

CTY SUMMER 2015

Science Court

Organization

The class will be organized into three groups. Each group will be divided into two camps: the defense and the prosecution. The instructors will serve as “attorneys” for the defense and prosecution.

Each group is given a proposal from either the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) or the United States’ National Institutes of Health (NIH). Groups will be allowed to review their proposals, supplemental material and any additional research they feel will help support their arguments for or against funding their specific project. Using mobile devices is encouraged!

Students not presenting will serve as the jury and, ultimately, the decision to fund a project will be determined by their votes. Presenters and their attorneys do not have a final say.

Though science court can be extended to any field of research, the focus of this exercise will be on “translational medicine”. As a result, arguments for or against will need to hinge, to some extent, on whether and how a particular project effectively “translates” knowledge in both socially and economically beneficial ways.

Rules

Opening Statements and Interrogations

The Defense

- Each deliberation will begin with the defendants summarizing their research proposal and offering some broad insights into why the project should be funded. The goal is to make these opening statements both thoughtful and concise.
- The prosecuting attorney will then ask a series of follow-up questions. The instructors will present some questions in advance, to help guide student research, but students must be prepared to answer improvised questions during the exercise as well. Remember, the jury is basing their decision on how well the two factions present their arguments.
- When the prosecution is satisfied, they will rest their case.

The Prosecution

- The prosecution will then be given an opportunity to offer their own summary of the project, as well as a clear and concise overview of why the project should not be funded.
- The defense attorney will then ask a series of follow-up questions. These questions may be informed by statements made by the defendants during their interrogation.
- When satisfied, the defense will rest their case.

Rebuttals and Jury Questioning

- The defense is then given an opportunity to offer counter-arguments based on the prosecution's stated concerns about the project.
- The jury is then given an opportunity to ask questions that might help them clarify their own understanding of the project.
- When the conversation seems to be coming to a close, the jury will be asked to vote.

Questions to Consider

Defendant

- In a short paragraph, summarize the research project
- Why does this project deserve to get funded?
- Explain how this project is "translational"? How does it benefit the health of the population and/or the economy?
- Explain how this project deals with ethical questions concerning, among other factors, age, ethnicity, religion, gender, etc.

Prosecution

- In a short paragraph, summarize the research project
- Why should we avoid funding this research?
- Explain why this project is not adequately "translational", meaning how it fails to adequately apply basic research and benefit both society and/or the economy
- What sort of questions are raised but missing from this proposal concerning issues of race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. What ethical questions does the project raise but not adequately address?