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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE--April 7, 1998

Bellarmino mock trial team finishes second in the nation

LOUISVILLE, Ky. - For the fourth time in the past 11 years, Bellarmine's Mock Trial team has finished as the national runner-up. This past weekend in Des Moines, Iowa, the team competed in the national finals, defeating Georgia Tech, Macalester College, and Yale University before falling to the University of Maryland in the finals. Ironically, Bellarmine opened its mock trial season with a victory at the University of Maryland Invitational last fall.

Bellarmino Coach Jim Wagoner, a partner in the Louisville law firm Williams and Wagoner, said the final match was very close and could have gone either way. As a matter of fact, just two points (out of 840 points awarded) separated Bellarmine and Maryland.

In mock trial competition, teams face each other in a trial where team members serve as attorneys and witnesses. Each team must come prepared to defend or prosecute. The teams are judged by professional attorneys who cast ballots for the team that best presents its case. Each ballot is worth 280 points.

Each year the American Mock Trial Association issues the same court case to all colleges fielding a mock trial team. That case is used in all official competitions, including the national finals. This year, the teams argued a murder case in which a local celebrity

claims self-defense in the killing of his drug-crazed child.

As with Bellarmine's other runner-up finishes (1987, 1991, and 1994), Wagoner said the team's success was a total team effort. Vanessa Cox was recognized as a top 10 witness and attorney, and Heather Jackson earned a top 10 attorney award. In addition, team members William Armstrong, Jason Butler, Nathaniel Cadle, Ryane Conroy, and Sean Fox earned All-American status. Other team members include Tom Madden, Matt Rich, Christi Spurlock, Leigh White, Sarah Wimsatt, and John Balenovich.

Wagoner shares coaching responsibilities with his wife Ruth Wagoner, a Bellarmine professor of communications, and they are assisted by Thad Keal and Jason Cooper. All are Bellarmine alumni.

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