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Friends First, Kossis and Ramkumar Close Law School with a Win in Lile Moot Court Competition



Archith Ramkumar and Lyle Kossis were the winners of the 84th annual William Minor Lile Moot Court competition.

Lyle Kossis and Archith Ramkumar became fast friends when they met soon after starting law school at the University of Virginia. Kossis, from Florida, and Ramkumar, an Oklahoma native, served on the Trial Advocacy and Moot Court team together, are both taking the Supreme Court Litigation Clinic, and will work at the same law firm after graduation. Now they have a new shared honor: winning the 84th annual William Minor Lile Moot Court competition.

The Lile competition is an annual UVA Law tradition that starts with a field of about 150 students who compete in two-person teams, writing briefs and arguing student-written problems before a mock federal bench, which in later rounds is manned by state and federal judges. Over the course of the participants' second and third years, the field is whittled down until two teams meet in a final round in April.

Kossis and Ramkumar were interested in competing from the start.

"We knew we would work extremely well together," Ramkumar said. "It was a lot of fun doing this with a close friend — it just made it that much better."

In Saturday's final, Ramkumar and Kossis bested third-year classmates Matthew Glover (who won the prize for best oralist) and Andrew Mutter before federal appellate judges Bernice B. Donald (6th Circuit), Stephanie D. Thacker (4th Circuit) and Paul J. Watford (9th Circuit).



Though it may have been a foregone conclusion that Ramkumar and Kossis — who acknowledge their similar personalities and competitive drives — would team up, they weren't sure whether they had performed well enough to win.

"When we sat down, we were both unsure of what was going to happen," Kossis said. "It's always nerve-racking being up there, but some of the questions were really, really insightful and it was difficult to kind of evaluate coming right off it how we were going to be able to do."

"No matter how much you practice, the reality is, appellate judges are much, much, much smarter than you, and you're never going to be able to anticipate what they hone in on," Ramkumar added, "and so because of that you're can't prepare for everything no matter how much you try."

The two teams debated whether, after the Supreme Court's 2012 decision in *Hosanna-Tabor v. EEOC*, a former employee of an organization claiming to be a religious institution could seek judicial enforcement

of an employment contract. (UVA law professor Douglas Laycock [argued that case on behalf of Hosanna-Tabor.](#))

Kossis and Ramkumar represented the respondent, Alan Decker, who had sued his employer for breach of contract. The company argued that it was protected from lawsuits by the First Amendment because it was a religious institution, and that Decker was a minister.

"I was arguing, first, that this is not a religion, it was more akin to like a way of life, or it was more akin to [something like] Alcoholics Anonymous," Kossis said. "I was also arguing that even if it were a religion, he was not a minister, but rather just a secular employee."

To help their case if they were to lose on those points, Ramkumar took up the second issue of whether the lawsuit could be heard because the disputed contract involved a secular issue.

"There were a variety of important reasons that courts should not let religious organizations off the hook for obligations that were secular in nature," Ramkumar said.

Ramkumar said the pair spent "an inordinate amount of time" preparing for each round of the competition.

"Especially this semester, we were constantly working, honing and revising the brief, and then practicing and mooted," he said. "I think every single night when I went to sleep, I was thinking about some question or having a nightmare about a judge embarrassing me or something along those lines. But it was absolutely worth it. We both love being on our feet. It's just exhilarating to really get out there."

Kossis added, "Whenever we weren't doing it, I was always thinking about it, always stressed about it."

Kossis praised the problem's role in their successful performance as well.

"[Third-year law student] Chase Cooper wrote the problem and he did an outstanding job. Archith and I were only able to use our talents as we did because the problem was so well-written," Kossis said.

Ramkumar said their friends' encouragement throughout the competition was meaningful.

"During the whole process, we had the greatest friends in the world," he said. "They showed up to all of our arguments in the quarters, semis and final; their support means the world to us, and we could not have done it without them. They are the best."

Both Ramkumar, who majored in biomedical engineering at Duke, and Kossis, an economics major at the University of Florida, are headed toward careers in litigation at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan in Washington, D.C.

"We're really excited about that," Ramkumar said. "It's a litigation-only firm and their work is top-notch, and the people there are top-notch."

The two will sit in neighboring offices.

"We've joked that they they'll need to put a door in the wall," Kossis said.