

NOMINATION FORM
2015 ANNUAL NCWBA PUBLIC SERVICE AND
OUTSTANDING MEMBER PROGRAM AWARD

Name of your organization's project:

Women's Trial Academy

Please indicate whether your submission is for the Public Service Award or Outstanding Member Program Award:

Outstanding Member Program Award

Name of sponsoring women's bar association:

Oregon Women Lawyers

Name of sponsoring organization's contact person:

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Number of members:

Approximately 1350

Name of contact person for purposes of award notification:

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Oregon Women Lawyers (“OWLS”) proudly nominates the Women’s Trial Academy, an OWLS-sponsored event, for the National Conference of Women’s Bar Association’s Outstanding Member Program Award. Below you will find a history of our organization, as well as information about this outstanding program. As detailed below, this was an innovative program that offered extensive, hand-on training to OWLS members.

Oregon Women Lawyers

Founded in 1989, Oregon Women Lawyers traces its roots to the Multnomah Bar (representing the metropolitan Portland area) Association’s *Committee on the Status of Women*. At the 1988 Oregon State Bar convention, the Multnomah Bar Association had breakfast with three existing groups of women attorneys from around the state. That led to the organization of OWLS in 1989.

Today, OWLS is approximately 1,350 members strong, which constitutes the third largest bar association in Oregon (behind the Oregon State Bar and Multnomah County Bar Association).

OWLS’ mission is to “transform the practice of law and ensure justice and equality by advancing women and minorities in the profession.” Our principal purposes are:

- i To promote equal rights and opportunities for women and minorities within the legal profession and justice system;
- i To promote full participation of women and minorities in the organized bar and in the legislative and judicial branches of government;
- i To provide opportunities for women and minorities in the legal profession to support and educate one another;

- i To promote the quality and image of the legal profession in Oregon; and
- i To actively promote equality and fair treatment of all people within the legal profession and in society.

Our major, ongoing activities include:

- i An annual continuing legal education course held each fall, focused a topic relevant to our mission and principal purposes;
- i An annual gala dinner honoring members of our legal community who have made outstanding contributions toward promoting women and minorities in the legal profession;
- i Recognizing those workplaces and specific innovative practices that promote one or more of our values with our Workplace Leader Award;
- i Publication of a quarterly newsletter;
- i Maintaining a listserv actively used by 1000+ members;

Other OWLS' programs are much more personal and are designed to benefit a particular contingency of our membership. These programs include monthly networking events (for our members and non-attorney women professionals), leadership seminars, as well as specialized groups, including our "First Generation Professionals Discussion Group" and our newly created parenting support group.

OWLS takes pride in listening to our membership to identify the needs of our membership, and how we can better support our mission and purposes. The Women's Trial Academy came about in this way. We appreciate NCWBA's consideration of this program for its 2015 Outstanding Member Program Award.

Women's Trial Academy

In 2014, OWLS sponsored the "Women's Trial Academy," (hereinafter "WTA") an innovative program developed to address the unique challenges that young female litigators face in the courtroom. The WTA ran for eight months, February through September, 2014.

Origins

Two OWLS members, who have each built distinguished careers as Oregon trial attorneys, Lisa Kaner and Renee Rothauge, identified two challenges facing young civil litigators – particularly women. They found that, first, litigators early in their career were not getting the experience necessary to become good trial lawyers, and second, there were inadequate resources to help educate women litigators learn how to deal with the unique challenges women face in the courtroom. Ms. Kaner and Ms. Rothauge brainstormed options to address these issues, and the idea of the WTA was born.

The Structure

The curriculum of the WTA was designed to follow an entire civil jury trial from start to finish over the course of eight months. Participants met once a month, for two hours, and each session focused on one aspect of a civil jury trial. Monthly topics included: establishing evidentiary foundation; direct examination; cross examination; opening statements; closing arguments; and voir dire.

Each session featured at least one guest “coach.” The coaches themselves were accomplished women trial attorneys and judges. At the start of each session, the coach(es) would make brief remarks regarding the portion of a trial that was the subject of that month’s session. Then, the participants would move to the “trial exercise” in which the participants would practice skills specific to that phase of the trial. This format included work in small groups, and allowed a more intimate, one-on-one experience. The directors, coaches, and participants would listen and offer feedback. The creators considered it essential that the participant receive constructive, immediate feedback.

One coach, a retired trial court judge turned mediator, found her coaching experience to be so valuable and enjoyable that she volunteered to assist with subsequent sessions as well.

The subject trial was not fictionalized. The WTA materials consisted of upwards of 600 pages of written materials drawn directly from an actual case recently litigated by one of the creators. Accordingly, each participant was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement and return all written materials upon completion of the course.

Prior to each monthly meeting, participants were expected to complete the assigned reading. The assignment included readings from the case materials, as well as secondary sources. The secondary sources were articles about trial preparation, personal style, evidentiary issues, and communication skills (including non-verbal communication) compiled by the WTA creators. By holding sessions only once a month, participants had adequate time to prepare for the next session (and balance their work obligations). As the participants and coaches later attested, everyone was expected to put a great deal of time into preparing for each session.

In addition to addressing the components of a civil jury trial, the WTA also explored gender-specific issues, including voice pitch, projection, wardrobe, posturing, and the perception of an assertive woman.

Tuition was \$199, which was merely to cover the cost of materials. The creators were adamant that this program be affordable for all attorneys, and not be limited to those with the financial backing of large firms.

Participants.

Fourteen participants were initially selected based on an application, which asked about their experience and interest in the program. The WTA was targeted toward civil litigators with two to five years of experience. Participants also had to be members of OWLS and the Oregon State Bar. Those selected represented the spectrum of civil firms in Oregon – from large, national firms, mid-size regional firms, solo practitioners, and the Oregon Department of Justice. The creators limited participation to ensure that each participant would receive hands-on instruction and personalized feedback. Approximately ten guest coaches also participated.

Outcomes.

The WTA immediately received favorable reactions from participants, coaches, and really anyone that heard about the program. One participant remarked how it was refreshing that the curriculum was not structured as “overcoming weaknesses” but rather embracing strengths as women. Even coaches spoke about how much they learned from the experience.

Moving Forward

Immediately, there was strong demand for OWLS to offer the WTA program again in the future. One of the challenges of the inaugural WTA was that it was held on a weeknight in Portland. This necessarily limited the participation to those OWLS members practicing in the Portland. Consistent with OWLS’ statewide mission and membership, moving forward, it is the goal of OWLS to hold the next WTA program outside of Portland Metro area. Since targeted future participants will represent a larger geographical area, the curriculum for the next WTA is currently being revised to be conducive to a weekend-long seminar, and, potentially, follow-up conferences.

With this goal in mind, plans are currently underway to offer an intensive, weekend WTA program in Southern Oregon. This event is tentatively scheduled to take place in the Fall of 2015. This WTA program will largely duplicate the efforts of the inaugural WTA and make the program available to OWLS members around the state as participants and coaches.

The WTA directly addresses OWLS’ mission to promote and advance women in the law. The curriculum developed did just this – by not only teaching valuable trial skills, but by helping women litigators identify and harness their own strengths for success in the courtroom.

We appreciate NCWBA’s consideration of the WTA for the Outstanding Member Program Award.