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## Navy looks to William & Mary for courtroom of future

By Brock Vergakis

Staff writer

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College of William and Mary | David Morrill

Law students at the College of William and Mary participate in a mock court-martial on Friday, April 5, 2019 that tested out new technology for the Navy.



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The courtrooms at Naval Station Norfolk look nothing like the innovative courtroom at the College of William and Mary's law school.

For starters, at the college there are more large-screen displays, a camera for videoconferencing and a technologically wired podium that attorneys can easily swivel around to face jurors, witnesses and the judge, who are each only a few feet away.

But more importantly, the college's courtroom doesn't sound anything like the Navy's. Every word spoken in the front can be heard all the way in the back of the courtroom at the college, regardless of how soft someone might speak. The acoustics are better and there isn't the competing sound of fans trying to cool an overheated room, or an open window or aircraft flying overhead. Strategically placed microphones capture what everyone says even if they walk away from their primary one.

The ability to clearly hear everyone during a trial is one of the reasons the Navy recently participated in a mock court-martial at the college, where it tested artificial intelligence technology that allows for the production of nearly instantaneous courtroom transcripts linked to the recorded audio. Typically, it takes months after the conclusion of a trial for a transcript to be produced that serves as the official record.

But a new law requires the military to make audio the official record and to make it more widely available to attorneys in a case once a trial is concluded, as well as to those taking part in deliberations, according to Capt. Matt Baran, director of technology, operations and plans for the Navy's Office of Judge Advocate General.

The use of the artificial intelligence has the potential to revolutionize the way someone's guilt or innocence is decided, along with their sentence. A court-martial can sometimes last weeks, and right now, the members of the panel charged with making a decision can only rely on their handwritten notes, their memory of what someone said and evidence submitted into the record.

If the Navy embraces the new technology, panel members could review a transcript of witness testimony and listen to the recording.

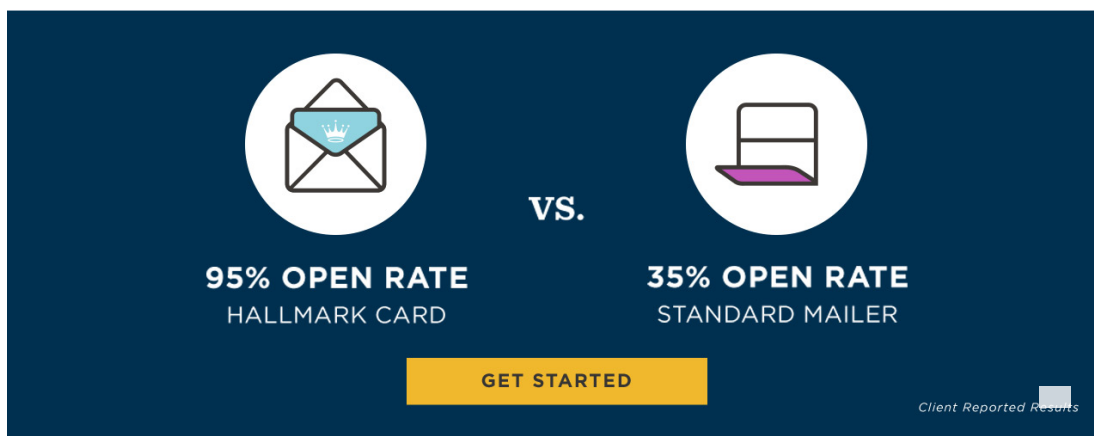
"They would have access to the audio and an indexed text that you could go back and say, 'I would like to look at this testimony,' and actually hear the record by literally clicking on the text and pulling up that portion of the audio, playing it again for all the members to be able to review in real time," Baran

said. "A real instantaneous impact to the process."

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The technology on display earlier this month was a collaboration between the college, Microsoft and Denver-based court-audio recording company called For The Record . After the mock court-martial, it was clear the artificial intelligence transcript wasn't perfect. A few phrases were misconstrued and there was some military jargon that didn't turn out quite right.

But it was able to identify who was speaking among multiple participants, and overall, it was really close to what was said in court.

Company officials said they would keep working with the Navy to improve the speech-to-text recognition technology.

"The whole thing is revolutionary. They could well be the first users in the United States of an automated speech-to-text system," said Fredric Lederer, director of the college's Center for Legal and Court Technology.

Lederer cautions that allowing jurors in every courtroom to have access to full audio and transcripts might not always be a good thing. There are parts of both that may be off-limits for legal reasons.

Plus: "No one has any idea how long it would take to get a verdict if everybody could replay the trial itself," he said.

Baran said the Navy will work as quickly as possible to roll out the technology to its largest courtrooms first, including those in Norfolk and San Diego, before expanding elsewhere.

"We'd like to get to the big players first, the biggest number of courts have the biggest impact for the practice as quickly as we can," he said.

It's unclear how long the procurement process will take.

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Brock Vergakis, 757-222-5846, [brock.vergakis@pilotonline.com](mailto:brock.vergakis@pilotonline.com)



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## Brock Vergakis

Reporter

Brock Vergakis writes about the military for The Virginian-Pilot. He joined the newspaper in 2015.

[brock.vergakis@pilotonline.com](mailto:brock.vergakis@pilotonline.com)

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