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Resource Center bridges the gap between law and business

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University of Maryland law students are getting a leg up on an area of law growing along with technology: intellectual property.

As of June, the students started staffing their fourth Maryland Intellectual Property Legal Resource Center, with this latest expansion taking them to the **techcenter@UMBC**, a business incubator at University of Maryland, Baltimore County. The center already has offices at business incubators in Shady Grove and Silver Spring, and in the new University of Maryland, Baltimore BioPark.

"I think there are tremendous opportunities at UMBC," said visiting law professor Frederick Provorny, who heads up the center. "It's a school that has demonstrated excellence in teaching science and technological pursuits. ... On top of that, both the incubator companies at the tech center as well as the companies in the [nearby] research park are on the leading edge of technology."

Baltimore County Executive James T. Smith Jr. plans to announce tomorrow that the county will provide \$75,000 in funding to support the center as well the school's entrepreneur- and CFO-in-residence programs. In a statement, Smith noted the center's legal services will be available to any business in Baltimore County.

Technology is a booming industry in Maryland and both the state and individual counties have invested resources to attract more of those businesses. Baltimore County boasts on its Web site a high concentration of nearby research universities, an educated workforce and an established technology

sector.

UMBC itself claims to produce roughly 40 percent of all of Maryland's information technology bachelor's degree graduates. The county helped to secure resources to start the **techcenter@UMBC** and **bwtech@UMBC**, the **UMBC research park**.

The legal resource center adds a third legal service to the business incubator. **Whiteford, Taylor & Preston LLP** and **Venable LLP** are already partnered with UMBC to offer some legal counsel and program sponsorships.

"What's so unique," said Tammi Thomas, director of marketing and business development at **techcenter@UMBC**, "is that we're not just talking about a free legal service, but we're talking about experience for the students. We're talking about two separate schools getting together to bring this resource to companies. ... It's blending government, academia and business."

Student attorneys primarily advise fledgling tech companies on intellectual property legal issues such as patents, licensing and technology transfer. However, they analyze a given company's entire business plan in order to "add value to what the company is trying to accomplish," according to Provorny.

The clinical program includes a classroom component for students but most of their time is spent rotating through the different center locations and assisting clients, he said. Five students participated during the summer semester and eight will start next week.

"It's a service that our clients have valued tremendously," said Ann Lansinger, executive director of the Emerging

Technologies Center in Baltimore. An Intellectual Property Resource Center used to be located in the Canton tech incubator hosting 61 companies until it moved to the nearby BioPark.

"The services are provided at no cost," she continued. "Obviously, for many entrepreneurs just starting out, legal services are something that would be difficult for them to afford. To get that service at no cost gives them the opportunity to move forward and to put those funds elsewhere, into research and development."

Chris Marschner, president of the Maryland Business Incubation Association, explained that technology companies in particular must involve legal services early on in their business life and a program like that offered by the University of Maryland School of Law helps.

"Smart companies know that this is a cost they can't do without," he said. "Then there are other companies that try to hold on and not pay and not engage the legal assistance until perhaps it's too late. Then it's too costly or they've lost their intellectual property. I think the advantage of a program like the Maryland Intellectual Property Legal Resource Center is ... giving these students these opportunities does them a world of good, and it provides the tech companies some helpful talent without the high costs to do their preliminary legal work."

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