



Jay and Danielle Hall. Photo by Nick Krug

# Collaborating, Connections, Competition

*Married couple coach trial advocacy team at Washburn Law.*

*By Angela Lutz*

For Jay and Danielle Hall, Washburn University School of Law's trial advocacy program is the gift that keeps on giving. **Jay, BA '04, JD '07**, and **Danielle, BA '06, JD '09**, each participated in the program while attending law school, and the married couple has been coaching trial advocacy teams together since 2010. Collaborating as coaches has not only helped their careers, but it has also enhanced their relationship, which began when they were both undergraduates at Washburn.

"As coaches, Jay and I have two different personality types," Danielle said. "In a sense, we kind of complete each other – I'm organized and I like to have a plan, and he can be spontaneous. We balance each other. Also, being able to share in those

moments where we see a student accomplish something that they had doubts in whether they could do is something we both enjoy very much. It's special when you get to share that experience with your spouse."

While some aspiring trial lawyers may start law school uncertain of their ability to effectively argue a case, the trial advocacy program gives students the opportunity to broaden their skills by developing and presenting hypothetical cases in a competitive format. As students, Jay and Danielle both did well in competitions, and the experience they gained has helped them flourish in successful careers.

“Even though I’m not a practicing trial attorney, advocacy is something that I do on a very regular basis,” said Jay, who works as legislative policy director and general counsel at the Kansas Association of Counties. “I tell our students that advocacy skills will always travel with you, no matter where you go or what kind of job you end up in. That’s been one of the rewarding things about teaching and maintaining these skills.”

“Trial skills can transfer over into life skills. We often talk about having direction, intent, and purpose in trial, but those same ideas can be applied every day in life.” added Danielle, who serves as deputy disciplinary administrator for the Kansas Office of the Disciplinary Administrator and received the Graduate of the Last Decade Award from the Washburn University School of Law Alumni Association in October. “It was bigger than just learning the trial skills. The advice that I could seek from my coaches was definitely helpful throughout law school and when I was trying to determine what to do on my own career path.”

After their own positive experiences with the trial advocacy program, Jay and Danielle are excited to help students enhance their legal prowess. Both naturally competitive, Jay and Danielle jumped at the chance to participate in the law school’s intensive trial advocacy program, which immerses students in trial practice for seven full days. Their involvement has only increased from there, including traveling with the team to national competitions.

“It’s pretty much like coaching a sports team,” Jay said. “You recruit your team, and after that you strategize and prepare for competition. That entails practicing – we practice things like opening statements, closing arguments, direct and cross-examinations. We go through legal theories and practice presentation skills.”

While participating in national competitions, Jay and Danielle have made lasting memories with their teams. Jay will never forget the first time their team advanced to the finals during his tenure as coach in 2015 – a big deal, considering anywhere from 50 to 100 students participate in the competitions, and only the top four teams advance.

“The reaction of the students when they heard their team called is something that will stick with me,” Jay said. “There was a moment of silence followed by, ‘Wait – that’s us.’ The year before we’d had a lot of the same students and we didn’t advance, so coming back and being able to advance was pretty nice.”

Danielle has also enjoyed leading the law school’s team to victory in the UMKC School of Law’s national voir dire

competition, which was the first of its kind in the country when it began six years ago. The competition teaches students about the voir dire process, including the essential skill of jury selection. Coached by Jay and Danielle, Washburn students won the competition in 2016.

Even more valuable than career success and competitive victories have been the lasting relationships Jay and Danielle have established with their students. Each year they receive Christmas cards, and they’ve been invited to several students’ weddings. They also readily offer advice and guidance to former students, continuing the tradition of mentorship they received at Washburn.

“The connection we make with our students is pretty amazing,” Danielle said. “Watching them develop their skill sets from becoming a law student to passing the bar and becoming a lawyer is remarkable as a coach to see. We continue to have relationships with them when they graduate. They’re not afraid to give me a call and seek advice.”

“Seeing our former students go out and become good lawyers is the most rewarding thing for me,” Jay added. “I talk to a lot of our students fairly regularly, and seeing them go out and do well for themselves is easily the most special thing about coaching.”



Danielle and Jay Hall work with the students during a practice this fall. Photo by Nick Krug