

Want to learn about the law? Come right in *Wilson High Confidential*

BY HENRY LI

The Southwest Community Connection, Feb 1, 2012

Many teachers and community members nostalgically recount “the good old days” when there were sewing classes at Wilson and the syllabus grew every year instead of shrunk. But, instead of watching from the sidelines, students here are taking matters into their own hands.

The mock trial club was restored by students last year. At its weekly Thursday night and lunch practices held in a Wilson classroom, kids can be seen learning and laughing. Three adults are the team’s facilitators; Gail Duffy, a Wilson teacher, and John McGrory and Nicholas Kampars, trial lawyers from the law firm Davis Wright Tremaine.

The co-captains are seniors Nate Hansen and Natalie Balkam.

Each year in the fall, the Classroom Law Project distributes a case to participating mock trial teams, which prepare intensely for three months before the regional competitions held in early March at the Multnomah County Courthouse.

This year the case is “Cavanaugh v. Cup of Joe.” Similar to the real case from the 1990s, plaintiff Lee Cavanaugh is suing a company for purchased coffee that gave him third-degree burns.

Students are the lawyers and witnesses from both sides; they prepare for both, finding out which side they will be arguing for only once they reach the competition. With guidance from the lawyers and Duffy, the students run the show — from opening statements to cross-examinations to closing arguments. They master trial procedure, improve their critical thinking, organizational and public speaking skills and gain valuable professional experience.

Sophomore Danielle Graugnard is participating in mock trial for the first time this year. She has aspirations to become a lawyer, and she feels mock trial will prepare her well.

“Using critical facts, along with learning how to present them properly, creates a thrilling challenge,” Graugnard said.

“Learning the dynamics, debating and law is really interesting,” senior Elise Smith, who is also interested in a career in law, said.

Mock trial’s benefits, however, also include the new network of people who support each other no matter what. A Wilson freshman with Asperger Syndrome related that her favorite experience with mock trial was when she sat in the wrong witness chair and had to be corrected by the judge. She said that her team told her it was the perfect act of a “dying, minor smoker” afterward.

“Mock trial has also helped me improve my skills of asking and answering questions,” she said.

“John, Gail and I couldn’t be more proud of them,” Kampars said.



SUBMITTED PHOTO / HENRY LI
Wilson High School’s mock trial club includes, from left: Natalie Balkam, Sage Nicholson, Nate Hansen, Amy Schenk, Kendall Kracke, Zach Director, Elise Smith, Lloyd Lewins, Emily Coker and Iris Parshley.

It's hard to believe that this is only mock trial's second year in existence at Wilson.

"Considering our gap year, we're doing phenomenal," said co-captain Nate Hansen, who said mock trial has improved his public speaking skills.

"We love our work," he said. "And just like band or drama or football, we need the community's support in everything we do."

For more information about Wilson's mock trial team, email gduffy@pps.net.

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