

## BOOK REVIEW

---

### REVIEW OF *THE MOOT COURT ADVISOR'S HANDBOOK* (SECOND EDITION)

Hilary Stirman Reed\*

When James Dimitri, Melissa E. Love Koenig, and Susie Salmon released the first edition of the *Moot Court Advisor's Handbook* in 2015, I eagerly bought my copy and dove in. I was one year into being a moot court program director,<sup>1</sup> and I read it cover to cover, nodding along while learning from these experienced professors and recognizing challenges I had maneuvered alone. The first edition had years of distilled wisdom, organized beautifully, packaged in an easy to approach guide. It was a comprehensive and step-by-step approach to running a moot court program, and I was grateful for it. Little did we know, a few short years later, how much the world would change, and how these changes would affect moot court.

The second edition of the *Moot Court Advisor's Handbook*, released last fall, retains all of the helpful work of the first edition but has added significant content to address many of the new realities we face.<sup>2</sup>

ABA standard changes? Check.

Virtual competitions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic? Check.

---

\*Clinical Professor of Lawyering Skills and Strategies, University of Houston.

1. This was at my former institution. While I have stayed engaged with moot court at UH, the moot court program is run by the University of Houston's Blakely Advocacy Institute.

2. JAMES DIMITRI, MELISSA E. LOVE KOENIG, & SUSIE SALMON, *THE MOOT COURT ADVISOR'S HANDBOOK* (2d ed. 2023).

Generative AI assistance in writing briefs? Check.

In many ways, it seems likely that directing and coaching moot court in 2015 was more like coaching 15 years earlier in 2000 would have been than five years later in 2020. Despite these rapid changes we have all experienced, the *Handbook* maintains a balanced, reassuring, and authoritative tone. While some of the circumstances that caused these changes were (and sometimes still are) frightening, I felt encouraged and excited by these changes in light of the discussions in the *Handbook*, rather than fearful.

Like the first edition, the second edition of *The Moot Court Advisor's Handbook* serves as a comprehensive game plan for organizing a law school moot court program, both for internal and external competitions. It also has sections that can be deployed strategically to help train volunteers, whether coaches or judges, and ensure quality in a moot court program. It's no surprise that this book was written by three legal writing professors with decades of experience. The chapters and subparts are thorough and skip no steps. For example, for an advisor planning an internal competition, the *Handbook* starts with determining the format and rules; moves to an in-depth discussion of creating a competition problem, scoring rubrics, and bench brief; then walks through the process of recruiting and preparing judges, orienting the competitors, scoring the briefs, and conducting the oral arguments.<sup>3</sup> It finishes with the awards ceremony, just like a competition does.<sup>4</sup> For the new moot court director thrust into a world of detailed logistics, it is a dream of a playbook, in part because of the thoroughness, but also because of the truly impressive toolkit of online resources to deploy. Starting with any of the models or samples will save precious time. Having the chance to think through issues like competitor protests ahead of time is invaluable. If you already have a program that is thriving, the *Handbook*

---

3. *Id.* at 57–161.

4. *Id.* at 157–160.

still offers helpful insights and best practices from other programs.

Right off the bat, one of the newest sections discusses how moot court can help satisfy more recent ABA standards, including the experiential education requirement and professional identity formation requirement.<sup>5</sup> Not only does the *Handbook* provide insight into these standards, but it gets to the heart of the matter by pointing out where the biggest obstacles may be for a program.<sup>6</sup> As advisors may occasionally need to justify the expense of a resource-intensive moot court program to law school administration, greater awareness of how these programs further institutional goals is critical.

The largest change in the second edition is the new addition of a chapter devoted to virtual moot court competitions.<sup>7</sup> The positive framing of this development stood out. The *Handbook* does not discuss virtual competitions only in the shadow of the necessity brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic—though, of course, the *Handbook* recounts that time. We are reassured that, despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pivot to online competitions in 2020, “[f]ortunately, no future program need ever make that pivot without guidance.”<sup>8</sup> Instead, the the chapter is framed in terms of how courts and lawyers are using virtual presence.<sup>9</sup> Considering that framing, the *Handbook* has a thoughtful and balanced approach to virtual competitions, identifying where they can add value in a world where in-person competitions are possible. The authors also credit many contributors from the moot court world who played major roles in making the 2020 pandemic pivot.<sup>10</sup>

Among many other topics relating to virtual competitions, the *Handbook* invites us to consider how

---

5. *Id.* at 10–14

6. *Id.* at 12–13.

7. *Id.* at 263–306.

8. *Id.* at 264.

9. *Id.* at 263–64.

10. *Id.* at 264–65.

moving online impacts accessibility, both in the literal sense of general student access to a competition and in terms of disability accommodation.<sup>11</sup> It highlights that some students will find the flexibility and the lack of required time on campus makes participation in a virtual moot court competition easier, while other students will have technological and living-space challenges that could be a disadvantage when appearing virtually.<sup>12</sup> Consistently throughout the *Handbook*, problems are not just identified, but there is collective wisdom and creative solutions offered.<sup>13</sup> For example, for the students with technological needs, it suggests that the law school could loan out equipment like hotspots and webcams for students during the competition.<sup>14</sup>

Helpfully, there is an extensive list of questions to think through in advance for handling technical glitches, which unfortunately come with the territory in virtual competitions.<sup>15</sup> I found it valuable to think through things such as “If a judge is disconnected from the argument or has persistent and unresolvable freezing or other audio or visual issues, can the round continue without that judge?”<sup>16</sup> Again, the authors do a terrific job looking at the various facets of a particular part of advising moot court and helping the advisor be several steps ahead of where they would be otherwise.

The last big change since 2015 that called for treatment in the second edition is the rise of generative artificial intelligence, like ChatGPT. This is a generational technological change that touches every aspect of legal writing, including moot court. The *Handbook* does not give extensive treatment to the subject but raises the right questions. When advising how to draft competition rules against plagiarism in brief writing, the authors wisely suggest prohibiting certain

---

11. *Id.* at 266.

12. *Id.* at 266, 272–73.

13. *See, e.g., id.* at 272–73.

14. *Id.*

15. *Id.* at 282–83.

16. *Id.* at 283.

uses rather than naming tools, because the “technological landscape evolves so quickly.”<sup>17</sup> Fundamentally, we are encouraged to stay focused on maintaining fairness, preserving educational value, and training “ethical, professional, competent future attorneys.”<sup>18</sup> There is also recognition that as these tools become more accessible and used in practice, we may have to shift our thinking about them.<sup>19</sup>

As to the book length, in the second edition the appendices have been moved exclusively to a secure online site.<sup>20</sup> Despite the significant additions to the second edition, this move prevented the book from growing unwieldy. There are 14 models and samples provided of documents that would be helpful both in internal and external competitions, from Model Judging Guidelines, to Sample Rubrics, to a stellar White Glove Brief Inspection Checklist. While I enjoyed being able to flip through the physical pages of the samples in the first edition, the nature of these types of documents makes their online availability much more critical. Even if your school has well-developed materials, it is fantastic to have a source of other high-quality documents.

Professors Dimitri, Love Koenig, and Salmon have given moot court advisors and the moot court community a gift by gathering, organizing, and distilling the vast amount of learned wisdom about how to run a moot court program. This *Handbook* has earned its spot on the shelf of anyone involved in running a moot court program. It will continue to be an invaluable resource.

---

17. *Id.* at 76.

18. *Id.*

19. *Id.*

20. The materials are available at [www.caplav.com/mootcourt](http://www.caplav.com/mootcourt). The *Handbook* provides a password to access these materials.

