

## **From Mock Trial to Real Trials**

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Some opportunities you just cannot pass up even if they are unpaid. Interning with a Superior Court judge in your home county is one of them. This summer I have had the pleasure of working with the Honorable Warren Davis and his staff in the Gwinnett County Superior Court.

Being a lifetime resident of Gwinnett and a participant in the county's high school mock trial program, I was no stranger to the Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center. However, this time I was not entering the building as a Berkmar student aspiring to go to law school one day, but as a rising second year Vanderbilt law student still recovering from a rigorous and difficult first year.

I thank everyone responsible for the county's high school mock trial program. Each year teachers, lawyers, and judges commit to helping students prepare for mock competitions. Arguing cases in actual courtrooms in front of practicing judges and lawyers is an awesome experience that requires you to both think on your feet and hone your presentation skills.

This competition, as I am sure it has and will continue to do for many others, allowed me to confirm my love of the law and desire to go to law school. For others mock trial leads to them pursuing other fields. Whether or not you decide to pursue law, mock trial is a great experience that can improve any student's skills.

This summer has provided me with actual courtroom experience that I could not receive from mock trial in Gwinnett or law school at Vanderbilt. In a March interview with Judge Davis he warned me that the law in practice was at times nothing like the law in books. After a year of law school and relentless reading assignments, I can personally confirm the veracity of that statement.

I believe this summer experience has been the most beneficial for me. I probably logged more courtroom hours than many of my colleagues. I got to experience the law from the other side of the bench. I have seen both the great and the not so great performances by lawyers. I have seen trial strategy work and fail. My experience taught a few things.

One: Case authority can make or break an argument or case. Yes, the judge and his staff have access to legal websites, but arguments sound more convincing when supported by on-point case authority. Also, when a judge is convinced that a case is on-point, opposing counsel often has first to convince the judge that he should ignore that authority before he or she can begin to establish support for their own position.

Two: Listening to the judge is of the utmost importance. Many people, including myself at times, think that once a great argument has been created and reduced to paper, no changes can be made. If the judge thinks an issue or element is important, I am going to as well or have some case authority to support me. If he prints out an applicable statute that he says governs our argument, I am going to quickly attempt to craft my argument into the elements of that statute.

Three: No matter what some might say uncontested divorce is a misnomer. Enough said.

Four: The judge's staff members are important to me because they are important to the judge. A judge's chambers cannot function without his staff attorney, calendar coordinator, and judicial assistant. Often a nice gesture to them is a nice gesture to the judge. At times, this may even include a lowly intern!

Five: Always work to improve my research skills. Often being good is not enough. You have to be quick as well. This summer has allowed me to become quicker in researching solutions to legal arguments. At times, Judge Davis has requested counsel go to the basement law library and do some research before reporting back. When one only has twenty minutes you have to be good and quick.

Six: Each day is a chance to learn something new. Judge Davis has been on the bench for 26 years, but still commented multiple times that he was seeing something new and different. The end of law school will be the beginning of learning the law.

Seven: My colleague's summer courtroom stories have no chance at beating mine. No chance at all.

Judge Davis and his staff have provided me with an unforgettable experience. I have learned more this summer than I learned all semester in some classes. Judge Davis helped solidify my desire to return home to practice law after graduation. So thanks to Judge Davis and all of the lawyers and judges around the county who allow the graduates of the best school system in the state to come back home.