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Great job offers to students with campus patents experience

TV Mahalingam, ET Bureau May 29, 2011, 12.35am IST

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Mayank Swarup, 22, will report to work for the first time in his life, in August this year. The fourth year engineering student of Manipal Institute of Technology (MIT) will join automotive giant Mahindra and Mahindra (M&M) at its Nashik campus. Swarup credits his blue-chip job to both his degree in industrial production, and a patent for an invention, a refrigerator-cum-water purifier, that has been filed in his name at the US and Indian patent offices.



16

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"The invention was viewed as an achievement during the interview," recalls Swarup. In campuses across the country, from Mumbai to Manipal, students like Swarup are now being encouraged by their universities to not just create intellectual property (IP) but protect them by filing patents. These universities are hoping that this will unleash a new wave of entrepreneurship and innovation in campuses.

For example, in Manipal, an incubation body, Manipal University Technology and Business Incubator (MUTBI) —was set up in March 2010 to encourage technology entrepreneurship among students, faculty and local business. "Since then, we have filed 12 patents," says Manohara Pai, chief executive officer and secretary, MUTBI. These include five patents filed by students including one for a low-cost, high-magnification telescope.

At IIT Bombay, the traditional hotbed of student innovation in India, patent filings have become an area of focus in the past few years. In 2009, the institute filed 16 patents. That number jumped to 46 in 2010. By the end of March 2011, the institute had already filed 15 patents. "We have been filing patents since the 1960s but we have become very focused about it in the past few years," says Padma Satish, who is a part of IIT Bombay's Industrial Research and Consultancy Centre.

Incubating Innovations

This increased focus has seen the institute simplify its internal patent review process and bolster its team of patent lawyers who have been working with student innovators and faculty for the past two years.

Beginning last year, the institute also started 'mining' the 650-odd doctoral and masters theses filed by scholars for patentable IP. "We kept these theses out of the public domain for a few months as we mined them for patents. We are filing 17-18 patents from them," says Dr Satish.

A thousand kilometers away, at the Amity University campus in Noida, faculty, students and researchers have filed over 150 patents in the past one-and-a-half years in areas ranging from nanotechnology to food processing. "Amity University students have already established over five companies. Over 20 patents have been filed by the incubator for entrepreneurs, faculty and researchers," says Atul Chauhan, chancellor, Amity University.

The spurt in innovation has not gone unnoticed. The patent for Swarup's invention, for example, is being filed by Intellectual Ventures (IV), a Washington-based 'invention investment' company which scans campuses worldwide for 'bleeding-edge' inventions, ties up with the student inventors and then licenses the technology to private companies.

In an email interaction with ET on Sunday, IV officials said that invention generation capabilities at Indian universities are "extremely high". "Our Indian office has always found high-quality inventions in India. In fact, we presented an invention from one of our Indian inventors at our annual investors meeting recently as an example of the wonderful inventions we are seeing from around the world," says Nicholas Gibson, IV's director for international marketing.

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IV had started its India operations in 2008 with a tie-up with IIT Bombay. Since then, IV India has tied up with eight universities in India, including other IITs, says its country manager, Kiran Hosakote. In the past, critics have accused the company of being a "patent troll". However, innovators like Swarup believe that without the support of the universities and funders like IV, he would not have filed a patent.

Money Matters

Typically, a student innovator is paid fixed sums (varying from \$700-2,000) at three stages, when he signs up with a company like IV, when the patent is filed, and finally when a patent is granted.

At each stage, the university takes a 20% cut from the amount. Finally, when the patent is licensed for commercial use, the college gets paid 15% of all profits that accrue from the invention. Of this, 70% is paid back to the student innovator. IV did not talk about specific details about the patents filed out of India, without permission from the universities and innovators it works with.

Universities, for their part, are pulling all stops to encourage patent filing. At Manipal, MUTBI splashed the campus with posters in 2010 announcing a cash award of Rs 5 lakh for winners of Provenance, an annual business plan event. IIT Bombay and Amity have a panel of patent lawyers who advise students and faculty on the intricacies of IPR laws.

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Ramaprasad (Basingstoke,UK)

30 May, 2011 03:15 PM

This is the new way of publicity gimmicks by private colleges. Majority these innovations are copied. The one they have been using Samsung Refrigerator come water filter in my house in UK for few years and it is pretty standard thing with fake degree certificates and now we fake inventions. Please read between the lines. Patent has been filed. If the patent office does the search then they will find the relay.

kumar (vadodara)

30 May, 2011 06:40 AM

yes it is a need. Institutes will not produce job seeker than job maker. Right direction for a success

Jay (Pune)

29 May, 2011 05:16 PM

MIT is synonymous with Massachusetts Institute of Technology. While there is nothing legally barring the usage of the name please leave the usage of MIT to that great institute which has been one of the greatest seats of learning and innovation. Here's a sampling ... Bose, HP, McDonell Douglas, Gillette, DuPont, Arthur D. Little, Feynman, Claude Shannon, Vannevar Bush (Inertial Navigation), William Shockley (Transistor), Norbert Weiner ... these are some names picked at random among great alumni or associates, over 75 of which have won nobel prizes. Also, 1/3 of all space flights are flown by MIT alumni.

ranvijay (bangalore)

29 May, 2011 04:25 PM

These are the things that build nations. Not coding in C for some gora or taking backoffice calls/tech support.

freebesthealth.com (india)

29 May, 2011 01:24 PM

Really great job in deed. Keep it up. Indians are proud of you.