

4th Annual Innovation and Technology Law Conference: Innovating for the Social Good

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Since 2018, the Seattle University School of Law has featured an annual late spring/summer conference on innovation and technology. This year's conference builds on the past annual themes starting with the initial conference held in 2018, Blockchain and FinTech: Innovation and Regulation (sponsored by the law firm of Fenwick & West LLP); 2019's theme of RegTech: The Transformation of Regulation & Compliance (sponsored by Perkins Coie LLP) and last year's conference theme of Data Justice: Legal and Policy Issues in Data Collection, Usage, and Ownership (sponsored again by Perkins Coie LLP). The annual innovation conference is part of the law school's SITIE program (Summer Institute for Technology, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship), which offers a unique curriculum of cutting edge courses to help equip students with the skillset they will need to represent start-ups and more established companies in Seattle's regional tech hub. Since 2015, the law school has offered what has become the SITIE program's signature course, known as the Immersion Course: Lawyering for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. Perennially wait-listed, that intersession course has featured site visits (virtual in 2020 and 2021) with inhouse legal counsel (and oftentimes corporate officers) of such regional companies as Microsoft, Expedia, Zillow, T-Mobile, DocuSign, Starbucks, Chef, SubPop Records, Zulily, and more. Immersion students attend the annual innovation conference as their final class session, and the conference benefits from their active participation and engagement with the speakers and themes.

The innovation conference over the years has highlighted emerging technologies, particularly blockchain distributed ledgers and AI/machine learning, focusing in particular on technology's potential to solve social problems as well as the risks for aggravating existing societal inequities. A key illustration of this tension was the panel discussion in the 2020 Data Justice conference around the privacy and racial justice concerns of facial recognition technology. Additionally, the innovation conference has emphasized the skillset that lawyers and law students need to bridge any divides with innovators, and to add value to their breakthroughs. We aim to educate our students in these technologies so that they can be part of the exciting possibilities of solving problems, or adding efficiencies, that technology makes possible, while also being aware of any ethical or other limitations of technology-based approaches and solutions.

This year's conference, with the title of Innovating for the Social Good, focused even more directly on the social good, highlighting three access barriers fundamental in law and society—access to legal services (and more generally, justice), access to health and health care

* Associate Dean for Planning and Strategic Initiatives, Seattle University School of Law. My thanks to Joe Vincent for planning the FinTech panel, and to Dean Annette Clark for her leadership and her ever-willingness to introduce this conference and moderate a health panel which has become a regular feature of the conference. Thanks also to innovation conference co-sponsor Perkins Coie LLP and to Youssef Sneifer of the Perkins firm for his support and assistance over the years in conceptualizing and planning this conference series. And my gratitude to Meghan Ricci, Editor at Large of the Seattle Journal of Technology, Environmental, and Innovation Law, for overseeing the publication of this online symposium.

both domestically and globally, and access to financial services for the unbanked or underbanked.

The first panel built on the 2019 RegTech conference panel titled RegTech and Legal Services, which posed the following questions for discussion:

- How are technologies and applications disrupting the delivery of traditional legal services?
- Are lawyers at risk of being replaced by these technologies, or just some of their work?
- Do large law firms receive an advantage over small firms by the advent and applications of technology—and if so, how can the small firms or solo practices keep up? and
- What role, if any, should lawyers and law firms have in the development of legal service technologies?

This year's opening panel¹ focused more directly on the access to justice gap of un- or under-served people, communities, and small businesses with legal problems, and asked what technology could do to bridge the gap, and what disruptive innovations were possible outside of new technology to expand access to legal expertise, particularly by non-lawyer delivery of legal services. Speakers on this access to legal services panel addressed reforms in other jurisdictions to expand legal service delivery, particularly through an innovation sandbox model in states such as Arizona and Utah that rethinks law firm ownership and potentially extends beyond licensed lawyers to deliver legal services. Speakers also addressed the role of technology to aid the underserved in need of legal services, with innovations including the Access to Justice Tech Fellows program² and AI tools for consumer use such as Hello Landlord.³

Moderated by Seattle University law dean Annette Clark, the torn-from-the-headlines health law panel⁴ featured a case study of the COVID-19 vaccine to explore the intellectual property constraints on global access and equity, and the role of blockchain technology in vaccine distribution—tracking through the supply chain to individual vaccine recipients.⁵ The panel ensured that health law and equity (or the lack thereof) were at the forefront of the innovation conference for the third time in its four year history.

The day's final panel⁶—moderated by Joseph Vincent, a Seattle University adjunct law professor who recently retired from the Washington State Department of Financial Institutions—addressed access to financial services with a focus on FinTech platforms (lending, deposit, and payments) that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Panelists were drawn from law and the business of launching and operating “challenger banks,” including Jonice Gray Tucker from the Washington D.C. law firm of Buckley LLP. Financial innovation—FinTech for short—has been a focus of every innovation conference thus far under the guidance of Professor Vincent, who teaches the law school's cluster of FinTech courses to LLM, MLS, and JD students.⁷

¹ To view the opening panel, see <https://media.law.seattleu.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Cw3d5YJc/view>.

² <https://www.atjtechfellows.org>.

³ <https://hellolandlord.org>.

⁴ To view the health law panel, see <https://media.law.seattleu.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/f8JLm93Z/view>.

⁵ <https://www.burstiq.com/40-recently-launched-covid-19-vaccine-management-solutions-to-know/>.

⁶ To view the FinTech panel, see <https://media.law.seattleu.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Fb6a9NEx/view>.

⁷ For Professor Vincent's bio see <https://law.seattleu.edu/faculty/profiles/adjunct/joseph-m-vincent>.

Since its inception, the innovation conference has drawn on the rich experience of national speakers, with the virtual conference format during the past two years ensuring even more national participation both in speakers and in the zoom audience. Likely, the innovation conference will maintain a virtual format going forward to leverage the national and international speaker base. Particularly evident this year was the broad diversity of presenters, with more than 10 women presenting, along with several panelists of color, as well as speakers from diverse backgrounds that include law professors and clinicians, lawyers, CEOs of financial institutions and technology companies, regulators and government officials, and at least one scientist.

Looking ahead to 2022, the innovation conference will continue to append to the immersion course, and to draw from the core technologies that businesses rely on to disrupt underserved markets or to stay relevant in their sectors, and as well to impart the skills, and the critical thinking of moral and ethical limitations, that flow from an in-depth understanding of the application of these technologies in law and society. In step with the law school's mission to educate powerful advocates for justice, we present in this online symposium format the compelling and timely themes and panels of the fourth annual innovation and technology law conference for broader consumption and viewership.