony Seagroves.

Mediation

Mediation is an extracurricular activity and is also supported by the Honors College. It is the newest of the three nationwide pre-law competitive programs, and UTD has participated in tournaments since almost the very beginning. The competition was established to recognize the increasing importance of alternative dispute resolution within the modern practice of law. Teams of three students each compete against teams from other schools in both the advocate/client division and the mediation division, with each student acting as a mediator, an advocate, and a client over the course of a tournament. Rounds, which are typically judged by practicing attorneys and professional mediators, are designed to simulate settlement conferences. Advocates and clients are judged on the effectiveness with which they argue their positions, as well as their flexibility during the negotiation process, while mediators are judged on their active listening skills, creativity, and ability to facilitate settlement. In all contexts, improvisational ability and adaptive skills are necessary for success.

UTD Mediation is one of the premier programs in the nation, having won the national championship in the advocate/client division three times and having three different students win the individual award for top mediator. UTD sends teams to the national tournament each year in early November. Since space on the traveling teams is limited to nine students, tryouts are held in mid- to late-September in the form of an afternoon-long instructional session followed by a tournament with teams from other north Texas schools. The program is open to any student with an interest in alternative dispute resolution and is not limited to pre-law students. There are no specific academic prerequisites. Students interested in participating in the program should contact the coach, Tony Seagroves, no later than the end of August.