

AAS Paralegal Studies
Student Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2020-2022

Recommendations from prior evaluation

Increase enrollment. Enrollment and graduation trends look promising, but please continue to monitor the enrollment, retention, and completion of students in the program.

Response: Since the ABA changed its requirements for synchronous learning in January 2020, this program competes with other online (ABA-approved and non-approved) schools for students. A draw to this program continues to be the in-state tuition benefit for eCampus supported courses.

Nationwide, enrollment in 2-year programs is down 9.2% for students aged 25 and above (<https://nscresearchcenter.org/stay-informed/>, October 2022 data). This age group is the program's typical student and makes up almost 50% of the program's student body. At the same time, enrollment for the 17 and above age group has increased 11.5% through fall 2022. The program must take advantage of dual enrolled or home-schooled students through targeted marketing and recruiting efforts.

The program curriculum emphasizes the benefits of earning the Certified Paralegal (CP) credential through NALA-The Paralegal Association. Graduates of an ABA approved program are automatically eligible to sit for the Certified Paralegal exam. Students may take the certification exam in their last semester of school with reduced testing fees. The program plans to offer a non-credit professional development CP Review course in spring 2023 to gauge community interest in the CP exam with a long-term goal of incorporating the CP exam into the curriculum. Students would be required to take the CP Exam to complete the internship course.

As more states consider licensing legal practitioners (similar to nurse practitioners), formal paralegal education or national credentialing are the standard criteria to approve legal practitioners.

SLOA Submission

Current Learning Outcomes

1. Perform legal research using both traditional research methods and computer-assisted methods.
2. Produce professional quality documents, including letters, fact memoranda, pleadings, contracts, wills and similar documents.
3. Conduct client and witness interviews.
4. Engage in basic fact finding and investigation.
5. Assist in case management, discovery, and trial preparation.
6. Apply substantive and procedural law to a reasoned analysis of the matter.
7. Recognize the ethical obligations of a paralegal and conduct oneself accordingly.
8. Demonstrate proficiency in use of legal technology, including electronic filing, case management and billing software.

Summary of Learning Outcomes Discussion (Required)

Data collected for SLOA includes

- Using specific questions addressing student-learning outcomes on the semester-end evaluations of paralegal courses
- Preparing a comparison of legal writing projects from the introductory level (PLS 102) to the advanced level (PLS 285)
- Computing the pass rate for courses identified by the paralegal advisory committee as practical-skills intensive (PLS 102, PLS 201, PLS 203, PLS 210, PLS 240, PLS 250, PLS 260, PLS 280 and PLS 285)
- Compiling detailed reports following the mandatory paralegal internship from both the student and the student's supervisor in the internship office (includes Credit for Prior Learning portfolios for students already employed in the field).
- Conducting graduate and employer of graduate surveys

In general, the curriculum is meeting the program's SLOs. However, all instructors are encouraged to add more practical, hands-on type of projects to their individual courses.

The program coordinator gathers information from students, graduates, and employers of graduates. This information is organized, compiled and presented to the full Paralegal Advisory Committee meeting each year to endorse any recommendations made by the program coordinator.

Discussion of Curricular Changes (Required)

The program has considered the use of portfolios to evaluate student learning. The program advisory board, who provides long range planning and input regarding the curriculum to the program coordinator, was not supportive of this idea. However, the advisory board recently agreed to a long-term goal of incorporating the CP Exam into the curriculum. The pass rate for a national, independently accredited professional exam will further inform whether the program is meeting its stated objectives and learning outcomes.

Student Success Data and High Impact Practices

Select any trends reflected in your student success data. More than one tag can be selected. Select tags by pushing the "+" button and clicking all that apply.

- Increase in degrees awarded
- Increase in majors
- Increase in persistence
- Decrease in pass rates
- Equity gaps

If equity gaps were found in any of your disaggregated student success data, please explain how you plan to address those gaps.

Historically, females dominated the paralegal profession. The gender disparity in the data reflects this fact. Anecdotally, I have seen more men in the program in the last five years than is reflected in the gender distributions throughout the profession. In the past, the program's student body generally reflects the local community (majority white with few other races). However, since offering an entirely online degree, there has been a slight increase in Black and Native Alaska/American students.

High-Impact Practices Used in this Program (select all that apply)

- Internship

High Impact Practice Description

Do you think your high impact practices are making a difference for student success?
Feel free to describe or expand upon the practices you are using.

Since this is a workforce development degree, the main goal of the program is to provide students with the skills and knowledge they need to enter the workforce with minimal on-the-job-training by the employer. To that end, the program has several "practical skills intensive" courses that focus exclusively on developing the practical skills needed by a paralegal. Assignments include: fact gathering and internet research, drafting legal documents (pleadings, disclosures, discovery requests and responses, motions, memorandums of law, settlement offers, pretrial memorandums and settlement agreements), and legal research, analysis and application. Students are able to practice what they have learned in a mandatory 150-hour internship with an attorney, government agency, court system or legal aid office.

Financial Reporting

How does your department/program approach being cost effective? Describe your approach.

The program continues to increase revenue while decreasing expenditures. The increase in revenue and decrease of costs began when the program started offering online delivery. The program was also able to cancel print subscriptions when the ABA changed its library resource policies to allow either print or online resources. The trend shows the program is attracting more students, becoming more productive and cost efficient, and soon will be capable of supporting itself.

Program Profile

Program's Value to Mission (required)

Your program(s) is part of a larger whole, such as higher education in Alaska, rural communities, disciplinary professions, employment landscapes, UAF, your school or college, etc. Provide a narrative that highlights the value of your program(s) to one or more of these and provide context.

Prepare: Alaska's Career, Technical and Professional Workforce

The paralegal studies program prepares individuals to work in legal offices, court systems, government agencies, tribal government and agencies, Native and non-Native corporations, and other industries reliant on the paralegal skill set, such as banking and finance, education, insurance, healthcare, social services and victim advocacy. While projections show the rate of growth for paralegals within Alaska are declining slightly, the need for qualified paralegals nationwide in the next 10 years indicates growth by 14% (source: U.S. Dept. of Labor). Several states are considering a licensed paraprofessional program which would allow qualified paralegals to offer limited legal services directly to the public, which will further increase the demand for paralegals. This program is positioned to provide the necessary education paraprofessional programs require.

Duplicative Programs (Response N/A if not relevant.)

It is important to note when there are similar or duplicative programs (within the UA System). When you share this information, highlight how you work together or how you differentiate your programs from one another.

UAA offers an AAS in Paralegal Studies, as well as BA in Legal Studies and a post-bacc certificate in Paralegal Studies. However, the UAA program has very few courses available online. Many UAA students take advantage of the convenience of CTC's online paralegal courses. The two programs informally accept each other's courses as transfers (usually by petition). This program intends to formalize the credit transfer policy between the two programs. Many paralegal students continue their education to the baccalaureate level, with most opting for a major in Justice. Justice majors often declare Paralegal Studies as a minor. Both departments collaborate to serve our shared students.

Post-Graduate Success (Response N/A if not relevant.)

Is your program(s) preparing students for areas that have been identified as high-need for the state of Alaska? Do you offer job placement or other career guidance? Describe your efforts to prepare students for post-graduate employment.

The paralegal profession is not identified as high-need in Alaska, although nationwide, the need for qualified professionals is growing faster than other occupations. About half of the current paralegal students reside outside of Alaska, this program is meeting the labor needs nationally. All paralegal students learn the practical skills needed to enter the workforce with minimal on-the-job training. The required internship further prepares students to enter the workforce, and often leads to employment for the interns.

Value of Service Courses (Optional)

You are provided with a breakdown of the Student Credit Hours (SCH) in your department by internal vs. service teaching, (for example, courses taught to majors vs. GER courses). If you would like to expand or add further context about how service teaching impacts the department's mission, do so here. If this is not relevant, enter N/A.

N/A

Community or Other Partnerships (Optional)

Does this program(s) have relationships to research institutes or community partnerships or agreements with tribal or community organizations, industries, or corporations? Describe if applicable. Respond N/A if not.

The program works closely with the state and local bar association and the Alaska Court System in providing student volunteers for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Law Clinic event. Students gain

practical experience by assisting consumers with intake documentation, explaining the limited representation and confidentiality agreements, and directing consumers to attorneys who can best meet the needs of the consumer. The program coordinator supervises all student work and provides coordination among volunteers, consumers and attorneys. At the last MLK Law Day in 2019, over 150 consumers in the community were provided with legal information and limited representation by volunteer attorneys.

The program plans to offer a non-credit professional development Certified Paralegal Exam review course to paralegal students and the public next year. The goal of this course is two-fold: first to gauge interest in the CP Exam and second to assess the viability of incorporating the CP Exam as a graduation requirement for the program.