

The Texas Lawbook

Free Speech, Due Process and Trial by Jury

Thompson Coburn Makes 5-Year Sponsorship Commitment to UNT Law Moot Court Competition



(LEFT TO RIGHT): THOMPSON COBURN ATTORNEYS AND UNT DALLAS COLLEGE OF LAW ALUMNI KAMRAN ANWAR, MAIA BARTEE, ALFRED BLUE III AND KRISTI WEISNER

October 19, 2021 | BY NICOLE WILLIAMS

However far removed from law school, many litigators recall certain key memories such as their first (at least seemingly) high-stakes moot court competition.

You're suited up, sleep-deprived from prepping and buzzing on adrenaline. You stand to give your arguments and quickly face an onslaught of questions from the judges. Or a judge launches into an elaborate hypothetical that pushes the topic at hand to its furthest possible relevance. Or you finish your artful dissection of the law only to hear crickets: a dreaded "cold panel" with no follow-up questions.

It is likely you remember those competitions fondly and treasure them for the lessons they provided about effective brief writing and effective oral advocacy, in addition to how close they brought you to the make-or-break courtroom moments that would soon define your career as a litigator as you built meaningful relationships with team members and coaches.

These extensive learning and networking opportunities are why every aspiring attorney should get the chance to compete.

In particular, our legal community needs to ensure that law students from diverse backgrounds have unfettered access to opportunities like moot court that give them the best chance to succeed in their education and early careers. And there's a direct benefit for practicing lawyers, too: Our profession can welcome more diverse attorneys, and our clients will benefit from the creativity and drive of more diverse attorney teams.

That's why Thompson Coburn recently agreed to become lead sponsor for the next five years of the annual internal Moot Court Competition at the University of North Texas Dallas College of Law, which was ranked as the nation's most diverse law school earlier this year.

In addition to committing \$5,000 in scholarships annually to award the outstanding students at UNT Law's moot court competition, the partners in our Dallas office also provided a separate donation that will fund individual awards for Best Oralist at the school's various internal advocacy competitions for years to come.

The winners of this year's event, which

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was held virtually in late September, were 3Ls Meghan Beer and Abby Lubbock. The second-place winners were 3Ls Paige Test and Matthew Brinegar. Ms. Test and Mr. Brinegar also tied for Best Brief with 3Ls John Andrews and Michael Campbell. Best Advocate honors went to 3E Elena Zhang and 2L Paige Goins.

The final round winners were determined by an esteemed group of judges that included the Hon. Erin Nowell from the 5th District Court of Appeals in Dallas, the Hon. David Evans of the 48th District Court in Fort Worth, the Hon. Amber Givens of the 282nd District Court in Dallas and the Hon. Victor C. Lander of the Dallas Municipal Court.

Embracing Diversity

The notion of building more diversity and inclusion in law firms and law schools is not a new concept. Still, it has thankfully begun to gain more attention from our profession as a whole, law firm leadership and our clients who expect us to staff their matters with a diverse team of attorneys.

Thompson Coburn is one of several national law firms that have embraced the idea of promoting and empowering a more diverse roster of lawyers through actions rather than simply words. The same can be said for UNT Law and the University of North Texas, both of which are “committed to seeking out, identifying, understanding and removing barriers to full participation and belonging among students, faculty and staff.

Since Thompson Coburn opened our Dallas office in March 2020 with four women partners, we have grown to 18 attorneys overall.

Today, four of our lawyers are UNT Law alumni from diverse backgrounds – Kamran Anwar, Maia Bartee, Alfred Blue III and Kristi Weisner. Kamran and Maia were also former UNT Law Moot Court champions and traveling team competitors.

Having worked alongside these four excellent young lawyers, it is evident that they have benefitted from UNT Law’s stated goal of preparing students “to thrive personally and professionally in a global society.”

Moving Forward

As we celebrate the winners of this year’s UNT Law Moot Court Competition, Thompson Coburn and all our attorneys will continue the firm’s Total Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion because we believe it strengthens our firm and the communities where we work.

We will honor our pledge to recruit diverse staff, paralegals and lawyers at every level, from law students to lateral partners. We will always staff matters with attorney teams that reflect both gender and racial diversity. In addition, we will keep implementing hiring practices to make sure we are recruiting more diverse employees.

In addition to our sponsorship at UNT Law, we will continue to provide our Thomas F. Eagleton Scholarship to support diverse 1L students. We also will build on our ongoing support for the firm’s Diversity Committee and our Affinity Groups for people of color, women and LGBTQ+ professionals.

Upholding these ideals and putting our related promises to work is the goal of everyone at Thompson Coburn and a primary reason that our other partners in Dallas and I chose our new home. Thompson Coburn has chosen this path not because it is something our clients demand but because it is the right thing to do. The differences among us strengthen us while enhancing our ability to deliver the work our clients deserve and respect.

Nicole Williams is managing partner of Thompson Coburn’s office in Dallas. She represents both plaintiffs and defendants in state and federal litigation, primarily in antitrust cases, unfair competition claims, Lanham Act allegations and