

## Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Summary

### *Paralegal Studies, A.A.S. Degree*

*UAF Community & Technical College*

**AYs 2013-2016**

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**1. Assessment information collected:** The CTC Paralegal Program uses a multi-faceted plan to assess whether students are learning the eight basic skills required for successful entry into the paralegal job market. The eight skills are identified as the "Intended Objectives/Outcomes" on the program's SLOA Plan.

The part of the assessment plan involving students includes:

**a)** Starting Fall 2015 semester, specific questions addressing student learning outcomes are included on the semester-end evaluations of paralegal courses. Prior to fall 2015, end of semester focus groups gathered input from students as to learning outcomes, course and instructor effectiveness, and student perception of needed changes.

**b)** Comparison of legal writing projects from the introductory level (PLS 102) to the advanced level (PLS 285),

**c)** Passing courses identified by the paralegal advisory committee as practical-skills intensive (PLS 102, PLS 201, PLS 203, PLS 210, PLS 250, PLS 260, PLS 280 and PLS 285).

**d)** Detailed reports following the mandatory paralegal internship from both the student and the student's supervisor in the internship office.

The assessment plan continues by following graduates into the job market by determining whether the courses completed provided them with the skills required to succeed in their paralegal position. This part of the assessment plan first focuses on the successful placement of graduates. The plan then follows up with a once-a-year focus group of recent graduates and a mailed questionnaire sent to those who were unable to participate in the focus group. In addition, members of the Paralegal Advisory Committee volunteer to visit with the employers of program graduates to obtain further information whether the students have learned what is required of them as successful paralegals.

## **2. Conclusions drawn from the information summarized above**

**a)** Prior to Fall 2015, focus groups were conducted in each course to determine if the course was meeting its student learning objectives. The data garnered from the focus groups indicated that current curriculum is meeting the stated learning objectives. Some courses could benefit from offering more practical, skill based projects. For example, PLS 240 Family Law assignments could include drafting a settlement agreement, preparing a property inventory or calculating child support.

**b)** Writing samples from PLS 102 Introduction to Paralegal Studies and PLS 285 Advanced Legal Writing were compared. The projects were identical in nature: read and brief a number of cases, then draft an interoffice memorandum that applies the holdings to a fact situation and recommends a course of action. Significant improvement was seen in the samples from the advanced writing course. Improvements included grammar, sentence structure, word choice and voice, proper citations to case law, application of case law to the facts, and the quality of legal analysis.

**c)** The data collected since Fall 2013 indicates a majority of students are successfully passing the practical skills intensive courses, most with a grade of A.

## Paralegal Studies, A.A.S. Degree

	Average Enrollment	A%	B%	C%	D, F, NB, W%
PLS 102 Introduction to Paralegal Studies (required)	8.50	59.72	11.65	11.40	19.60
PLS 201 Practical Paralegal Skills (required)	5.00	95.33	0.00	0.00	4.67
PLS 203 Torts (Elective)	9.67	74.33	5.53	5.57	23.57
PLS 210 Civil Procedure (required)	10.33	61.97	12.90	19.57	17.63
PLS 250 Probate Law (elective)	5.33	25.10	11.13	9.67	20.77
PLS 260 Computers in the Law Office (required)	10.33	54.33	9.67	0.00	52.67
PLS 280 Legal research & Writing (required)	6.67	57.77	6.67	32.23	16.67
PLS 285 Advanced Legal Writing (required)	5.00	91.75	0.00	0.00	11.00

**d)** Fifteen students enrolled in PLS 299 Paralegal Studies Internship between Fall 2013 and Spring 2016. Thirteen students successfully completed the internship. The student and supervisor reports indicate that these students had the requisite skills required of a working paralegal and the students were well prepared to enter the workforce.

Since Fall 2013, fifteen students graduated from the paralegal degree program. Of those graduates, five are working in the legal field, five are continuing their education, and five have not sought employment as paralegals for a variety of reasons, including relocation, family obligations and medical issues. While the number of graduates working in the legal field is short of the 75% goal as stated in the SLOA plan, employers consistently express satisfaction with program graduates and frequently comment on how little on-the-job training is required.

### **3. Curricular changes resulting from conclusions drawn above**

No major changes to the curriculum are required at this time. The curriculum is meeting the learning objectives identified in the SLOA Plan. However, all instructors were encouraged to add more practical, hands-on type of projects to their individual courses. Instructors of courses with a disproportionate number of high grades should reevaluate their grading criteria and/or incorporate more challenging assignments.

### **4. Identify the faculty members involved in reaching the conclusions drawn above and agreeing upon the curricular changes resulting**

All of the information gathered from students, graduates, and employers of graduates is collected by the Outcomes Assessment Subcommittee of the Paralegal Advisory Committee, organized, and presented to the full advisory committee at fall meeting each year, and also to the fall meeting of the paralegal faculty each year.

The primary overseeing of the program's curriculum is the Paralegal Advisory Committee, whose membership includes two judges, four practicing lawyers, and three practicing paralegals. This is the group which can assess on a day-to-day basis the changes occurring in the local legal community and job market and which most often provides recommendations for updating or changing the curriculum. The paralegal faculty, which also consists primarily of practicing lawyers and paralegals, is involved in this process, but to a lesser degree.