

ON CAMPUS

Keiser Students to Compete in Mock Trial Competition

Trial team learning more about legal system

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SCOTT WHEELER | THE LEDGER

Arzell Diggs makes a point during the Mock Trial Team practice at Keiser University in Lakeland.

LAKELAND | A small group of Keiser University students has formed the school's first "Mock Trial Team," to learn more about the legal system and engage in some high-spirited competition.

Coached by Karen Steverson, director of legal studies, the team of seven students meets twice a week to practice. Full-time students, they juggle outside commitments to participate, she said.

Student Jennifer Pickett, 34, a mother of eight, said she thinks it's worth the effort.

"I have a passion for the legal system," she said.

That surely helps. In addition to the children and her husband, Pickett has a full-time job, a part-time job, a commute and classes three nights a week.

"I have to schedule sleep," she said.

Pickett is a criminal justice student. The team is made up of students from the school's legal studies, criminal justice and business administration programs.

It's about learning, certainly, but for this team, involvement is also about competition. The team will participate in the American Mock Trial Association Regional Competition at the University of Central Florida in February.

In the meantime, practices will continue.

Arzell Diggs, 30, a criminal justice major, said he's on the team in part to work on his public speaking skills and learn more about the legal system.

"Although the work is hard, it is very rewarding," he said.

The competition provides a good learning environment, Steverson said. With simulated trials, students will face teams from other schools and try legal maneuvering on for size. The practice is designed to help students develop critical thinking and public speaking skills, as well as legal practices and procedures.

Keiser is proud to be involved, said campus President Rebecca McDonnell.

"We are pleased to be the first campus in the (statewide) Keiser University system to have started a Mock Trial Team," she said in a statement.

The Mock Trial Association sponsors regional and national competitions and provides case material for academic use. It hosts 24 regional tournaments, eight opening round championship tournaments and a national championship tournament each season. Some 600 teams from over 350 universities and colleges will compete.

Keiser University is a private, not-for-profit school with about 18,000 students on 15 Florida campuses and online. The Lakeland campus has about 1,100 students.

Once Pickett finishes her degree work at Keiser, she plans to continue toward her professional goals.

"My overall career goal is to go on to law school when I am done at Keiser and become a lawyer, and someday a judge," she said.

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