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## Simon Tam of the Slants discusses group's landmark SCOTUS victory at UH Law Center



*Professor Michael A. Olivas, left, and recording artist Simon Tam, right, in the Hendricks Heritage Room at the University of Houston Law Center.*

**Feb. 22, 2019** — A musician whose band's trademark case was taken to the Supreme Court shared details from his seven-year legal journey in a question-and-answer session Tuesday with University of Houston Law Center Professor Michael A. Olivas.

"I'm thrilled I was able to visit the University of Houston Law Center to spend some time with students talking about our Supreme Court case," Tam said of the discussion hosted by the Intellectual Property Student Organization and the Houston Law Review.

"The case itself is extremely complex and has a rich history that is often not discussed. For me, the ability to candidly interact with those interested in entering the field of law was a welcome opportunity."

Simon Tam is the founding member and bassist of the Asian-American dance-rock group "The Slants." He tried to trademark the band's name in 2013, but the application was rejected for being offensive or disparaging, according to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

"I had the idea of starting an all-Asian-American band that would proudly showcase our culture and provide representation in an industry that has very little representation for Asian-Americans," Tam said. "I thought why not talk about our perspective, our slant on life of what it's like to be people of color while injecting the term with a sense of pride instead."

The USPTO's decision was overturned in December 2015 by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, and brought to the Supreme Court which ruled in the band's favor on June 19, 2017 in a unanimous 8-0 decision in *Matal v. Tam*.

"Simon Tam is a most extraordinary young man — a bass player who can thrash with the best of them, and a very savvy band leader who understands the business side of entertainment," Olivas, the William B. Bates Distinguished Chair of Law and director of the Institute of Higher Education Law & Governance, said. "Both of these would make him an interesting person, but where he excels is in both combining music and social justice, and by having the courage of his convictions. Many Asian-Americans, including law professors, urged him not to bring the case or trademark the hateful name.

"But he displayed a very nuanced and deep appreciation of free speech, and put all his efforts into this admirable fight, and he won. I was thrilled our students and faculty were able to hear his story."

Tam said he was grateful for having pro bono legal representation throughout the lengthy appeals process.

"If I didn't have pro bono counsel, if I didn't have generous services donated by experts, fighting for this trademark registration probably would have cost in excess of \$1 million, maybe \$2 million," Tam said.

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