

# Law Students Mentor Youth at Teen Court

By Judy Nichols, Director of Communications, Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University

**Cutline: Shana Einhorn, left, a third-year law student at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, and Suzanne Sanchez, right, a 1991 alumna and supervising attorney in the Maricopa County Public Defender's Office, mentor high school students Abby Richardson, 17, center left, and Ashley Elliott, 18, as part of the Teen Court program, a teen diversionary program of the Maricopa County Superior Court system.**



Courtroom etiquette, proper direct examination and consequences fitting the offense are all on the agenda when students at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University mentor teens in the Maricopa County Teen Court program.

Teen Court is a diversionary program in which teens serve as prosecutors, defense attorneys, bailiffs and members of the jury to determine the proper consequence for a peer who has admitted responsibility for a violation of the law.

By listening to the offender and any witnesses that appear, the teens determine any mitigating circumstances and assign consequences that can include community service, restitution, letters of apology, peer counseling, tutoring, research papers, educational classes, skill-building classes, and jury duty.

The University Lakes arm of the program began meeting at the College of Law in November, using the College's courtroom classroom, which has a judge's bench, jury box and tables for lawyers and defendants.

Law students volunteer through the College's Pro Bono Program, which provides free law-related services to promote the public good or to those who cannot afford help. Last year, the College's law students donated 73,000 hours to the elderly, the disabled, the homeless and other programs.

Shana Einhorn, a third-year law student who plans to work in family law, recently sat across the table from Abby Richardson, 17, and Ashley Elliott, 18, both of Desert Vista High School, who served as prosecuting attorneys in an assault case. Ashley eventually hopes to take pre-law classes at ASU. Abby wants to be a cosmetic surgeon.

---

Article reprinted with the permission of Judy Nichols

Einhorn helped the students read the police account of the incident, a fight over a boy, in which one girl slapped another and dragged her by the hair across the cement.

“You should point out the difference in size,” Einhorn suggested. Then she explained the idea of hearsay, that someone told the offender that the girl was saying things about her.

She coached them on their performance in front of the judge.

“Most people talk too fast,” Einhorn cautioned them. “Speak much slower than you think you should. Even if the person on the stand is rude to you, always be polite. And stand up when you speak to the judge.”

Lee Roberts, a juvenile probation officer and Teen Court coordinator, sat on the bench.

The “defense attorneys,” two teenage boys, walked the offender through her background, the teasing she suffered in school, and her anger at hearing the other girl was spreading rumors about her.

Abby and Ashley asked her about the size difference, whether there had been other fights, and whether she had apologized.

The jury of teens decided the offender should attend an anger-management workshop, and write an essay on anger.

Suzanne Sanchez, a 1991 graduate of the College of Law and now an attorney and supervisor in the Maricopa County Public Defender’s Office, said the Teen Court program has a great success rate.

“Ninety-eight percent of the teens who come through the program, don’t have a second offense,” she said.

Sanchez said the program gives first-time offenders a taste of the court system without establishing a juvenile record.

“It’s literally a jury of their peers – other teenagers – and the consequences stop short of jail or probation,” Sanchez said. “It’s a great experience for high school students interested in law or public speaking.”

.....  
The Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law ([www.law.asu.edu](http://www.law.asu.edu)) at Arizona State University was founded in 1967 and renamed for the retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice in 2006. It is the only fully accredited law school in the Phoenix area, boasts an Indian Legal Program that is arguably the best in the nation, and houses the Center for the Study of Law, Science, & Technology, the oldest, largest and by far the most comprehensive law and science center in the country. ASU is one of the premier metropolitan public research universities in the nation.  
.....

**THOSE INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING WITH TEEN COURT MAY CONTACT CHRIS PHILLIS OR SUZANNE SANCHEZ.**