

**ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY'S 22<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL INVITATIONAL MOCK TRIAL TOURNAMENT**

**Dates: Friday through Sunday, November 1-3, 2024**

**Location: McLean County Law & Justice Center – Bloomington, Illinois**

**INVITATION TO MOCK TRIAL JUDGES/EVALUATORS**

Greetings from the Illinois State University Mock Trial Program! Our annual invitational tournament is fast approaching, and we need your help!

Each year, the American Mock Trial Association publishes a case file that undergraduate students from about 700 teams from around 400 colleges and universities across the country use to conduct mock trials in intercollegiate competitions. On behalf of ISU's mock trial program, and in conjunction with the McLean County Bar Association, I write in my capacity as this year's tournament judges recruitment coordinator to inform you that ***we need your expertise and assistance as a mock trial tournament judge/evaluator***. The balance of this document summarizes the particulars of our invitation for you to join us.

**Mock Trial Competition—Dates and Location**

The ISU Mock Trial Program is sponsoring its 21st annual Illinois State University Mock Trial Invitational Tournament on **the weekend of November 1-3, 2024**. The tournament will take place at the McLean County Law & Justice Center in Downtown Bloomington, Illinois. We will have about 32 teams (each consisting of 6-8 students) from several different Midwestern states traveling to Bloomington-Normal to compete in our very popular tournament. There will be as many as 16 mock trials happening simultaneously in the Law & Justice Center during each competition round, and we estimate about 300 college students, coaches, parents/supporters, and guest judges/evaluators will be in the building throughout most of the weekend. It is quite an event, and we want you to be a part of it.

**Tournament Judges Needed**

When universities host an invitational mock trial tournament, they rely heavily upon local judges and attorneys, university alumni, and friends of their mock trial programs to serve as mock trial judges/evaluators for the students. Serving as a mock trial judge/evaluator is a wonderful experience. You would be assigned to act either as a presiding judge who oversees the trial and rules on objections, or as a scoring judge who observes the students' performances and assigns scores to them. During the trial, judges/evaluators provide written critiques of the students' performances. After each round concludes, each judge/evaluator will have the opportunity to provide oral feedback in the form of a brief constructive critique to the students.

As a tournament judge/evaluator, however, you would not need to review any materials ahead of time, and you do not need to have any particular expertise in trial work or in a given legal field. All of the information you would need to evaluate the competitors at the tournament would be covered during a brief orientation prior to each competitive trial round and in the materials the student-competitors would present to you during the trials. (Generally, if you are interested in volunteering but do not want to be responsible for acting as the presiding judge in a trial, then we will accommodate your request.)

**This Year's Case: *Shahid v. Hopson***

This year's mock trial problem is a civil case entitled *Shannon Shahid v. Taylor Hopson*. On April 25, 2024, infamous millionaire Avery Bancroft died while aboard Train 1985 of the Mid-Riverina Express, a luxury train experience in Australia. Bancroft's last will and testament divided his \$400+ million estate lopsidedly between the two children who would be his heirs and legatees—95% to his older child, Taylor Hopson, and only 5% to his younger child, Shannon Shahid.

In this lawsuit, plaintiff Shahid alleges that defendant Hopson was "a culpable actor in the death of" their parent under the applicable "slayer statute"; in other words, Shahid seeks a declaration that her sibling Hopson cannot inherit any of their late father's estate, and that plaintiff Shahid is therefore the only person eligible to inherit, the Bancroft fortune. Hopson has denied any responsibility for Bancroft's death and has instead claimed that one or more other persons on the train actually were responsible for their father's untimely demise.

Like a “whodunit” mystery with hundreds of millions of dollars at stake, the case of *Shahid v. Hopson* will unfold in a courtroom near you very soon! The parties will duke it out before a jury in the State of Midlands (the fictional 51st state in the United States of America). Each side of this hotly contested civil suit must make tough choices in the trial, and the mock trial advocates will be working from a case file consisting of more than 250 pages of materials—legal documents, caselaw summaries, stipulations, witness affidavits, deposition transcripts, and more than 40 different potential exhibits! The parties also must offer testimony from a selection of 10 possible witnesses, including Mr. Bancroft’s assistant, a private investigator, a pulmonologist, a social media influencer, a photojournalist, and a clinical psychologist.

### **Schedule of Tournament Rounds/Trials**

This year’s tournament consists of four rounds during the weekend of November 1-3, 2024. Each round lasts about three hours (including breaks). During each round, teams from different schools will square off against one another to try the case to a panel of judges/evaluators. I know you will be quite impressed with the trial skills displayed by the students!

Each round will be preceded by a brief orientation for judges/evaluators. We will provide food and drink to our volunteers. The four rounds of this year’s tournament are scheduled to occur as follows:

**Round 1 (Friday Evening):** 6:00 P.M. on Friday, November 1 (with the judges’ orientation at 5:15 P.M.)

**Round 2 (Saturday Morning):** 9:00 A.M. on Saturday, November 2 (with the judges’ orientation at 8:15 A.M.)

**Round 3 (Saturday Afternoon):** 2:00 P.M. on Saturday, November 2 (with the judges’ orientation at 1:15 P.M.)

**Round 4 (Sunday Morning):** 9:00 A.M. on Sunday, November 3 (with the judges’ orientation at 8:15 A.M.)

### **Please Join Us!**

**Would you please consider volunteering to serve as a mock trial judge/evaluator at our competition?** We would appreciate you sharing a little of your time and expertise by judging one or more rounds. We welcome current and retired attorneys, paralegals, judges, and others involved in law-related fields to assist us in this effort.

Please join us for at least one round! We routinely have judges/evaluators who wish to serve two or three rounds, and we would love to have you join us for all four rounds if your schedule permits. If you are able to help out for any of our competition rounds, therefore, then we would be most grateful.

We really need your help, as this huge undertaking requires a very large number of volunteer judges/evaluators (32 per round for four separate trial rounds!). If you can volunteer, then all you need to do is send a short e-mail to me ([sekordi@ilstu.edu](mailto:sekordi@ilstu.edu)) and indicate the specific rounds for which you are volunteering. We then will send you additional details about the schedule for your round(s), how to enter the courthouse for the tournament, and related information. (We also will send reminder e-mails as the tournament date draws nearer.)

### **Thank You!**

We cannot pull off such a successful tournament each year without the volunteer service of dedicated members of the Bar Association, the Central Illinois legal community, and friends and alumni of our program. On behalf of the Illinois State University Mock Trial Program and the McLean County Bar Association, thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, or if you require any additional information, then I would welcome your call/text (309-826-0022) or e-mail ([sekordi@ilstu.edu](mailto:sekordi@ilstu.edu)). Thank you very much for your consideration!

Respectfully yours,  
S. Kording

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