

"Alumni enthusiasm is one of Dartmouth's strategic advantages."

LOOK WHO'S TALKING

> **NILA BHAKUNI**, *Director of Technology Transfer*

When people ask what you do, how do you explain it?

It depends on who's asking. When I explain it to my 8-year-old, I talk about getting a hold on people's ideas, protecting them and distributing them with a contract to make sure they get commercialized. What I do is an intersection of business, technology and law. Because each piece has its own language attached to it, I also act as a translator.

How has your engineering background influenced your work in intellectual property transfer?

I'm always thinking about the problem statement, the constraints, how to go about solving the problem. When I started as an engineer I was working in optimization and automation, so I'm very focused on doing things more efficiently.

You say that working with innovators is a very rewarding aspect of the job. Who are some of your favorite success stories?

Joe BelBruno, a Dartmouth chemistry professor, was linked up with Jack O'Toole, Tu'14, through the office of entrepreneurship and technology transfer. They formed a company called Fresh-Air, which has gone from a research group to a developer of unique air-sensor technology. Then there's Dean Madden, a biochemistry professor who researches cystic fibrosis, whom we've connected with different funding sources. Knowing he'd like to stay in research rather than move to a company, we can try to help him license his technology.

Is this type of work ever contentious?

There's a certain discourse that can be passionate and loud, but my family prepared me for that. I've had conversations where someone will say, "this person is so full of himself" or "this person is hard to deal with," but I don't even notice those things anymore. I'm thinking about what someone is saying and whether I agree with it.

What drew you to Dartmouth from Rice?

It was the opportunity to focus on creativity, startups and bold ideas. I looked on the Dartmouth webpage and saw that innovation was one of the four initiatives articulated by Phil Hanlon '77 and I thought, "Wow, they're really serious about this."

—Savannah Maher '17

