

PARALEGAL PROGRAM REVIEW
SPRING, 2004

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The curricula offered through the Paralegal Programs at PCC are consistent with, if not more thorough than, that used in other community colleges throughout Oregon and nationally. It is standard to offer introductory survey courses which are then prerequisites for more substantively based classes covering specific areas of law such as Real Property, Corporations, Estate Planning and Family Law. Also included are general education requirements to meet state standards for Associate of Applied Science Degrees.

Paralegal graduates will:

- Demonstrate professional competency so they are competitive in the paralegal job market.
- Articulate needs and goals of the potential employing agencies.
- Identify the components and needs of the community they serve.
- Relate the history of paralegal practices to contemporary policies relevant to the skills required for a paralegal to meet current and future needs and practices.
- Evaluate and respond appropriately to situations requiring legal, moral and ethical judgments.

Communication

Students develop the ability to communicate effectively by participating in classroom discussion, group activities/projects and interacting with peers during classroom discussions

Community Responsibility

The importance of professional accountability and service is stressed to students seeking to enter the legal field. Current events, legislative action and prominent cases are topics of assignments and discussions. Students come to recognize the need to remain current and informed, not only as the material pertains to their profession but also as a productive, informed voting member of the community

Critical Thinking

Extensive research on legal issues provides the student with the opportunity to work individually and as a member of a group. Papers, projects, presentation and exams all require the development of clear thinking, analysis, logic and evaluation

Professional Competency

Graduates of this program have the ability to research and apply legal principles and present them in an industry accepted manner to be utilized in various legal contexts and environments

Self Reflection

PARALEGAL PROGRAM REVIEW SPRING, 2004

The ability to research and present objectively and subjectively a legal issue requires our students to not only examine their respective personal positions on an issue, but also to recognize and confidently present a different point of view. This is accomplished through requiring the students to include a reflective component as part of a Service Learning project, an Internship or classroom discussions as well as other activities

NOTE: Please see URL www.pcc.edu/edserv/ccg/la for complete listings of Course Content Guides for all Paralegal students.

ASSESSMENT

Our instructors utilize various methods when assessing what the student has learned. Most instructors use a combination of both direct and indirect methods. Direct methods include: exams – objective, short answer, essay, on line and oral; research papers; case presentations; projects; internship performance/service learning; written assignments; and class participation.

Indirect methods include: exit interviews; job placement and surveys; retention statistics; informal observation of student attitude; effort and application.

IMPROVEMENTS MADE

- Instructors gather information about individual students and apply course content
- Use of multiple modalities and learning styles
- Individual conferencing and advising with students
- Flexibility and options in coursework
- Exposure to a multitude of legal fields and experiences
- Ongoing individualized evaluation of, and feedback to, faculty
- Faculty commitment to accommodate students with disabilities
- Increase in the use and application of Power Point and Service Learning

75% of the Paralegal Program courses are offered primarily in the evenings (M-Th) to accommodate attendance for currently employed students. Some weekday and Saturday classes are also offered. Summer courses are made available to facilitate the timely completion of a certificate or a degree. Program courses are held on six of the PCC campuses; Sylvania, Central, Cascade, Rock Creek and the Washington County and Southeast Centers. A year-long guide showing projected term offerings is available to students to facilitate course planning.

All instructors make an effort to increase retention. Many “preview” respective “next term classes” in an effort to engage students and make suggestions on course sequence and direction to individual students. Also helpful are the increased summer and daytime

PARALEGAL PROGRAM REVIEW
SPRING, 2004

classes as well as the diversified classroom locations made available to students. In addition, we have several new courses in the program including Legal Terminology, Computer Research, Intellectual Property Law and Torts. Students are also consulted for their opinions either in general or as members of the Advisory Board.

Use of computer technology, including recently created a subscriber relationship with LEXIS. As discussed earlier, the continual introduction of new courses with more sections, new faculty, new campus locations for classes and response to student input regarding all of the above are responsible for much in terms of progressive program change.

CHALLENGES

Because of the lack of adequate funding available, not many opportunities exist for full or part-time faculty to engage in Professional Development or the purchase of new curriculum materials. Faculty does take advantage of the few opportunities they are afforded. Any instruction or curricular changes have been made as the result of attending meetings and participating in discussion regarding such issues.

Other challenges faced by the Department are: cost prohibitive access to technology; increased class sizes; insufficient time and resources needed for department chair administrative duties; and restrictions on the number of course and sections that can be offered due to budget restraints.

Larger systems issues that impact the Department include: budget cuts; inadequate state funding for community colleges; higher education in general; reduced number of course offerings determined by class size; tuition increases; textbook costs; and reduced number of scholarships available to students.

The importance of increased funding cannot be overemphasized, particularly in the area of faculty training in assessment tools and techniques. With such training available we could much better evaluate the success of our current practices. It is virtually useless to write the many excellent learning outcomes and CCOGs without an effective, educated way to measure mastery of these objectives.

IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Methods that are proposed to both assess student learning and to provide for improvement at both the course and program level are: focus groups; professional portfolios; increased access to technology including LEXIS; individual student assessment conferences on-line and in-person with instructor; involvement of advisory board .

It would be helpful to have a SAC support person to identify and track program participants to allow the SAC to better build our program assessment. In addition we need to better identify our graduates (exit focus group). This person could also serve as a liaison to the legal community, serve on our Advisory Committee and provide needed

PARALEGAL PROGRAM REVIEW
SPRING, 2004

information to allow us to evaluate, validate and improve our program.

Additional resources to help build better assessment of outcomes include: assistance from institutional research; faculty release time; training for faculty on assessment; financial support; smaller class size to permit more individualized instruction; individual student assessment conferences on an on-going basis; increased technology access to computers and LEXIS; creation of on-site legal library; administratively provided assessment options, techniques and tools.

MAJOR PLANS:

1) We would like to find the resources to further research Portland State University's (and other four-year colleges') transfer programs in Administration of Justice and other Baccalaureate degrees. In this way we will be better able to advise our students seeking to transfer on to a four-year program. Many of our students already hold a four year degree and are not interested in this option but the potential exists to expand our program by positioning it to better meet the needs of incoming and current students who wish to explore this possibility.

2) If resources were allocated, we would like to survey current and former students regarding their feedback on PCC's academic program as it relates to employability, including perceived obstacles to employment.

3) In addition, we will continue to have community members on our Advisory Board and Service Learning courses in the community, both of which enhance the relevance of academics to the community and a career.

4) Establishment and implementation of Paralegal/Criminal Justice EST Certificate which would embody the core courses from each discipline and prepare the Paralegal graduate to work in a firm where Criminal Law is practiced.

5) Create two-tiered Paralegal Program with an entry level LAI Law Office Assistant EST Certificate and a more advanced LAII Legal Associate one-year Certificate

6) Merge the Paralegal, Criminal Justice and dormant Legal Secretary programs under one "Legal Studies" Department/Program.

7) Design and implement four new courses in the Paralegal Program:

- Legal Terminology
- Intellectual Property Law
- Torts Law
- Law Office Procedures

8) The program will hire a second full-time Paralegal instructor to begin fall term 2004.

9) Research and create an Information sheet for students showing course articulation policies in four-year college programs.

Most important plan – to continue to ask the administration for funds and time to train faculty on *Assessment Strategies*, now that most of us have mastered writing course outcomes.