

## **Dos and Don'ts for Teaching Students About Intellectual Property Law**

By Tiffany Kwong and Judith Young<sup>1</sup>

As part of the IP CO-LAB, the intellectual property clinic at Northeastern University School of Law, we had the opportunity to present an IP law module to a senior capstone course, Business Planning for Technology Ventures, taught by Professor Kevin Scanlon at the D'Amore McKim Business School at Northeastern University. Students in this class learn about entrepreneurship and innovation by focusing on a venture assigned by the professor and learning its mission, its product, and intellectual property.

Preparing and teaching a class about IP law, especially a class of business students, can be an invaluable, yet overwhelming experience. First, as a law student, you may have a tendency to cram all the information you know about IP law into a two-hour lecture. Second, you may have a tendency to speak, write, and explain things in a legal language that only you and your peers may understand. Third, you may need to figure out the capacity of the class you intend to teach; and what the students know about the subject of your lecture. All of these factors, if significantly considered and addressed, will lead to a poignant and impactful presentation that is useful to your audience.

Here, we share tips on what to do, and what not to do, when teaching a class about IP law.

### **DO Get a Sense of Your Audience**

It is important to understand your audience beforehand so that you can better prepare your presentation. You can learn more about your audience either by meeting with the instructor or reading the course description. Understanding your audience allows you to know how much the class knows about intellectual property law. If the class is learning about IP law for the first time, it is highly recommended to start out with the basics.

Keeping that in mind, we met with Professor Scanlon twice before the presentation. Our meetings were quite fruitful and yielded very positive results: we discussed the subject matter he wanted us to present to the class; the structure and format of the presentation; and the specific discussions and materials to emphasize. Meeting with the professor and establishing a baseline of what should be included in the presentation is an essential step. After our meeting, it was easy to discern that Professor Scanlon wanted us to discuss the *Apple vs. Samsung: Intellectual Property and the Smartphone Patent Wars* business case with the class, allow for an interactive questions, and to not get bogged down in the details of each student's particular project, but rather provide an overview of intellectual property law and business development and best practices. From there, we had our title and inspiration to build our presentation.

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## **DON'T Wait to the Last Minute to Prepare Your Presentation**

We recommend that you finish assembling your presentation far in advance of your lecture, so that you can have a try a test run in front of your colleagues and peers. This is a dually valuable experience: (1) colleagues can give you constructive feedback on your presentation, which you can utilize to revise it; and (2) you get a strong sense of how the lecture is going to run. Your colleagues and peers will ask questions and draw your attention to points or materials you either need to explain differently, or need not to include in your presentation. While the idea of standing in front of your professors and classmates, demonstrating your knowledge in IP and receiving constructive criticism on your delivery and presentation is not exactly comfortable, it is immensely valuable. Make the time for a test run. You will not regret it.

## **DO Make the Presentation Interactive with Your Audience**

Whether you are presenting in a class of twenty students or in a large lecture hall, you should ask students to put away their laptops and other electronics. At both presentations, we announced the class that this was going to be like a traditional law school class and as such as going to be “laptop free” to encourage discussion and participation. We asked students to put away their laptops and informed them that we would give a copy of our presentation slides to Professor Scanlon.

After introducing ourselves, explaining the role of IP CO-LAB within the university’s innovation ecosystem, and lecturing on four areas of IP to the class, we began asking student groups about their assigned ventures and its IP. This allowed students the opportunity to apply IP law basics to their ventures, and to begin thinking critically about the company’s needs. Students were able to test their theories and their understanding of IP and receive feedback from us instantly; thus increasing their grasp of the law.

## **DO Be Prepared to Answer In-Depth Questions**

There will always be at least one student in the class who will ask one or a series of in-depth questions outside the scope of your presentation. This may throw you off a bit, and while you want to give this student an in-depth answer, and you should be prepared to transition back to the material you originally came to present about.

This past spring, Professor Scanlon asked us to present the IP module a second time, to a different class. We were originally under the impression that the students in this class did not know much about IP, but soon realized they were more familiar with the subject matter than we anticipated. Earlier in the term, the IDEA Legal Officer, one of our IP CO-LAB colleagues, was an invited guest to the class. Throughout the presentation, students asked questions beyond the expected scope of our presentation. While the questions were thoughtful and demonstrated their critical thinking skills, providing specific answers to all of them would have left us with hardly any time to complete our lecture and answer questions at the end of the class. Instead, we

transitioned back to the lecture, refocused on the material, and politely asked them to save their questions at the end of the presentation, or to contact us directly with specific questions at a later date.

### **DO De-Brief After the Presentation**

Whether you are presenting as a team, or as an individual, give yourself the time and opportunity to reflect on the presentation. Are you pleased with results? What could you have done differently? What could you have gone better? Did students respond to the material as well as you hoped? Touch based with the professor and seek out their opinions and feedback as well. This is doubly important if you intend to return to their class in the future or foresee yourself lecturing in a similar environment one day.

There is always something to improve! Having had the opportunity to complete this module twice, we are still motivated to improve our techniques and find new areas and methods to present this material. Both of us have a strong interest in oral advocacy and intellectual property law. We viewed this presentation as an opportunity to sharpen our communication skills, and took it seriously from start, to finish, to follow up. Getting feedback from each other, Professor Scanlon, and our IP CO-LAB supervisors was very vital to our success in both the academic and post-graduate sectors.

Ultimately, we are thankful and humbled for the opportunity to work closely with Professor Scanlon and provide undergraduate business students with valuable information and best practices in the area of intellectual property law. We highly recommend this experience to any law student seeking to increase and improve their presentation skills.