

UM Space Law Students Partner with MIT Engineering Students on Project

Contributed by Jennifer Farish
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Joanne Gabrynowicz (left), director of the University of Mississippi National Center for Remote Sensing, Air and Space Law, and Annalisa Weigel, assistant professor of aeronautics and astronautics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, talk with UM law students about the legal challenges facing engineers who work on space-related projects. UM photo by Nathan Latil.

OXFORD, Miss. - A semester-long collaboration between University of Mississippi space law students and Massachusetts Institute of Technology engineering students is helping prepare both groups for the challenges they will face in space-related careers.

The project requires the students to create a series of proposals on two different space-related issues. The idea for the collaboration originated from a conversation between Joanne Gabrynowicz, director of the National Center for Remote Sensing, Air, and Space Law at the UM School of Law, and Annalisa Weigel, MIT assistant professor of aeronautics and astronautics and of engineering systems.

The law students benefit by learning about the needs and mind-set of engineers, since some of them may end up representing space engineers in their careers, Gabrynowicz said.

"Our students will act as legal advisers to the engineering students, who have to make decisions regarding their projects involving the International Space Station and Earth observation satellites," she said. "The idea is that space projects are impacted by the legal agreements that govern them, and the engineers carrying out the projects need to know about them."

Weigel, who visited Ole Miss recently and spoke to the law students, said engineers often view law and policy as constraints on their work.

"They don't tend to develop a really deep understanding of why those constraints exist," she said, adding that this project is a unique opportunity for engineering students to get a different perspective.

"For my engineering students to have exposure to law students and to the mind-set of a lawyer will be phenomenal," she said. "MIT doesn't have a law school, so this is a perspective that they wouldn't otherwise be getting on campus, but it certainly is one that they will run into in their careers, and I think it is important for them to understand that."

Nicholas Welly of Oxford, a second-year law student in the space law program, said the projects will give him and the other law students an opportunity to see what it is like to work with a client.

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"This will give us a really good opportunity to look at what requirements a client might have and help us tailor the products we make as law students to meet their needs," he said.

Second-year law student John Wood of Atlanta, whose emphasis is in aviation law, agrees that the project is a chance to gain real-world experience.

"This field is really international, and the students we are working with will have different perspectives," he said. "This is really a mock client-attorney relationship, and just getting to interact with them in that setting mimics real-world experience and how practicing international aviation or space law will be."

As part of the project, Gabrynowicz plans to visit Weigel's MIT class in March to share her knowledge of space law. The law students' goal is to provide guidance on legal issues, while the MIT students will offer technical expertise in assessing the engineering, technical and policy issues related to their proposed scenarios.

For more information about the National Center for Remote Sensing, Air, and Space Law, visit <http://www.spacelaw.olemiss.edu> . For more information on the UM School of Law, visit <http://www.law.olemiss.edu> .