The University of Kansas hosted a state recognition program Sunday at the Lied Center for more than 300 of the more than 900 academically talented seventh-grade students selected for the 2009 Duke University Talent Identification Program. Robert D. Warton, Rossville, and Codey Lee J. Albers, Silver Lake are area students who were recognized.

Kevin Willmott, associate professor of theatre and film, delivered a special address about his approach to filmmaking to the students and their families and guests. Willmott directs and produces most of his films in Kansas with locally based production crews and actors. His works include “CSA: The Confederate States of America” and “The Only Good Indian,” both selected for the Sundance Film Festival, considered among the world’s preeminent celebrations of independent film.

Selection to Duke TIP is based on college entrance exam scores that are in the top 5 percent while the students are in middle school. Students participate by taking either the SAT or ACT national achievement tests. Working with host academic institutions such as KU, Duke TIP sponsors 35 ceremonies in its 16-state talent search region.

Each Duke TIP student receives a medalion. The state recognition ceremonies honor seventh-graders who earned scores above the average scores of college-bound high school seniors. Of more than 74,000 applicants this year, 24,204 students qualified and have been invited to state recognition events, including more than 900 students being recognized at KU.

The Duke program is in its 29th year, and this is the 11th year KU has hosted the Kansas recognition program. Since 1980, more than 1.5 million students have taken part in the program that is supported by student fees and donations from individuals, corporations and foundations.
Local law student competes at international moot court

A spring graduate of the University of Kansas School of Law was deemed the best oral advocate in preliminary rounds at an international moot court competition last week.

Beau Jackson earned the honor at the international finals of the European Law Students' Association Moot Court competition in Taipei. Jackson and his three teammates—Christina Elmore, Ben Sharp and Carrie Bader—qualified for the finals by finishing second in the North American regional round in March. Coached by Professor Raj Bhala, they were the first KU team to make it to the world level of the seven-year-old competition.

Sharp, the son of Dave and Janice Sharp of Rossville, graduated from Rossville High School and received his undergraduate degree from Kansas State University in Manhattan.

"I was very pleased to receive the best oralist award because it is perhaps the highest individual honor, since it is the only stage at which every competitor participated—four people from 19 teams, so almost 80 people," Jackson said. "Obviously, though, I would rather have had our team win the whole thing than for me to be recognized individually. But in many ways it is a team award. I would not have won it without Christina's excellent research assistance, Carrie's spot-on speaking advice and Ben's insightful suggestions on how to best navigate the trickiest parts of my argument."

The day after graduating from law school at Lawrence, the team members departed for Taiwan with high hopes of bringing home a global victory. After a 14-hour flight from Los Angeles, they arrived in Taipei at midnight local time and, thanks to an unlucky draw, had to compete in the first preliminary round at 9 a.m. They squared off against a team from the Universidad de los Andes in Colombia and then Maastricht University in The Netherlands. Each of those teams advanced to the semifinals.

"We had some stiff competition," Jackson said. "There were some really talented students from all around the world. It was fun to be in that environment."

The European Law Students' Association Moot Court Competition is a simulated hearing in the World Trade Organization dispute settlement system. Competitor teams represent both parties to the case by presenting oral submissions in front of a panel, which consists of World Trade Organization law experts. The 2008-09 case dealt with a hypothetical dispute over trade and regulatory measures aimed at addressing climate change.

The students were impressed with the caliber of panelists who heard the oral arguments, including law professors from various countries, legal affairs specialists at the WTO and a former member of its appellate body, and the Canadian law professor who authored the problem for this year's competition. Jackson said the questioning was even more intense than at the regional level, with judges posing sharp, precise queries throughout the arguments.

"I think we handled it really well, and I walked out of each round feeling like we had done our best," he said. "The fun part was seeing how much we had progressed from the original stages—from writing the brief to the regional rounds to this. You get so much deeper into the problem and you learn to come at it from different angles and you learn how complex it really is."

Team members also experienced the Taiwanese capital, which is home to nearly 3 million people.

"I think we hit everything that our guidebook told us to hit," Bader said. "We have the most tattered guidebook I've ever had after visiting a place."

Highlights included the National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, various tea gardens, temples and night markets, and Taipei 101, the world's tallest completed skyscraper.

Despite their disappointment at not winning the competition, the team members said they learned a great deal from the experience and were grateful for the opportunity.

"Right after one of the rounds, I was sitting there thinking, 'What did I do in my life that I'm suddenly here with these particular people representing my school in Taipei?'" Bader said. "It's such a look-at-where-life-takes-you kind of thing. We all had that moment."