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Students' success is no moot point

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Kelvin Chan

Hong Kong University's legal eagles excel in US competition

In the weeks leading up to the distinguished Jessup international mock court competition held in the US, Hong Kong University law student Mary Koo Tin-yee and her four teammates spent every moment studying and preparing.

'In the month before we left for Washington, literally every day we were preparing for a practice moot or researching some new issues, or working out some logistics,' said Ms Koo, 23.

The efforts paid off, because the team came third along with three other teams out of a total of 94 competing in Washington.

In the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition, teams are required to respond to a hypothetical legal problem with oral and written arguments presented in a courtroom simulation, known as a moot.

They are judged by panels of experts that include lawyers, judges and scholars.

To add to the pressure, the teams have to know both sides of the case because they do not know beforehand which side they will be arguing.

This year's problem required participants to argue a case between two fictional countries that reflected real problems concerning jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court and powers of the United Nations Security Council. The case, announced to contestants in September, highlighted actual objections of countries to the court.

The Hong Kong team, which also included Enoch Li, Daniel Lau Pak-yue, both 23, Adrian Leung Hay-yin, 22, and Christopher Chain Siao-liang, 18, made it to the quarter-finals of the competition that was held from March 28 to April 3.

They were narrowly defeated by a team from Mexico, who in turn were trumped by students from the Philippines, who eventually won the competition.

Hong Kong has competed for the prize since 1986.

In 1997, it also finished third, but only 40 teams were in the running that year.

In Washington, the atmosphere during the competition was electric, the students said.

'Everyone was very charged up, very focused,' Ms Koo said. 'Definitely during the preliminaries, people were generally quite tense.'

At one point, Ms Li lost her voice, which posed a problem because she was scheduled to compete the next day with Mr Leung. But the team soldiered on, with Ms Koo standing in for her ailing teammate and arguing the case while Ms Li passed notes to her from the sidelines.

For its efforts, the Hong Kong team received a trophy from the organisers and a US\$20,000 scholarship from law firm Temple Chambers.

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