Family Violence Clinic Receives $140,000 in State Funding

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years,” she said.

“One of the critical things in determining where you want to practice in your law career is, are you comfortable with oration?” Zwiracki said. “There aren’t a lot of people who are comfortable with oral argument. This gives you a way to test yourself before a live audience in a situation where your job is not on the line.”

That motivation paid off greatly for at least one participant, Patrick Roth, who teamed with fellow second-year student Jeffrey Reina on what proved to be the championship team. They defeated Dennis Schaeffer and Robert Marinovic in the final round, argued in the Ceremonial Courtroom at Erie County Hall.

“We did an oral argument and brief in Research and Writing class last year,” Roth said, “and I was awful — nervous and unprepared. That was one of the reasons I decided to do Moot Court.”

The experience of arguing before a panel of judges (more than 150 jurists and attorneys volunteered as judges, and the final round was argued before a panel of five) is different from, say, giving a speech, because of the intense questioning, Roth said. “The most unnerving thing was the questions,” he said. “It is a little harder to anticipate than when you are giving a normal presentation.”

“It was really enjoyable — in retrospect,” said Reina, his partner. “While it was happening it was a little nerve-wracking. You have to get used to public speaking; you have to get used to talking to judges. But one of the judges gave me a good piece of advice in the early rounds: Just treat it like a conversation. Even though sometimes it may seem confrontational, I took that to heart and kept it in the back of my mind throughout the competition.

“I thought it was a great learning experience.”

Each team prepared a brief based on facts provided to the participants; no outside research was allowed. That in itself was a major task. Reina and Roth’s brief, for example, ran 35 pages total, with 20 pages of argument. As well, during the six-round competition they ended up arguing “off brief” — taking the position opposite to the one advocated in their brief — three times. “When you are writing your brief, you sometimes come up with good counterarguments. It is good to argue off brief because you can anticipate those arguments,” Reina said.

“We put a lot of time into it, and I think we presented a good oral argument.”

The final-round panel of judges consisted of Justice Ann T. Mikoll ‘54 of the Appellate Division of State Supreme Court; State Supreme Court Justice Edward A. Rath Jr. ’54; Buffalo City Court Judge Timothy Franczyk; Buffalo attorney H. Kenneth Schroeder Jr. ’61; and Patrick NeMoyer ’77, newly elected to the State Supreme Court.

“It’s a great program. It’s good for the students and it’s good for the community,” said NeMoyer. “It gives people better lawyers out there to represent them.

“Every lawyer at some time has to stand up and make a presentation, whether it’s to a town board or a court or a community group. This helps them learn to organize their thoughts and present them well, and they come out better lawyers because of it.”

NeMoyer said he and some of the other judges had done outside reading on similar cases, and said he was impressed throughout the competition by the caliber of the participants.

“In terms of the vote (on the winners), it was pretty close,” he said. “I was impressed by all four finalists. They were good lawyers.”

“The judges were pretty tough on the competitors,” Zwiracki said, “and they provided great feedback.”

Dennis Schaeffer and Robert Marinovic had the distinction of having their brief named best in the competition. Named Best Oralist was Linda Seraf'i.