

UC Hastings' Inaugural LexLab Demo Day Showcases Legal Tech Startups

Insights

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SAN FRANCISCO — As the legal industry becomes an increasingly prominent vertical in the tech startup world, some forward-thinking law schools are expanding their curricula to include course offerings on legal technology and innovation to better prepare their students for the legal careers of tomorrow.

Last month, I witnessed these two trends colliding in the heart of the nation's largest tech hub when I was invited to judge the inaugural LexLab legaltech accelerator demo day at UC Hastings College of the Law.

LexLab has three main areas of focus:

- creating a “Law and Technology” curriculum, including a concentration/certificate program for UC Hastings’ law students;
- hosting open community events, such as panels and talks with prominent legal innovators and legal tech hackathons; and
- running a go-to-market accelerator for legal tech startups, which provides co-working space, mentorship, networking opportunities, and other programming.

The demo day — slated to begin in the afternoon — featured pitches from the accelerator program’s first cohort of companies (comprised of three legal tech startups). Before the demo day began, however, a morning session featured an

opening act introduced by **Prof. Alice Armitage**, Director of Applied Innovation at UC Hastings. Armitage also runs the school's popular Startup Legal Garage clinic; and as the final project in her new course on "Building a Legal Tech Startup," she had her students give presentations to the assembled crowd.

Surrounded by spectacular 360-degree views of San Francisco from the 26th floor Skyroom of UC Hastings' residential building, Armitage's students pitched legaltech startup concepts to an all-star panel of judges, which included veteran legaltech journalist **Bob Ambrogi**; **Eric Zaarour**, co-founder of AI time-keeping startup Ping; UC Hastings alumna **Maya Markovich**, head of product at Dentons' NextLaw Labs; and UC Hastings alumnus **Derek Duarte**, president of e-discovery company Blackstone Discovery. The students displayed an impressive depth of understanding under questioning from the judges, especially considering most had only one semester's exposure to legal technology, agile development, design thinking and the business of law.

Following lunch, the director of LexLab, **Drew Amerson**, officially kicked off the demo day event. Amerson introduced me and my fellow judges, who included **Stephanie Corey**, co-founder of consulting firm UpLevel Ops and the Corporate Legal Operations Consortium (CLOC); startup lawyer **Aravinda Seshadri**, a partner at Silicon Legal Strategy; and UC Hastings alumna **Samantha Von Hoene**, Chief Legal Officer at Enjoy Technology.

First up to pitch was **Ansel Halliburton**, CEO and co-founder at Syntexys, an AI document analytics startup that uses its software to review thousands of contracts from a large enterprise to build custom reports analyzing the underlying contract language. Syntexys' demo illustrated how these reports could provide companies using the tool with business insights, help them to mitigate risks, and even predict contract outcomes. Halliburton started working on the concept while at A³ — Airbus' Silicon Valley innovation center — with his co-founder and CTO, **Neville Newey** (who was head of engineering at A³) before spinning it out into a startup. As a result, Halliburton and Newey were able to test and refine the product using Airbus' massive collections of contracts.

Next, **Drew Amoroso**, CEO and co-founder of **DueCourse**, shared his company's vision for helping lawyers develop essential professional skills and improve performance by leveraging DueCourse's online and mobile video learning platform. The company works with professional development departments at major law firms to create courses tailored to the individual needs of the firms' attorneys as they progress through their careers.

Jordan Ritenour, CEO and co-founder of **Clearlaw**, an AI-powered virtual assistant (named Ally) that allows large in-house corporate legal departments to more efficiently review contracts, closed out the day. Promising contracts in minutes, not weeks, Clearlaw is aiming to help under-resourced legal departments avoid becoming the bottleneck that prevents their business partners from closing deals, while continuing to ensure the company is mitigating risks.

With the launch of LexLab, UC Hastings has joined the ranks of law schools — like Northwestern, Duke, Stanford, Michigan State, Chicago Kent and Suffolk, to name a few — that are offering their students significant opportunities to learn about legal innovation. UC Hastings has also added LexLab to a growing list of legal tech accelerators, most of which are run by major international law firms like Allen & Overy and large legaltech companies like Thomson Reuters.

By exposing the next generation of lawyers to legal innovation early in their careers, while at the same time fostering the growth of fledgling legaltech startups (and doing so all under one roof), LexLab may discover exciting new opportunities to transform the legal industry that others may miss.

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