

PROGRAM REVIEW 2008-2011

Division: Social Sciences and Humanities

Department or Program: Paralegal Program

Name and Title of Preparer(s): Terry Ellis; Stephanie Ferrill

I. Description and Mission of the Program

Which area(s) does this program considerably address (check all that apply):

Basic Skills Transfer Career/Technical Other (describe)

A. The Paralegal program is a Career oriented program wherein students are taught substantive law and practical, real world/job related applications therein. Their knowledge is tested in a multitude of ways, including but not limited to exams, reports, case analysis, role playing, group projects, research assignments, class discussion and oral presentations. Aside from the required courses, students are offered a myriad of legal topics and advanced classes to choose from. These classes prepare them more specifically for the area of law in which they plan to work, or allow them to explore areas they to which they may be suited for/interested in. Finally, technology is integrated into class offerings through the use of the program's dedicated smart classroom and wireless lab in L-22.

Upon the completion of the required classes and minimum credit hours in the paralegal specific classes, the students are either awarded a certificate (if they have already have an AA Degree) or an AA Degree in Paralegal Studies. These allow them to practice in the state of California and market themselves as, "paralegals" pursuant to California's Business and Professions Code Section 6450.

B. The Paralegal program is an ABA accredited program – lending prestige and uniformity of education (in relation to other paralegal ABA programs nationwide), as well as baseline standards of education. Most of the instructors in the program are either actively engaged in the practice of law, or have many years of experience in the past to draw upon. This lends itself to purposeful, practical and real world training of our students, along with real world applications. Furthermore, the current state of the US economy makes our program extremely desirable since a paralegal certificate from our ABA accredited program, along with our excellent training makes the students immediately employable in the California legal market which allows law firms and corporations to utilize our paralegals to keep legal costs down. Paralegals can perform many of the tasks lawyers would do, but at a fraction of the cost, and paralegals enjoy a moderate, to high, salary.

C. Lack of funding for more technology and student assistance. The legal field is highly dependent on technology, and the students need training and practice to remain competitive in the job force. Furthermore, the paralegal program attracts a diverse group of people, including women who are juggling family responsibilities with school, often without a significant other contributing financially or otherwise. Support services for them in terms of money and/or

child care would greatly help them complete their education so that they can support themselves and their families.

Additionally, Basic English skills need to improve. A paralegal's career is primarily dependent on their ability to read and write well, communicate clearly and concisely, utilizing not only general English language skills, but specialized legal terminology as well. Their success not only in school, but in their profession as a paralegal is directly related to these skills. The students' success will greatly improve if Basic English skills were to improve.

- D. The expected outcomes are either a Paralegal Certificate, transfer to a four-year undergraduate degree or law school.

II. Retention and Growth

- A. The Paralegal program has improved its retention rate from 92% in 2005-06, to 94% in 2007-08. This percentage rate is based on a total enrollment of 1,285 in 2005-06, to 1,475 in 2007-08. Likewise, the success rate has increased from the 2005-06 rate of 86% to 87% in 2007-08.

- B. It has positively responded overall. The statistics for the "Targeted" groups are as follows:

2005-06

African Ancestry: enrolled = 50 (4%), retained = 82%

Latino/a: enrolled 184 (14%), retained = 89%

Filipino/a: enrolled = 34 (3%), retained = 94%

2007-08

African Ancestry: enrolled = 68 up by 18 (5%) up by 1%, retained = 91% up 9%;

Latino/a: enrolled 208 up by 24 (14%) same, retained = 93% up 4%

Filipino/a: enrolled = 62 up by 28 (4%) up by 1%, retained = 93% down 1%.

- C. The lack of basic skills impacts our students' success greatly. A paralegal's career is primarily dependent on their ability to read and write well, communicate clearly and concisely, utilizing not only general English language skills, but specialized legal terminology as well. Their success not only in school, but in their profession as a paralegal is directly related to, and impacted by these skills. The students' success will greatly improve if Basic English skills were to improve.

III. Student Equity

- A. Excellent progress. In 2005-06 there was a 77% (206 students out of 268) success rate for all targeted groups (African Ancestry 64%/32 out of 50; Latino/a 80%/147 out of 184; and Filipino/a 79%/27 out of 34), compared to a success rate of 84% in 2007-08 (281 students out of 338) (African Ancestry 78%/52 out of 68; Latino/a 85%/177 out of 208; and Filipino/a 85%/52 out of 62). Non-targeted groups had an 88% success rate all three years (897 students out of 1,017 in 2005-06, and 997 out of 1,137 students in 2007-08)

- B. Continued early intervention and referral to other, appropriate campus facilities/programs as needed.
- C. Challenges: basic English skills. The lack of basic skills impacts our students' success greatly. A paralegal's career is primarily dependent on their ability to read and write well, communicate clearly and concisely, utilizing not only general English language skills, but specialized legal terminology as well. Their success not only in school, but in their profession as a paralegal is directly related to, and impacted by these skills. The students' success will greatly improve if Basic English skills were to improve.

IV. Budget Limitations

- A. We will lose students. Lack of funding for more technology and student assistance. The legal field is highly dependent on technology, and the students need training and practice to remain competitive in the job force. Furthermore, the paralegal program attracts a diverse group of people, including women who are juggling family responsibilities with school, often without a significant other contributing financially or otherwise. Support services for them in terms of money and/or child care would greatly help them complete their education so that they can support themselves and their families.

The ABA recommends that the paralegal program have a dedicated staff person(s) for support, which requires additional funding. Furthermore, additional funds are needed to promote our paralegal program to targeted groups, such as through "outreach" programs to high schools.

- B. Our paralegal program is one of the best, if not THE best program in Northern California/West Coast. Not only is it ABA accredited, but our students acquire not only the basics skills and knowledge required by law, but marketable, real world training from practitioners that makes them highly sought after by California employers. Because of the program's excellent reputation, DeAnza College gets favorable publicity, as well as a boost to its reputation from the paralegal program. Furthermore, as addressed in I. B., above, the current US economy should signal a much higher demand for this program, and thus, a much higher enrollment.

V. Additional Comments (optional):

- Relationships with Other Programs:

The paralegal program is engaged in a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship with the Administration of Justice Program, and to a lesser extent, the Political Science, Psychology and Sociology departments.

- State and Federal Mandates:

California's Business and Professions Code Section 6450. Also the American Bar Association requirements to maintain accreditation involve certain minimum facility and program requirements (i.e. minimum size of library, access to computers). The program has a dedicated wireless lab, smart classroom.

- Trends (such as enrollment, certificate and degrees conferred, transfer rates, job placement, etc.):

Almost 90 more students are enrolled (2008W = 423 and 2009W = 512), and WSCH increased by 235. These numbers indicate greater/increased productivity.

- Comparable Programs at other Institutions:

ABA Certified paralegal programs:

West Valley – the differences are:

1. West Valley is on a semester schedule, so we get students transferring to us for our more flexible quarter schedule, with more night classes; and
2. West Valley has fewer classes offered and lower enrollment, whereas we have more classes and including solid day, night and weekend offerings.

SF State & Cal State East Bay - Both programs are MUCH more expensive than ours.

Non-ABA Certified paralegal programs:

Evergreen & Skyline Community Colleges – students migrate away from these schools to DeAnza due to our “gold standard” ABA accreditation.

HEALD – private and VERY expensive.