



USC TRIAL ADVOCACY

BRING THE RUCKUS

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HAPPY (ALMOST) END OF THE SEMESTER!

While you're signing up for fall classes, be sure to keep the Trial Advocacy program in mind ([click here](#)). Our students compete in Mock Trial tournaments, travel the country (when there isn't a global pandemic running loose), prepare ourselves for law school, and advocate for people facing real-world problems. The Trial Advocacy class can also fulfill one of the requirements for USC Agents of Change.

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AT THE CLOSE OF OUR 2021 COMPETITIVE SEASON WE'RE CELEBRATING...



UNDEFEATED: USC Trial Advocacy placed **FIRST** in the Inaugural George Floyd Memorial Tournament, beating Harvard University in the fourth round to **WIN** the competition with a perfect 8-0 record!

Additionally, the team secured a first place finish at the Scarlet & Cream tournament, second place at the Emerald City tournament, and third place at the Arizona Cactus Classic Invitational. Throughout our competitive season many of our students were recognized for their tremendous work with several winning attorney and/or witness awards. As the season came to a close we continued to bring the ruckus, finishing regionals with a 7-1 record and a bid to the Opening Round Championship Series.

In previous years, our students worked on BLM-LA's lawsuit against the LAPD for excessive force against George Floyd protestors, interned at the Los Angeles Public Defender's office, and traveled to the Texas-Mexico border to train immigration lawyers defending migrants in detention. This summer, our students are working at the ACLU Foundation of Southern California, interning at the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, and traveling to San Francisco to train disability lawyers.

USC Trial Advocacy is going to keep bringing the **RUCKUS**, year in and year out, and if you're a hardworking undergraduate student with a passion for justice, we welcome you to join our fight! Don't miss out on the opportunity to join—[click the "notify me" button on our homepage](#) to sign up for our newsletter and be the first to know about recruitment.

INTERVIEW: CROSSING AN ASPHYXIATION EXPERT IN A POLICE BRUTALITY CASE

BY SABRINA FENG

AYasmin Fardghassemi is an alumna of the USC Mock Trial Team. She was admitted to the California Bar on December 6, 2014. Just four days later, she appeared in a police brutality trial to cross-examine an expert witness on positional asphyxiation - the same issue at the center of the George Floyd case. In this interview with current USC Mock Trial freshman Sabrina Feng, Fardghassemi recalls the cross-examination and discusses her time on the USC Mock Trial Team.

How did you become involved in the police brutality case?

Professor Olu Orange was one of the lead trial attorneys for the plaintiffs on this case. He contacted me one morning to discuss his upcoming trial. Prof. Orange was and still is the Head Coach of the USC Mock Trial Team. He frequently checks up on former students to mentor them. At the time, I had recently returned home from my post-bar trip. Many of my friends and classmates were starting their first week in big law positions. As an aspiring government lawyer, I was not eligible to apply to government positions without my bar results. I was yearning to work on something meaningful and I was given this opportunity when Prof. Orange asked me to join his legal team. He knew I wanted to be a prosecutor and believed I would gain invaluable experience participating in this trial.

So you started working on the case before you were barred, how did you get involved with this cross?

I started working on the case as a law clerk. I was in court for every day of the trial - which lasted 41 days. I drafted motions. I prepared witnesses. I participated in strategy sessions with co-counsel. I was an active participant on the plaintiffs' team. Even though I had been a lawyer for only four days when the expert took the stand, I had an intimate knowledge of the case and the trial proceedings. Early on, Prof. Orange discussed the possibility of having a scheduling conflict. Still, I did not anticipate that he would actually ask me to handle a witness. One day, Prof. Orange had a mediation scheduled in an unrelated matter and asked me to take his place at counsel table the next day to cross-examine the positional asphyxiation expert. I shared my concerns with Prof. Orange who assured me that I would be fine so long as I relied on my mock trial training. He told me that I was one of the best advocates USC has produced, that he saw me do a great job in court when I interned for the DA's office, and that those things together with my National Championship win as a member of UCLA Law School's mock trial team - made him sure I could successfully cross the expert. He was right! Those skills were all I needed. We won the trial and the jury awarded \$8 million dollars. For one of the news stories [click here](#).



How did you prepare for this cross?

I spent the entire night researching prior transcripts and cases involving our expert witness. Luckily I was able to find material related to his prior testimony that would later be used for impeachment purposes in our trial. The next day, I listened intently as the expert testified. I was quick to notice inconsistencies with his prior testimony. I jumped on the opportunity to cross-examine the expert on those inconsistencies.

Did your experience on the USC Mock Trial Team contribute to this preparation?

Without a doubt. My participation as a member of the USC Mock Trial Team gave me the courage and confidence to cross-examine a medical expert just four days after becoming a lawyer. The invaluable skills we hone in the program allow us to hit the ground running in law school and as brand new lawyers.

To read the full story, [click here](#)!

USC STUDENTS HELP TRAIN LAWYERS TO BETTER REPRESENT DETAINED IMMIGRANTS

BY SUSAN BELL

Attorney and civil rights advocate Olu Orange leads students enrolled in his Trial Advocacy Program at USC Dornsife to South Texas to help train immigration lawyers representing unaccompanied minors seized at the border.



By now we have all seen the distressing news images of immigrant children separated from their parents and detained in cages at the southern border.

This August, Olu Orange led a group of USC students to South Texas to help train immigration attorneys representing these detained children and families. This was the third such trip to the border Orange has organized for USC students to enable them to support the efforts of those helping immigrant families — trips that are made possible by endowed funds from the Harding and Chaudhry families.

“Our first trip, in May 2018, was inspired by seeing the news of children being detained in dog-kennel type cages,” said Orange, who leads USC Dornsife’s Trial Advocacy Program. “Our second trip, taken in mid-August 2018, was inspired by accounts of parents having their children stripped from them. In both cases, the collective thought process of students in our program was, ‘This is wrong, and we need to go do something about it.’ So, we did.”

On their second trip, Orange’s team assisted with locating and identifying the detention status of more than 100 children around the country, many fleeing abuse or gang violence at home.

“Now those children may be provided legal representation and services,” Orange said.

After last year’s success, program students were enthusiastic to make a third trip to the border this summer. The eight-strong student team came from diverse USC majors including political science, psychology, computer science and philosophy.

A chance to double success rates

The group stayed in Harlingen, Texas, from Aug. 2 to 8, splitting their time between three projects.

First, the team went to Port Isabel Detention Center in nearby Los Fresnos to observe proceedings involving detainees at the border. There they met with attorneys from the South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project (ProBAR) — a joint project of the American Bar Association, the State Bar of Texas and the American Immigration Lawyers Association. Led by Orange, the USC students provided training and exercises to the ProBAR lawyers representing detained children and families.

Orange’s team designed and delivered presentations on various aspects of advocacy that the lawyers could use during further proceedings, such as ensuring opportunities to cross-examine government witnesses and attacking stereotype-based gang inferences.

To read the full story, [click here!](#)

PROFESSOR ORANGE AND STUDENTS SPEAK AT ST. MARY'S LAW IMMIGRATION SYMPOSIUM

As a part of our continuing efforts to help immigration attorneys fight to protect migrants coming to the United States, Prof. Orange and USCMT members Elisa Herrera and Yvette Lopez presented on gang evidence discovery at the St. Mary's Law Immigration Symposium.



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S DORNSIFE TRIAL ADVOCACY TEAM

The Dornsife Program is a competitive trial simulation program that is complemented with real-world public interest legal opportunities. During competitions, students explore the trial process by presenting opening statements, directing witness cross examinations, and giving closing arguments — all while practicing attorneys and judges preside over the "trial". In the community, students work to better the lives of others. Trial Advocacy offers a unique and unrivaled opportunity to learn about the U.S. legal system through simulation and a community participation.



Yvette Lopez

Yvette Lopez is a student at the University of Southern California and a member of the school's Trial Advocacy Program. Under Olu Orange, she developed an immigration training packet and organized three trips to Harlingen Texas for the Trial Advocacy program to support the immigration attorneys working there. While there, she and the team held workshops on making objections for asylum hearings, obtaining documents from ICE, and effectively advocating for migrant children. When she isn't studying, Yvette enjoys volunteering at the local high schools and making video games. This past summer, she worked at the

LA county Public Defender's office, where she assisted public defenders with reviewing body-camera footage, interviewing clients, and giving input on trials. After earning her bachelor's in computer science, she plans to go to law school and become a civil rights lawyer.



Elisa Herrera

Elisa Herrera is an undergraduate studying Political Science at the University of Southern California, where she is a member of the Trial Advocacy team. Elisa has spent the past year and a half doing volunteer immigration work, both with the Trial Advocacy team as well as the USC Gould School of Law's Immigration and Global Migration Initiative (IGMI.) This past summer, she spent a week working with ProBAR in South Texas. Along with her teammates, including Yvette Lopez, to use mock trials to help prepare new immigration attorneys to represent children and adults being detained at the Southern border. She has also been

involved in local immigration advocacy, attending lectures at the ACLU, working at Public Counsel with Spanish-speaking clients, and helping connect the Latino Student Assembly and its members with USC's IGMI resources. Elisa grew up in Whittier, California, a suburb of Los Angeles. In her free time, she enjoys reading fiction and doing creative writing, as well as spending time with friends and family.



Olu Orange—Gang Evidence & Cross Examination

Olu K. Orange is the Director of the University of Southern California Dornsife Trial Advocacy Program. Orange has twice been selected as a recipient of the California Lawyer Attorney of the Year (CLAY) Award—first in 2015, and again in 2017. Both awards honored Orange for his civil rights work, which is the primary focus of his legal practice at Orange Law Offices. In 2016, Orange was selected as one of the Daily Journal's Top 100 lawyers in California in recognition of his entertainment law practice. Orange is also consistently selected by Thomson Reuters as a "Super Lawyer" in the Civil Rights and First Amendment category. Orange's practice of law in California began as a Deputy Public Defender in Orange County. In 2017,

Orange finalized his federal civil rights class action victory in *Rodriguez v. Los Angeles*. Rodriguez stopped the enforcement of illegal gang curfews upon several thousand residents of the City of Los Angeles, established a \$30 million dollar jobs and education program to redress the harm government officials caused, and has now served as a point of reference for similar restorative approaches in other states.

PROFESSOR ORANGE CO-COUNSELS AND STUDENTS ASSIST ON BLACK LIVES MATTER - LOS ANGELES CLASS ACTION



In keeping with the heart and soul of what we do, OUR STUDENTS worked on a case our Director filed with 8 other law offices on June 5th, 2020 in federal court — A FEDERAL CLASS ACTION AGAINST THE LAPD ON BEHALF OF BLACK LIVES MATTER & LA PROTESTERS.

For 20 years, USCMT has been at the tip of the spear when it comes to fighting for civil rights. Our members have worked on every major federal civil rights class action against the LAPD ... as well as the federal case that ended the practice of making it cheaper for police to kill rather than injure suspects ... and freeing caged immigrant children in Texas — work which we continue with the assistance of the Harding and Chaudhry family endowments.

We were doing the work that needed to be done at times when many refused to acknowledge that anything needed to be done at all — and we'll keep doing the work until the job is done.

WE ARE PROUD TO SAY THAT BLACK LIVES MATTER ... BECAUSE FOR 20 YEARS WE'VE BEEN SHOWING THAT BLACK LIVES MATTER.



USC TEAM WINS CLASS-ACTION VICTORY ON L.A.'S CONTROVERSIAL GANG INJUNCTIONS

BY SUSAN BELL

With help from undergraduates and an alumna, Olu Orange brings a successful lawsuit that forces the city to pay for millions in job training and education



Walking home from his girlfriend's house late one evening in 2009, Christian Rodriguez, a 19-year-old from Mar Vista Gardens, a Los Angeles housing project, spotted his childhood friend, Alberto Cazarez.

But before he could greet him, Rodriguez and Cazarez were thrown to the ground and handcuffed by police who ran up to them from behind. Accusing Rodriguez of violating a gang injunction curfew and Cazarez of associating with him, police arrested both.

Far from being gang members, however, Rodriguez and Cazarez were straight-A students at West Los Angeles Community College.

Cazarez, 17, was released to his parents; Rodriguez was jailed and charged with violating the curfew.

Although innocent of gang involvement, because of an older brother's gang ties, police deemed Rodriguez subject to the injunction — a court order that aims to curtail gang activity in a designated area. If convicted, he risked prison and being permanently labeled a gang member, an eventuality that would likely result in his family being evicted.

Constitutional freedoms

Gang injunctions, argues Olu Orange, adjunct assistant professor of political science at the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, curtail the most basic constitutional freedoms — by prohibiting association with others, being outside at night, being in certain places and saying or wearing certain things.

"Everything Americans hold dear as quintessential to being American, gang injunctions take away, without even an opportunity to appear in court," said Orange, a civil rights lawyer and former public defender who took on Rodriguez's case. "It's manifestly un-American."

Orange succeeded in getting the criminal charges against Rodriguez dropped in 2011.

But the story doesn't end there.

"When we got the criminal charges dismissed, Chris and Alberto wanted to ensure this kind of injustice didn't happen to anyone, ever again," Orange said. "So we filed a class-action lawsuit."

Seven years later

Now, seven years after Rodriguez and Cazarez were arrested, Orange, with the volunteered help of six USC Dornsife undergraduates and an alumna, has won that lawsuit, forcing the city of Los Angeles to pay up to \$30 million to provide education, job training, apprenticeships, jobs and even gang tattoo removal for those impacted by gang injunctions.

"If a police officer believes you're a gang member because they've seen you in a gang area or in the presence of gang members, they can serve you with a gang injunction," Orange said. "Then they have the power to arrest you for violating it, even if you've done nothing wrong."

To read the full story, [click here!](#)

DC BOUND: OUR GRADUATES ARE OFF TO LAW SCHOOL

These outstanding USCMT alumni certainly hit it out of the park this law school application cycle.



Yvette Lopez

Attending: Howard University School of Law

"I chose to go to Howard Law School so that I can continue their legacy of fighting for racial justice. My plan for after graduation is to work at a public defender's office and then use my trial skills to contribute to civil rights firm or start one of my own. I never would have reached this point without the mentorship and opportunities the USC Trial Advocacy Program offers. As a daughter of immigrants, I have a responsibility to help others achieve the American Dream I have been lucky enough to live."



Dylan Specht

Attending: Georgetown University Law Center

"After graduation, I want to become a public defender. I hope to use my skills as a litigator to help low-income and marginalized clients. The USC Trial Advocacy Program has had a huge impact on my career choice. Olu Orange and Hooman Kazemi, both public defenders (one current and one former), helped convince me that every attorney has a responsibility to help those in need. I plan on living up to that responsibility."



Mariah Breit

Attending: Georgetown University Law Center

"As a Blume Public Interest Scholar, I will use my time at Georgetown to further shape my advocacy skills as a force for good. Beyond graduation, I intend to use my legal career to increase educational access and equity for marginalized students. Over the past four years, USC Trial Advocacy has helped me develop invaluable skills while impressing the responsibility to use them to leave a lasting positive impact on our world."

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Mock Trial?

Mock Trial is a competitive trial simulation. Two teams present all the aspects of a regular trial, including opening statements, direct and cross examinations, and closing arguments.

Who can join the team?

The Trial Advocacy Program is available to all USC undergraduate students.

We generally require that you be enrolled in 17 or less units in the Fall and Spring semesters. Due to the structure of AMTA competitions, membership to the Trial Advocacy Program is a two semester commitment.

Do I need any prior experience?

Prior experience with public speaking is helpful, but not required. We will teach you everything you need to know!

What is the time commitment like?

Trial Advocacy requires a significant time commitment. For the first few weeks, students will spend about 4-6 hours a week in class. Once the competitive season starts, students may spend upwards of 20 hours a week doing trial advocacy, both at practices and competitions.

Find answers to your other questions on our [website FAQ page](#)

*Good luck with finals
and
Fight On!*

