

**Advanced Trial Advocacy 408A Fall 2026**  
**Thursdays 4:00 to 5:40 pm**  
**AND Competitions Fall 2026 and Spring 2027**

**SYLLABUS**

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**1. Objectives and Learning Outcomes:**

The Advanced Trial Advocacy course is devoted to the continued development and performance of trial advocacy skills in the courtroom. Among the skills we will be perfecting are case analysis, motions in limine, opening statements, direct and cross examination, use and introduction of exhibits, objections, impeachment, expert witnesses, closing arguments and perfecting the record. We will be concerned with the application of the **Federal Rules of Evidence (FREs)** to the materials in the case file(s).

The Mock Trial competitions are all based on oral presentations by the competing advocates. Accordingly, we will also focus on improving oral presentations and effective advocacy. Students will improve their ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a case, to formulate proper strategies and to use appropriate authority as well as social policy to persuade others.

Although there will be suggested reading materials, the primary learning device will be actual performance assignments and eventually culminating in interschool mock trial competitions in October-November 2026 and February 2027.<sup>1</sup> All competitions are based on the **Federal Rules of Evidence (FREs)**. If we do not have the case fact patterns for the October competitions until Labor Day in September, the first several classes will be devoted to our reading and hypothetical performance assignments involving the case file from a previous mock trial competition. Our classes and practices will initially be in-person in the Moot courtroom and may be moved online depending on the status of any Health crisis.

Keep one thing in mind, though. You are part of a team. Just as serious law firms use an in-house trial review process by colleagues prior to trial, we will make one another better and more effective advocates if we are prepared and candid in our work with one another. So, as much as anything else, one objective of this class will be to learn how to work as a team, to be open-minded about opposing points of view of our teammates, and to appreciate the value of teamwork.

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<sup>1</sup> Most teams will consist of four students. Each team will practice separately once we get the two competitions fact patterns. Two teams will be participating in the online **All Star Bracket Challenge competition on Friday-Sunday (one on October 2-4, 2026, and one on October 9-11, 2026)**. Two teams will be participating in the **Premiere Trial competition on November 14-15, 2026, at UCLA**. There may be another competition(s) in the fall. We plan to enter two teams of two or three students in the **Texas Young Lawyer's Association (TYLA)** national competition in **February 2027**. The regionals of that competition will be hosted at our law school. We also plan to enter one or two teams of 4 students in the **March 2027 STAC online competition**. **There may be another competition in the spring 2027.**

## 2. Instructors:

The course will be taught, and the teams will be coached by Professors Mark Brown, Michael Vasquez and Robert Molko who have extensive criminal trial experience. They may be assisted by other former team members.

## 2. Required Texts:

A copy of the **Federal Rules of Evidence** (the version you used in your Evidence class should suffice).

There are, in the final pages of this syllabus, suggested reading regarding topics pertinent to trial practice from one or more of the texts listed below. **We are suggesting that you NOT purchase the texts unless you have a lot of extra money that you don't want to keep.** Between faculty copies and texts you have already used in another class, there should be enough to go around.

Fundamental Trial Advocacy, Rose (3<sup>d</sup> Ed. West) (hereinafter “Rose”); this book was required in this class in past years and there may be multiple copies around.

Trial Practice, Martin, Radvany, Dubin and Guernsey (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. LexisNexis) (hereinafter “TP”); this book is and has been a required text in Professor Shapiro’s Trial Practice class and there should be multiple copies around.

In addition, portions of the following texts may be helpful, although less so than Rose and TP.

Materials in Trial Advocacy, Problems and Cases, Mauet, Wolfson and Easton (7<sup>th</sup> Ed. Wolters Kluwer)(hereinafter “Mauet”); this book is and has been a required text in some Trial Practice classes and there may be multiple copies around.

Problems and Materials in Evidence and Trial Advocacy, Volumes I & 2 [Cases and Problems], Burns, Lubet and Moberly (5<sup>th</sup> Ed. National Institute for Trial Advocacy) (hereinafter “NITA”); these books have been used the last couple of years in Evidence Practice class and there may be multiple copies around.

## 3. General structure and Credit:

The class has two formally scheduled hours each week: Thursday, 4:00-5:40 pm. We will also meet less formally at other hours during the week which we will discuss in our first class. We will have group practices and individual practices. Also, as we approach the fall competitions, we will meet more often, including sometimes on weekends. Some of the weekend practices may run for as much as five hours. It is expected that you will spend an average of more than four hours a week in your preparation outside of the classroom on each fact pattern.

After the October and November competitions, we will meet for a postmortem and, when appropriate, prepare for hosting the February competition. This is a two-credits course with one additional credit for each of the competitions.

From day 1, we will be focusing on **not using any notes** when presenting any part of the case. You may create a one-page (or less) bullet point summary, but you may **NOT read** your presentation or questions. It may be difficult at first, but this approach at practices has been shown

to be useful, leading up to the competition where all the good teams never use any notes. Competition judges also score you down for using notes.

#### 4. Preparation for the First Days of Class:

Since the starting points for any trial attorney are learning<sup>2</sup> and analyzing the facts of the problem and developing a “theme” and a “factual theory of the case”, that’s where we will start. We may not have the case file for our mock trial competition problem(s) on the first day of class. In that case, we will use the case file from a previous competition until we do receive the competition fact patterns. A copy of the case file will be distributed in advance of the first day of class. For the first day of class, please learn that case file and be prepared to discuss on the second day of class how you would go about organizing your approach.

An advocate’s “**theme**” and “**factual theory of the case**” are critical to determining what evidence is relevant and, therefore, admissible. There are often several possible “factual theories of the case” that can be constructed by the advocate. These theories are often conflicting. One of the crucial responsibilities of the advocate is to consciously and carefully choose which factual theory (and theme) to construct and to present to the trier of fact. Everything that the advocate does during a trial **should be consistent with** this theme and the factual theory.

We will have a **Boot Camp** in the week of **August 10-13, 2026** from 4-9pm and **4 simultaneous head to head all-day trials on August 14-15, 2026, from 9am to 5pm**, in order to be ready for the first fact pattern that we expect to be released around Labor Day. We will be reviewing some of the very common evidence presentation rules that come up in every trial. **We will practice** Closing Arguments, Opening Statements, Direct and cross examinations of witnesses. We will also show how to lay the proper foundation for, inter alia, refreshing a witness’ recollection, past recollection recorded, identifying and introducing exhibits, impeachment of a witness with a prior inconsistent statement, along with simultaneously focusing on proper decorum and smoothness of your presentations. You should review the Fact pattern and the materials I emailed to you last semester and those which have been posted on the **LexiNexis** webcourse and be prepared for these practice sessions ahead of the first class. Each student should **review the related evidence rules before the first class** and **bring a copy of the Federal Rules of Evidence to each class**.

**Early on**, we will ask each student to present a “factual theory of the case” and a “theme” for one side or the other on the provided fact pattern. You should be prepared to do one for either side by having a short-written outline (**10 bullet points maximum**) of your theory which incorporates relevant pieces of evidence. You should be prepared to describe why certain evidence (pro and con) will or will not be admitted. Finally, you should be prepared to critique the “factual theories” and “themes” of other students.

After the Boot camp, our performance assignments will depend on when we get the other competition case file(s).

#### 6. Exams and Grading:

There will be no midterm or final exam for this course.

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, in real life, the process of “learning the facts” is an ongoing one. Almost never will an attorney learn all of the facts in the initial meeting or meetings with the client. In this class, we will have the advantage (that you may never again have) of being able to work with a “closed” case file.

Each student who **fully participates** in the preparation for competition and also competes in a fall competition will receive a numeric final course grade for the 2-units course and a Pass/Fail for the competition one-unit. The numerical grade will be based upon a combination of preparation, teamwork, contribution and performance. **Preparation** is the foundation of any trial presentation; it will count as **30 %** of the numerical grade. Since we are a team and we will be practicing as a team during class, attendance (i.e. reliability) and being prepared and being a **Good Teammate** is very important, it will count as **10%**. Effectively practicing every part of the trial before the interscholastic competition is critical; we will be competing at a much higher level than an introductory trial practice class against mostly experienced teams from other law schools; the **Practices** will count as **40%** of your numerical grade. The **Performance** at the competition will count as **20%** of your numerical grade.

Each student who participates in the preparation for competition but does not compete in a fall competition will receive a numeric final course grade for the 2-units course based on the preparation, teamwork and practices performances.

## 7. Attendance

Quite apart from the impact it may have on one's grade, we will take attendance at the beginning of each class by asking you to sign in for the class on a roll sheet. **In accordance with school rules, if you miss more than four (4) 2-hour classes, you will be academically dismissed from the course and will receive a grade of 0/Fail.**

## 8. Office Hours:

Since we are a team, you can pretty much come to see Professor Molko any time you want during his office hours including online ones. Professors Brown and Vasquez will let you know when they will be available for office hours. You will also be able to communicate with all three professors by email, phone and on zoom video. We will be using the following **zoom url** for this class throughout the academic year: **916-0475-7947**. Password **815036**.

## 8. Web Course

A LexisNexis web course for this class has been set up; you have to enroll in the class by registering on the webcourse. **Please check the web course regularly.** If you are unable to access it, send Professor Molko an email or, better yet, seek help in the library. During the semester we will use the web course to send you emails, make class announcements and post course documents. **Easy and regular communication will be important to our success as a team.**

## 9. Covid 19/RSV/Flu Protocol

We will all follow the Law school's health protocol. The protocol may change depending on the status of any health crisis. Do not come to school if you are sick. It is very important to always maintain the good health status of each team member. Losing one or more team members to a health issue could completely destroy the chance of competing.

## 9. Class schedule

| <b>Week</b> | <b>Date</b>            | <b>Subject</b>                                                                          | <b>Suggested Reading Assignment</b>                                                                                   | <b>Performance Assignment (subject to change)</b>                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1</b>    | August 20              | Exercises in Presentation of Evidence                                                   | - Read the posted materials on the LexisNexis webcourse                                                               | Refreshing a witness' recollection, past recollection recorded, identifying and introducing exhibits, impeachment of a witness with a prior inconsistent statement, prior consistent statement use. |
| <b>2</b>    | August 27              | - Case analysis<br>- Factual theory of the case<br>- Theme of the case                  | - Read carefully the actual competition fact pattern if it has been provided at that time<br>Rose, 1-46<br>- TP, 3-17 | Individual presentations. Present your theme and factual theory of the case                                                                                                                         |
| <b>3</b>    | September 3            | - Closing Arguments                                                                     | Rose, 63-108<br>- TP, 18-24 & 141-184                                                                                 | Present a Closing Argument for one side or the other in the provided case                                                                                                                           |
| <b>4</b>    | September 10           | - Opening Statements                                                                    | - Rose, 47-62 & 109-145<br>- TP, 185-290                                                                              | Present an Opening Statement for one side or the other in the provided case                                                                                                                         |
| <b>5</b>    | September 17           | - Cross examination                                                                     | - Rose, 147-193 & 301-332<br>- TP, 365-414                                                                            | TBD – some cross exam exercise                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>6</b>    | September 24           | - Direct examination<br>- Exhibits<br>- Impeachment                                     | - Rose, 195-217 & 253-287<br>- TP, 291-364 & 415-440                                                                  | TBD – some exhibit exercises; some impeachment exercise                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>7</b>    | October 1              | - Closing arguments and Opening statements<br>Final tune-up for the Buffalo Competition | - Rose, 289-299 & 333-359<br>- TP, 441-496                                                                            | Preparation for competition                                                                                                                                                                         |
|             | October 2-4<br>Team 1  | All Star Bracket Challenge                                                              | Just do it!                                                                                                           | Online competition                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>8</b>    | October 8              | Team 1 All Star Bracket Challenge tune-up                                               | - Rose, 361- 402<br>- TP, 497-532                                                                                     | Preparation for competition                                                                                                                                                                         |
|             | October 9-11<br>Team 2 | All Star Bracket Challenge                                                              | Just do it!                                                                                                           | Online competition                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>9</b>    | October 14-15          |                                                                                         |                                                                                                                       | Debriefing Teams 1 and 2                                                                                                                                                                            |

|    |                               |                                |             |         |
|----|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|---------|
| 10 | October 22                    | Team 3 &4<br>Premiere practice | TBD         |         |
| 11 | October 29                    | Team 3 &4<br>Premiere practice | TBD         |         |
| 12 | November 5                    | Team 3 &4<br>Premiere practice | TBD         | TBD     |
|    | November 14-15<br>Teams 3 & 4 | Premiere<br>Competition        | Just do it! | At UCLA |
| 13 | November 12                   | TBD                            | None, yet   | TBD *   |
| 14 | November 19                   | TBD                            | None, yet   | TBD*    |

\* The TYLA case file will likely be released in mid-November, and the competition will be held in February 2027 **at our law school**. Every student on the mock trial team is expected to help with the hosting preparation and the running of the competition (other than those competing at that time). That includes being timekeepers, bailiffs, etc...

## **10. DISABILITY SERVICES STATEMENT:**

### **12. Disability Services Statement:**

Western State College of Law provides accommodations to qualified students with disabilities. The Disabilities Services Office assists qualified students with disabilities in acquiring reasonable and appropriate accommodations and in supporting equal access to services, programs, and activities at Western State College of Law.

To seek reasonable accommodations, a student must contact Senior Assistant Dean Donna Espinoza, Student Services Director and Disabilities Services Coordinator, whose office is Room 276. Dean Espinoza's phone number and email address are: (714) 459-1117; [despinoza@wsulaw.edu](mailto:despinoza@wsulaw.edu). When seeking accommodations, a student should notify Dean Espinoza of her or his specific limitations and, if known, her or his specific requested accommodations. Students who seek accommodations will be asked to supply medical documentation of the need for accommodation. Classroom accommodations are not retroactive but are effective only upon the student sharing approved accommodations with the instructor or professor. Therefore, students are encouraged to request accommodations as early as feasible with Dean Espinoza to allow for time to gather necessary documentation. If you have a concern or complaint in this regard, please notify Dean Espinoza; or please notify Dean Halim Dhanidina at [hdhanidina@wsulaw.edu](mailto:hdhanidina@wsulaw.edu) or (714) 459-1168. Complaints will be handled in accordance with the College of Law's "Policy against Discrimination and Harassment."

## **11. Western State College of Law – Programmatic Learning Outcomes**

Western State College of Law's curriculum is designed so that every student achieves a level of competency prior to graduation in each of the eight Programmatic Learning Outcomes listed below:

### **Doctrinal Knowledge**

#### **(1) Doctrinal Knowledge**

Students will demonstrate knowledge of substantive and procedural law in the core curriculum subjects, including Contracts, Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure, Torts, Real Property, Business Association, Evidence, Civil Procedures, Constitutional Law, Estates, Community Property, Remedies, and Professional Responsibility.

**(2) Practice Skills**

Students will demonstrate the development of other law practice skills. Each student's chosen outcomes within this category will be varied based on the student's particular interests, coursework and work experiences. They may include, but are not limited to, the following topics: oral presentation and advocacy; interviewing; counseling; client service and business development; negotiations, mediation, arbitration, or other alternate dispute resolution methods; advanced legal research and writing (excluding purely academic papers and the first four units earned in introductory first-year legal research and writing class); applied legal writing such as drafting contracts, pleadings, other legal instruments; law practice management or the use of technology in law practice; cultural competency; collaboration or project management; financial analysis, such as accounting, budgeting project management, and valuation; cost benefit analysis in administrative agencies; use of technology, data analyses, or predictive coding; business strategy and behavior; pre-trial preparation, fact investigation, such as discovery, e-discovery, motion practice, assessing evidence, or utilizing experts; trial practice; professional civility and applied ethics; a law clinic that includes a classroom component; or a legal externship that includes a classroom component.

**(3) Legal Analysis**

Students will demonstrate the ability to identify the factual and legal issues implicated by a fact pattern and to appropriately use cases (including identifying the salient features of an appropriate precedent case, identifying legally significant similarities or differences between the precedent case and a fact pattern and explaining why those are legally significant) and rules (including the ability to connect legally significant facts in a fact pattern to the rule) to predict how a court would decide the issue. Students will also demonstrate the ability to identify and evaluate the public policies of a precedent case or rule, and be able to evaluate how public policy can impact the application of a rule to the legal issue.

**(4) Legal Research**

Students will demonstrate the ability to locate relevant legal authority using a variety of book and electronic resources, and to properly cite to such legal authority.

**(5) Communication**

Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate both orally and in writing in a manner appropriate to a particular task to effectively convey the author or speaker's ideas. This includes audience sensitivity in written and oral communication (the ability to adopt a tone, style and level of detail appropriate to the needs, knowledge and expertise of the audience); and written communication basic proficiency (the ability to use the conventions of grammar, spelling, punctuation, diction and usage appropriate to the task and sufficient to convey effectively the author's ideas).

**(6) Advocacy of Legal Argument**

Students will demonstrate the ability, in both oral and written formats, to evaluate the legal, economic and social strengths and weaknesses of a case and use case and statutory authority as well as public policy to persuade others. Making policy-based arguments includes the ability to identify and evaluate the public policies of a precedent case or rule and their implications, and be able to assert such appropriate arguments to support a particular application or distinction of a precedent case to a legal controversy or a particular resolution of the application of a rule to the legal controversy.

**(7) Client Sensitivity and Cultural Competency**

Students will demonstrate an awareness of clients' needs and goals, including a sensitivity to clients' background and circumstances (including, but not limited to, socio-economic, gender, race, ethnicity, educational, disability and/or religious background(s)), the ability to make decisions that reflect an appropriate focus on those needs and goals, and awareness that cultural issues may affect the relevance of facts and application of the law.

**(8) Legal Ethics**

Students will demonstrate the ability to identify ethical issues in law practice contexts and make appropriate decisions to resolve such issues.