

## **EshipLaw, iLINC, and Building the Network of Network for Startup Law Clinics**

*Professor Jonathan Askin  
Founder/Director, Brooklyn Law Incubator & Policy Clinic  
Innovation Catalyst, Center for Urban Business Entrepreneurship*

As most of us in the American experiential law school community are well aware, clinical legal training has grown dramatically over the past few decades. Clinical programs are now widely recognized as playing vital roles both in training lawyers prior to their admission to the bar, and in providing valuable legal services to various underserved communities.

Initially, law school clinics predominantly served impoverished constituencies and trained lawyers for careers in poverty or social welfare law. Over the past few decades, however, law schools have extended the concept of the law school clinic to serve the needs of entrepreneurs and the startup community. This expansion grew out of concerns that, in the startup world, there were many potential entrepreneurs with great ideas but without the legal resources needed to turn their ideas into sustainable businesses. Without access to legal support, these startups would never get their ideas off the ground, to the detriment of their communities, their potential consumers, and the general public. Serving the emerging startup community has proven to be a great benefit both to the community and to the law students determined to represent the next generation of clients in the Digital Age.

### **Clinical education in Europe**

While clinical education is well-established in America, the concept of the generic law school clinic – much less one that specifically represents startups -- did not enjoy widespread adoption in *European* legal pedagogy ... until now. Recognizing that such clinics would be a boon to legal training and to the would-be entrepreneurs and tech centers of Europe, a consortium of European law schools has launched [iLINC, a European network of startup law clinics](#) to bridge European Information and Communication Technology (ICT) entrepreneurs and startups with law students.

iLINC is funded by the European Commission (“EC”) and conducted by four core partners -- Queen Mary University of London, the University of Amsterdam and KU Leuven, and the Hans Bredow Institute for Media Research -- with associated support from Brooklyn Law School. The founding partners have already begun to provide *pro bono* legal support for unfunded European ICT startups within their respective regions. These schools also now convene six-monthly meetings across Europe to train the other law schools that have joined the iLINC network and hope to launch similar startup clinics in their own schools and regions within the next few years. The four core partner schools will serve as models and resources for any European law schools aspiring to build startup clinics at their own schools. While the iLINC network now includes 16 law schools, the plan is to grow the network over the next several years.

The iLINC-connected clinics will train and enable law students to provide the needed services that European startups cannot otherwise obtain from law firms. Students, through these clinics, will gain practical experience in representing the needs of emerging, tech-

oriented clients. The clinics will also serve as hubs to bring together academics, lawyers, government, business and tech leaders, and early-stage entrepreneurs to build the tech entrepreneurship ecosystem that many European regions currently lack. Among other goals, iLINC and the law schools in the iLINC network will pursue the following activities:

- analyze the legal landscape for technology firms in the region;
- reach out to, and coordinate with, the various constituencies and relevant communities (government, academia, lawyers, business and tech leaders, entrepreneurs, incubators, accelerators, co-working spaces, other core innovation centers, and the startup community);
- train law students to work with startups;
- provide legal support for early stage startups on issues that include corporate structure and governance, IP protection, licensing, contract drafting, and web documentation;
- spearhead a networking and coalition-building initiative aimed at maximizing efficiency of operations and quality of service that could be launched in other universities and tech centers throughout Europe; and
- engage in trans-Atlantic legal and policy research and collaboration.

Whenever a new clinic is created, iLINC will have the expertise and resources to promote quick and cost-effective launch by facilitating information and knowledge sharing among clinics and centers, with intensive outreach initiatives to students, entrepreneurs, incubators, nonprofits, and government bodies as a means of raising awareness about the clinic and encouraging student participation.

iLINC is also spearheading networking and coalition-building aimed at maximizing efficiency of operations and quality of service. This initiative can establish best practices, provide legal primers and template documents, and develop a network of clinic alumni to provide mentoring and job opportunities for current clinicians.

These efforts, taken together, will ensure that entrepreneurs throughout the EU have trusted legal support available wherever the company is operating.

### **The Creation of a Trans-Atlantic Network of Networks:**

iLINC will also be positioned to devote resources to help build a trans-Atlantic network of legal and policy support for tech startups and establish valuable synergies and knowledge exchanges between European and US law school clinics and startups.

Through EshipLaw, the US already has a large, growing, and robust network of more than 150 entrepreneurship-oriented law school programs [see the list of law schools entrepreneurship clinics on the EshipLaw website at <http://www.entrepreneurship.org/entrepreneurship-law/law-school-entrepreneurship-clinics.aspx>]. With the emergence of iLINC in Europe, we can now build a trans-Atlantic network of tech-entrepreneurship legal clinics. Among the areas of immediate benefit would be the following:

- The opportunity to engage in trans-Atlantic legal and policy research and collaboration. With such cross-border cooperation, it would become easier for tech entrepreneurs and government (as well as investors and citizens) to navigate the cumbersome (and often stifling) patchwork of divergent laws and regulations affecting globally-oriented tech ventures.
- Having sister programs in the US and Europe would allow us each to tap into jurisdiction-specific expertise. Given the global nature of ICT clients and services, many startups need guidance on foreign law and multi-jurisdictional issues that cannot be fully satisfied internally.
- Foreign tech startups could more readily tap into US-based clinics for American legal support, and US-based programs would be able to forward client issues to Europe-based programs.
- There would also be opportunities for knowledge transfer and cross-enrollment, allowing European students and faculty to spend time in US-based legal programs and allowing US law students and faculty to spend a semester abroad engaged in practical European legal support in a law school clinic environment.

Networks like iLINC and EshipLaw, with the creation of an iLINC-EshipLaw *Network of Networks*, will take us a long way toward ensuring that entrepreneurs have the necessary legal support to transform ideas into viable and job-creating businesses across the globe. At the same time, these clinics and networks will serve as a launch pad for the next generation of thought-leaders and independent attorneys, while providing a sustainable model to support and foster innovation in the EU and America.

Now, onto Asia, Africa, South America, and the rest of the world to build out the global startup law clinic Network of Networks.