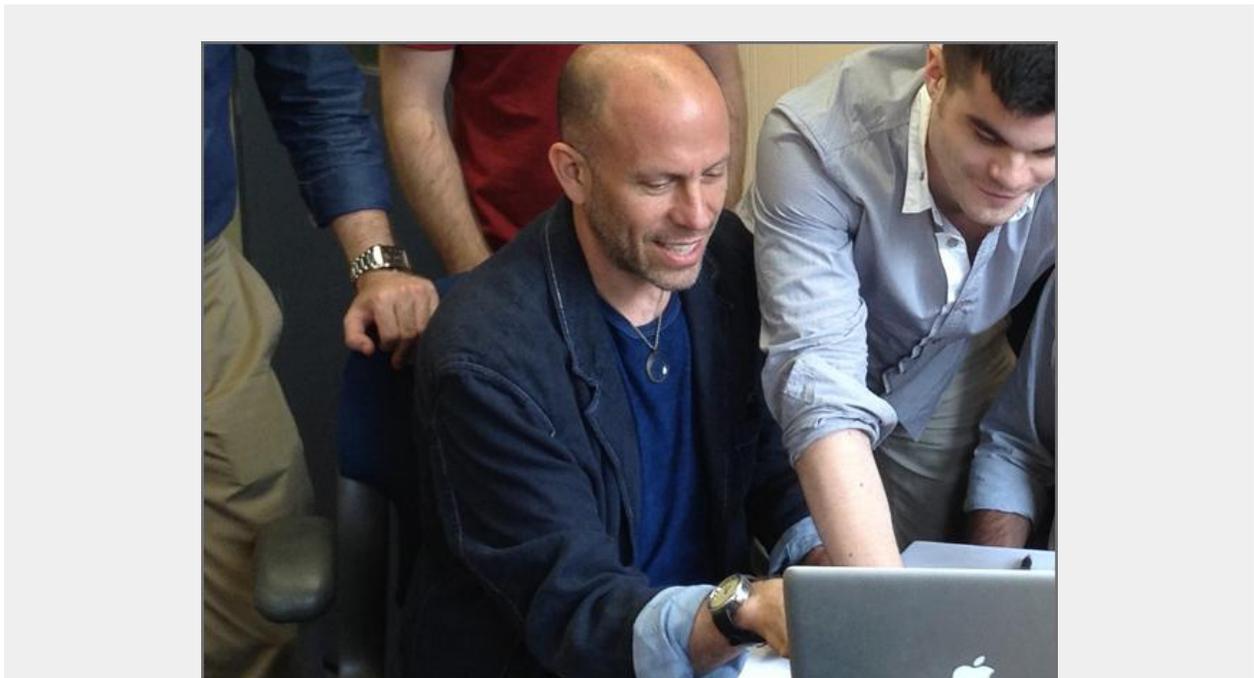




PROFILES
Jonathan Askin
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By Kate Meersschaert

Jonathan Askin has worn many hats, from litigator and lobbyist, to advising companies and startups that build and develop communications networks and Internet applications to playing a pivotal role in President Obama's 2008 campaign and the transition of the Federal Communications Commission. Askin has also served in leadership roles at countless organizations devoted to championing both digital freedom and Civil Liberties and is a sought-out expert in the field of IP law. Askin is also the president and founder of the Global IP Alliance and is a Fellow with the [Columbia Institute for Tele-Information](#).

However, despite an impressive career as an advisor and lawyer, his most important role just might be that of professor and provocateur.

While working as a Professor of telecommunications, Internet, media, tech, and "entrepreneurship" at Brooklyn Law School (he is also an adjunct professor at Columbia Law School) Askin has endeavored to transform traditional legal education. Functioning more as mentor and guide, he is helping to "incubate" the next generation of digital revolutionaries who embrace a "hacker ethos" and are prepared to help lead and shape the social and civil rights movements that develop and flourish online. Askin's emphasis on thinking outside the traditional bounds of legal education is evidenced in his work as founder and director of Brooklyn Law's groundbreaking, [BLIP-clinic](#). Since 2008 BLIP has functioned as an incubator, policy clinic and full-service law firm, allowing students, under Askin's direction, to gain real-world experience at the leading edge of internet policy and law. Askin's own educational career includes degrees with honors from both Harvard College and Rutgers Law School.

EXCLUSIVE NEW LEARNING TIMES INTERVIEW

Question: How did your educational trajectory (background) affect your current work?

Answer: I've had a particularly circuitous path to my current position. I started my career as a civil rights attorney, but was not excited by the issues. Frankly, I thought there was something wrong with me for my lack of inspiration from these society-altering and life-altering issues. My attitude was that most of the pioneering civil rights battles had already been waged in the 1960's and 1970's, and in the 1990's most of the work was trench warfare, holding the line against transgressions of our civil rights and liberties. Then the Internet came along, and I determined that the great intellectual battles would be waged over the creation of the policies and legal structures to advance the digital economy and online culture. I decided that I needed to play a role in shaping the laws and policies and the ventures of the Digital Age. I knew, at a minimum, I would awake each day, immersed in new technology addressing cutting-edge issues, and that my life would always be rich with fresh ideas. Now, most of the great civic, social and cultural battles are waged online, so, it turns out, that my early path as a civil

rights advocate has been joined with my current path as a tech law professor and online activist.

Every revolution requires those trained in law to frame the political, legal, social, and business rules and structures. I wanted to become one of those legal architects, and I wanted to train a new generation of lawyers with the skills and resources to play a role in shaping the new society.

Question: What professional experiences have been most formative to your current work?

Answer: I look at myself as a unique "mashup" and I try to impart in my students the goal of sculpting their own unique mashup. I have a diversity of experience, but so do each of us. Each of my students comes with their own unique experience that should make them uniquely suited to add value to any venture. Their past should never be a waste of time, but it should serve to make them special, unique and an indispensable mashup.

I think each disparate job and activity has served as an essential component in steering me to where I am today. I have periodically lamented my desire to try too many new professional experiences, but now I see that each position played a vital role in shaping my knowledge and skill set to give me the broad exposure I've needed to fully represent the needs of tech startups and to train my students to represent 21st Century clients and to advocate in the Digital Age. I've gone through the entire legal circuit – I've worked at a large Wall Street firm; I've worked as a litigator; I've worked as a transactional attorney. I've worked in Congress, at administrative agencies, and for the judiciary. I've been a public advocate and a lobbyist for the burgeoning tech industry and I've represented tech startups in litigation, transactional, and policy advocacy positions. I think this diversity of experience has uniquely positioned me to understand the broad and deep needs of tech startups, from policy and politics to transactions and litigation. I think the tech lawyer of the 21st Century needs to be equally well-versed across the spectrum of issues to represent 21st Century ventures. My hope is that I'm playing a role in demystifying for my students what is required of them to function as top-tier lawyers, advocates, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and thought-leaders.

I had tried teaching many years ago, but I quickly realized that I did not have the breadth or depth of experience to impart true knowledge, wisdom, or insight to my students. I, finally, feel well positioned to be an effective teacher. I also feel like, with each passing year and new experience, I become a better teacher.

Question: How do you hope your work will change the learning landscape?

Answer: My goal is to train the next generation of attorneys to adopt the "hacker ethos" and to think a bit more like the enterprising startups we represent.

Lawyers have traditionally been "yeah but" people, thwarting the creative spirit of their clients and too often chilling their clients from pursuing their ventures. To startup entrepreneurs, lawyers are, at best, a necessary evil. My goal is to create a new generation of lawyer who, like their clients, are "why not" people – enablers and facilitators of their clients' visions. The problem is that most of our laws have been written for bygone, analog, geographically and politically distinct communities. These laws did not anticipate the needs of globally-distributed, digitally-empowered ventures. I'm hopeful that my students, in addition to learning the routine and nuanced skills of transactional startup law, will also learn the science and art of systemic law reform and play vital roles in shaping the policies and rules to guide society into the Information Age.

Question: What broad trends do you think will have the most impact on learning in the years ahead?

Answer: Commitment to experiential education is essential for any school hoping to survive the Schumpeterian disruption we now see in every industry and institution, including academia. I see schools, including law schools moving more to a "flipped learning" model, in which students learn much of the substance outside the classroom and then work closely with the professor and their colleagues in the classroom to put their knowledge and skills into practice. I'm proud that Brooklyn Law School has been such a pioneer of experiential education. We have built the world's first, full service law firm, run by students for tech startups. Our model is now being adopted by schools around the country, and I am working with several schools in Europe to build similar clinical programs.

My students graduate with many of the skills needed to be functional lawyers. My students have had hands-on real world experience. What it is to be a lawyer in the

Digital Age has been somewhat demystified. They are able to jump in immediately and bravely to represent clients without having to learn from scratch how to actually practice law. My graduates can perform both routine and novel legal services, because they have spent their time in law school doing it.

Question: What are you currently working on & what is your next big project?

Answer: My students and I provide legal support for tech-oriented startups. We provide some level of routine support, but much of my objective is to find clients pursuing revolutionary, transformative ventures that the law has not anticipated. Our objective is to ensure that our clients' ventures are morphed to satisfy current legal norms, but also to morph the law so that it better accommodates the needs of next-generation ventures. The blessing and the curse is that technology is mutating and evolving in front of our eyes and there are too, too many issues we want to tackle. As a result, we try to play a role in every tech law issue on the horizon. It's the Chinese curse of living in "interesting times."

Because I have students from so many diverse backgrounds with distinct interests, we attempt to tailor their education to best suit their passions and career aspirations. That means we work on almost every bleeding edge tech law and policy issue, from supporting the pioneers of the "maker" revolution (e.g., 3D printing), to those paving the way for new models of venture financing (e.g., equity Crowdfunding), to those building platforms for civic engagement and government transparency, to those revolutionizing the ways in which we create and distribute media and information, to those working to reform our immigration laws to ensure that America is a haven for tech ventures and thought-leadership.