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Cardozo/Google Patent Diversity Project Obtains Its First Patent on Behalf of Black Female Inventor



Cardozo's **Patent Diversity Project**, led by Director Victor Wang '15, has secured its first patent on behalf of Rose Coppee, a Black inventor, for a modular hairbrush.

Funded in part by Google, the Patent Diversity Project aims to close the "patent gap" by providing free legal assistance to inventors who have been historically underrepresented, including women and people of color. According to research, Black inventors file for patents at one-third the rate of white inventors in the United States, and women accounted for only 22 percent of patents filed in 2019. Students and faculty at the Project work with entrepreneurs to navigate through the patent system and connect qualifying inventors with lawyers who provide pro bono services. The network of pro bono providers compiled by the Project consists of law firms, solo practitioners and in-house counsel leveraged through Cardozo's deep bench of relationships in the legal community. Through the Project, Coppee, in collaboration with Jones Day who provided pro bono services, received the expertise to bring her business dreams to reality.

"We're ecstatic for Rose and very thankful to Jones Day for their pro bono assistance," said Wang, who has led the Patent Diversity Project since 2019. Prior to returning to his alma mater, Wang was an IP associate at Baker McKenzie, where he was heavily involved in patent litigation and prosecution in the automotive, telecommunications, electrical control methods, design and oilfield services arts.

Coppee was referred to the Patent Diversity Project in the fall of 2018 through Start Small Think Big, a nonprofit that helps small businesses with high potential and limited access to the resources needed to create thriving businesses. Her product is a hairbrush with a bristled head and a handle that holds styling products and that injects them throughout the bristles when it is pressed. This allows consumers to more easily style, color, bleach or treat their hair.

“I was scrolling through Instagram one day when I saw a regular brush, and I thought it would be so much easier for women if gel came out of the brush,” Coppee said. “I started researching because I thought I would have to do it all myself since I couldn’t afford a patent attorney.”

“The brush helps consumers apply hair products on a whim without the need to carry bulky pressurized containers or creating a mess associated with other professional products,” Wang said. “It seeks, and in my opinion succeeds, in making people’s lives easier.”

Start Small Think Big is one of many local nonprofits within the Project’s network that refer budding inventors seeking business guidance and legal support in obtaining a patent. Students involved in the Project are responsible for handling client intake calls and understanding the needs of these entrepreneurs and small businesses. For many potential patentees, students and lawyers also provide holistic guidance on their business trajectory.

“Working with the Patent Diversity Project was so helpful,” said Coppee. “My deadline was in four months, and they were able to get me a lawyer in just a few days.”

“For some, obtaining a patent may not always be the most strategic first step,” Wang said, “which is why this Project is in alignment with the broader work undertaken by Cardozo’s Tech Startup Clinic,” led by Professor Aaron Wright. The Patent Diversity Project contributes to the Clinic’s existing suite of services for businesses and investors by offering assistance on trademarks and entity formation, in addition to patents, in order to best support clients. Both the Patent Diversity Project and Tech Startup Clinic are part of Cardozo’s nationally renowned Intellectual Property program, which is ranked #2 in New York City and #10 in the United States by U.S. News & World Report.

Since filing her first patent, Coppee has continued to invent. As someone who works in the health-care industry, she has taken steps to apply for a patent for another device that will assist ICU nurses in organizing and keeping track of patient medications. “At first I was scared and intimidated by big lawyers, but this process put me in the mindset to think outside the box and create,” she said. “When you do it once, you’re not afraid anymore.”