

Comprehensive Program Review Report



Program Review - Paralegal

Program Summary

2021-2022

Prepared by: Pura Cordero

What are the strengths of your area?: In reviewing last year's program review document. The Paralegal Program remains steady in enrollment - given the pandemic enrollment decline across community colleges and here at COS - and remains consequential to students. It provides a well-educated pool of graduates to the local legal community. Students who successfully complete the program are ready to enter the field as valuable assets to their prospective employers.

1. The Paralegal (Para) program serves as a hiring source for many attorneys in the local legal community. Although the program is understaffed, the program continues to gain the credibility and confidence of students and employers alike. Unfortunately, without additional assistance, I am no longer able to field employment requests from attorneys. The demands are too great for one person. Therefore, I now refer all requests for paralegals to COS's JobSpeakers representatives - Wil Hobbs and Lisette Conway.

2. The employment indicators for the paralegal profession remain positive. The job outlook for 2020-2030, the field is expected to grow 12%. An uptick of 2% from the 2019-29 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics* summary shows a 10% growth in the industry, which is faster than other sectors. *See repository

3. The number of students obtaining an AS Paralegal degree and declaring paralegal/legal assistant as a major remains steady and in line. From reviewing Tableau data collection, section Program Majors by Department, the paralegal program has a strong showing in unduplicated enrollment, collectively, under the AS and CT-PARA Cert. The multi-year numbers, assessed from 2018-2021, total 150. That is impressive for a niche program and given the general COS downtick in enrollment numbers due to COVID.

4. The paralegal program strives to achieve a high level of success, with last year's data reflecting a 76.3% overall student success rate. The disaggregated data shows the following (pandemic remains a negative factor): Fall 2020 - 59 students enrolled - 54 females, 3 males, and 2 non-binary. Retention Rate: 93.22% with a success rate of 83.05%. Spring 2021: 69 students enrolled - 60 females, 5 males, and 4 non-binary. Retention rate: 91.55% and success rate 71.83%. The retention rates of African-American and males requires further inquiry, which both were at 50%.

5. The retention rate for the paralegal program, in general, is still impressive. In 2017-2018, the retention rate was 68%. With support staff and great efforts, in 2018-2019, we increased the retention rate to 79%. Although COVID became a factor in spring 2020, in 2019-2020, we maintained a retention rate of 78%. 2020-2021 it is 76%.

6. Another overarching success of the paralegal program, which is not reported in the data collection, is the number of students who declare a paralegal major and then change to an AA-T in Law Public Policy, which is transferable to a 4-year university, with the desire to pursue a law degree. Whereas the AS paralegal degree core curriculum units are non-transferable. The paralegal program serves as a direct student conduit to the Pathway to Law School program, which has a 100% transfer rate to a 4-year university.

What improvements are needed?: Undoubtedly, the program needs resources, namely a classified staffer, to help in promoting the program and outreach. I know the public sector is very different than the private sector. However, the basic functions remain the same. A program without any resourcing will continue to remain inert. The Strong Workforce grant allowed the paralegal program to do many promotional events, create a newsletter, develop a legal résumé writing workshop, high school outreach, marketing campaign, plus other student and program-centric activities. In turn, we witnessed the positive effects of that resource. Unfortunately, funding ended, and so did the promotional work. I have sought out through Program Review resources. The business division, as a whole, votes on the priorities of the division, which historically has superseded my one vote. The weaknesses that I, as the program coordinator, face are outlined below.

1. One of the program's greatest strengths is also one of its greatest weaknesses: having only one faculty member with no support staff. There is no collegial input on how best to approach the curriculum. I do attend conferences (virtual during the

pandemic). However, it is professionally difficult not to have the ability to collaborate in strategizing on how best to enhance the curriculum and overall paralegal program. At present, paralegal classes and business law, Bus 018, which historically has the highest FTES of any business course offered, have no full-time faculty redundancy, unlike other disciplines within the business division: accounting, general business, and computers.

2. The paralegal program is heavily reliant on adjunct instructors. Maintaining a cohesive curriculum is challenging, which is necessary to promote and increase student success rates. Although each course, to some degree, is independent of one another, para courses collectively serve as building blocks for the successful completion of the paralegal degree. The Business Division Chair, and I have experienced issues with adjuncts failing to meet contractual deadlines, not submitting needed paperwork, or not responding to emails. Although the adjuncts are incredibly competent and esteemed practicing attorneys, some fail to meet the basic contractual requirements of being an adjunct, which, in turn, makes collaboration on academic and administrative matters evermore challenging. It limits the program's growth; it limits the number of specialty courses offered, and it is, at times, professionally exhausting. Equally, being the only full-time faculty member for the program has a stifling effect on professional development. In turn, given the reliance on adjuncts, the program has experienced turnover. Two adjuncts have moved out of the area. Very difficult to set program standards and maintain a level of continuity.

3. In 2020, the program suffered from the loss of a grant-funded classified staffer. The position was filled by an individual that I thoroughly trained in the operations of the paralegal program. Unfortunately, when the grant ended, so did the position. The vacancy created a vacuum. Many of the action items instituted to promote and grow the program have ceased for lack of support staff. I will reiterate the importance, effectiveness, and essential function the classified staff member played within the division and assisting students, especially when I was on emergency family leave.

4. The paralegal courses we offer are narrow in comparison to other paralegal programs. The ability to provide a wider array of courses, e.g., torts, evidence for paralegals, contracts, wills and trusts, and administrative law, considered 'specialty' courses, is important in broadening the students' marketability skillset and creating a more robust program curriculum. Fresno City College*, our sister and closest competing college, provides students with a greater array of courses. It would be advantageous for COS and its paralegal students to mirror a more encompassing program. *See repository.

5. Last, many paralegal students end up changing majors to a transferable degree, such as LPPS / Pathway to Law School program, with a goal to be admitted into law school proceeding the completion of their undergraduate degree. Therefore, enrollment numbers and success data do not give the complete picture of student success and graduation rates within the paralegal program.

Describe any external opportunities or challenges.: 1. The paralegal program is a niche discipline within the business division, unlike accounting, computers, and business, which offers graduates a wide array of employment opportunities. Paralegal skills/degrees are suited for law offices or government entities. The data does reflect that paralegal/legal assistant employment opportunities are on the upswing nationally and California-wide; however, in the Tulare Country region, there is a flattening of the employment curve. The factors that may be attributable to the data is that fewer numbers of attorneys are opening practices in the local area and to the low turnover of currently employed paralegals. Although student enrollment and program growth are important, it is equally important to understand market demands. The current graduation rate aligns with the local market.

2. In reviewing the surrounding area colleges: public and private, there are no American Bar Association (ABA) approved paralegal programs in the central valley. COS's decision to seek ABA approval would be an enhancement to the Paralegal program and the college. However, with the limited resources – human capital - coupled with reviewing the stringent ABA commissions guidelines for ABA approval, I do not believe COS' paralegal program, as it stands, can successfully meet the criteria of the ABA program approval process. I believe that ABA approval would, undoubtedly, lend credence as to the quality of COS' paralegal program and would open doors of employment opportunity to graduates in those law offices/firms that require a degree from an ABA-approved program. In turn, in preparation for ABA approval, the paralegal certificate has been deleted.

Overall SLO Achievement: The SLOs are being met per course offered. However, SLOs need to be continually reassessed to assure we are meeting the demands of the profession.

Changes Based on SLO Achievement: SLOs have been changed to be aligned with the respective course curriculum.

Overall PLO Achievement: The PLOs have been assessed for the academic year 2020-2021. The achievement rate supersedes the targeted rate of 70%. The overall achievement is 76.2% with a retention rate of 78%.

Changes Based on PLO Achievement: No changes will be implemented at this time. However, the program will be continually assessed to assure the curriculum is current with evolving employment trends and standards.

Outcome cycle evaluation: The assessment of the program and review of data is scheduled at the end of each academic year.

Related Documents:

[2018-2019 Program Review Document.pdf](#)

[5 Reasons Why a Basic Paralegal Certifi...pdf](#)

[2020 BLS Paralegals and Legal Assistants _Occup...ook__ U.S.pdf](#)

[2020 Local Labor Statistics occupationalemploymentandwages_visalia.pdf](#)

Action: (2021-2022) Complete an in-depth assessment of curriculum standards

Complete an in-depth assessment of curriculum standards

Leave Blank:

Implementation Timeline: 2020 - 2021, 2021 - 2022

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Identify related course/program outcomes: American Bar Association (ABA) - "Needs Assessment" ; related to a "District Objective".

Person(s) Responsible (Name and Position): Pura Cordero, Paralegal Instructor

Rationale (With supporting data): The following remains a concern as to course offerings and standardization of curriculum. Paralegal courses have been taught by various faculty and/or adjunct. Each course, in the last four academic years, has had no continuity in instructors; therefore, no continuity in the curriculum. The data is not indicative of success or failure of the program. Although the 'success' and enrollment has declined, it is inconclusive until benchmarks are in place. Currently, the Paralegal program relies heavily on adjunct instructors; two of the three adjunct instructors are new to teaching. Adjuncts are vital, but also unpredictable variables as to building a cohesive curriculum. Therefore, courses taught by adjunct need to be evaluated and standardized in order to meet SLOs and, ultimately, PLOs.

In addition, the possibility of creating a 'cohort' type of program enrollment coupled with course sequencing is being vetted.

Priority: High

Safety Issue: No

External Mandate: No

Safety/Mandate Explanation:

Update on Action

Updates

Update Year: 2020 - 2021

09/25/2020

Status: Continue Action Next Year

Currently, the Paralegal program relies predominately on adjunct instructors. The data is not indicative of the success or failure of the program. Although adjuncts are vital to the program, they remain an unpredictable variable in building a cohesive curriculum. Therefore, courses taught by adjunct need to be standardized in order to meet the SLOs, and ultimately the PLOs.

Impact on District Objectives/Unit Outcomes (Not Required): District Objective 1 - Provide effective academic support services as measured by an increase in the rate at which students successfully complete courses.

District Objectives - 2.2 - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate annually.

District Objectives - 2.4 - Increase Career Technical Education course success rates and program completion annually.

Link Actions to District Objectives

District Objectives: 2018-2021

District Objective 1.1 - The District will increase FTES by 1.75% over the three years

District Objective 2.1 - Increase the percentage of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and Non-CTE) by 5 percentage points over three years

District Objective 2.2 - Increase the number of students who transfer to a four-year institution by 10 percent over three years

District Objective 2.4 - By 2021, Increase the percentage of CTE students who achieve their employment objectives by 5

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percentage points

District Objective 4.1 - Increase the use of data for decision-making at the District and department/unit level

District Objective 4.3 - College of the Sequoias Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, and staff will engage in best practices and staff development to sustain effective operational systems for institutional assessment and continuous improvement.

District Objectives: 2013-2015

2013-2015: District Objective #1 - District Objective #1 for 2013-2015: Provide effective academic support services as measured by an increase in the rate at which students successfully complete courses.

District Objectives: 2015-2018

District Objectives - 2.2 - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate annually.

District Objectives - 2.4 - Increase Career Technical Education course success rates and program completion annually.

District Objectives: 2021-2025

District Objective 2.1 - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and non-CTE) by 5% from 2021-2025.

District Objective 2.2 - Increase the number of students who are transfer-ready by 15% and students who transfer to four-year institutions by 10% from 2021-2025.

District Objective 2.4 - Increase the percentage of CTE students who achieve their employment objectives by five percentage points (job closely related to field of study and attainment of a livable wage) and the number of CTE students who successfully complete 9+ CTE units in a single year by 10% from 2021-2025.

District Objective 4.1 - Increase the effective use of data and transparency in decision making at all institutional levels from 2021-2025.

District Objective 4.3 - Improve professional development practices District-wide for all District employees to support equity and operational effectiveness from 2021-2025.

Action: (2021-2022) Provide students with Instructional and Program Consistency in order to meet the standards of ABA and District Objectives for Student Success

Evaluate resources, adjunct instructors, and course curriculum to align the paralegal program with the requirements of the ABA

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Implementation Timeline: 2019 - 2020, 2020 - 2021, 2021 - 2022

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Identify related course/program outcomes: 1. Associated with "District Objectives"

2. Program Learning Objectives

3. Related to Para courses SLOs:

Para 101: Intro. to Paralegalism

Para 102: Legal Terminology

Bus 018: Business Law

Para 203: Civil Procedure I

Para 204: Civil Procedure II

Para 205: Legal Research and Writing

Para 232: Wills, Trusts and Estate Law

Para 237: Family Law

Person(s) Responsible (Name and Position): Pura M. Cordero, Paralegal Coordinator and author

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Rationale (With supporting data): California has twenty-two American Bar Association (ABA) approved paralegal programs. There are none in the central valley area - meaning the closest are Saratoga or Santa Clarita. If COS' paralegal program meets the ABA program approval process, it would be an academic achievement and increase student enrollment.

The paralegal profession is evolving. With the adoption of various states professional business codes, California being at the forefront, paralegals are required to have formal education. In Paralegal.edu, the major qualifier for paralegals is formal education. State bar associations are encouraging licensing for paralegals. The movement of having paralegals with more formal education is to allow them to draft documents or represent clients, which, at this time, only attorneys are able to do. It is a direct response to the lack of legal resources for underrepresented and under-resourced sectors of the population. With these changes on the horizon, COS' paralegal program would provide students with a 'leg up' in the field.

*Please see Document Repository, 2018-2019 Program Review Document

Priority: High

Safety Issue: No

External Mandate: Yes

Safety/Mandate Explanation: ABA Standing Committee Application and Program Requirements

Update on Action

Updates

Update Year: 2020 - 2021

09/25/2020

Status: Continue Action Next Year

The adjunct pool is being reviewed as well as new applicants to better accommodate students' educational needs. Various resources continue to be compiled and assessed for educational enrichment,

Impact on District Objectives/Unit Outcomes (Not Required):

Resources Description

Personnel - Classified/Confidential - Permanent Part-Time Classified Staff. The paralegal program as well as, to some degree, the Pathway to Law School program, is seeking a permanent classified staffer. (Active)

Why is this resource required for this action?: With the program having only one full-time faculty member, the need to have support staff is imperative. The data collection and requirements of the ABA are enormous, and, frankly, undoable without knowledgeable staff assistance.

Notes (optional): POINT OF CLARIFICATION: Please note that the resource request is duplicated on other "actions" within the program review allowing for augmented specific reasoning per action, but the Paralegal Program/Pathway to Law School is only requesting one part-time classified staffer.

The request for a permanent classified stems from the great need of both the paralegal and Pathway to Law School programs. Both programs are symbiotic with the objective being student success in the legal field. Distinctly, the business division does not have any full-time instructors who hold a Juris Doctor except for the paralegal coordinator. Therefore, the paralegal program cannot draw from the experience of its fellow colleagues for assistance, promotion, program review, or simply covering a class. Having a classified staffer is paramount to meet the demands of the program and to affect positive change in the ongoing efforts of we have set forth in promoting student enrollment and community outreach.

Cost of Request (Nothing will be funded over the amount listed.): 33000

Link Actions to District Objectives

District Objectives: 2018-2021

District Objective 1.1 - The District will increase FTES by 1.75% over the three years

District Objective 2.1 - Increase the percentage of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and Non-CTE) by 5 percentage points over three years

District Objective 2.2 - Increase the number of students who transfer to a four-year institution by 10 percent over three years

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District Objective 2.4 - By 2021, Increase the percentage of CTE students who achieve their employment objectives by 5 percentage points

District Objective 4.1 - Increase the use of data for decision-making at the District and department/unit level

District Objective 4.3 - College of the Sequoias Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, and staff will engage in best practices and staff development to sustain effective operational systems for institutional assessment and continuous improvement.

District Objectives: 2015-2018

District Objectives - 1.1 - Increase overall enrollment by 1.75% annually

District Objectives - 2.1 - Increase the number of students who are transfer-prepared annually.

District Objectives - 2.2 - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate annually.

District Objectives - 2.4 - Increase Career Technical Education course success rates and program completion annually.

District Objectives: 2021-2025

District Objective 1.1 - The District will increase FTES 2% from 2021 to 2025.

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District Objective 4.1 - Increase the effective use of data and transparency in decision making at all institutional levels from 2021-2025.

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Action: Ongoing expansion of the Paralegal Internship

Increase the number of worksites and participants in the paralegal internship program

Leave Blank:

Implementation Timeline: 2019 - 2020, 2021 - 2022

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Identify related course/program outcomes: Requirement of the program: degree.

Person(s) Responsible (Name and Position): Pura Cordero, Paralegal Program Coordinator

Rationale (With supporting data): The WEXP/internship course, WEXP 193P and 194P, are now electives. Due to the pandemic, worksites and overall enrollment in the WEXP electives have decreased.

Priority: Low

Safety Issue: Yes

External Mandate: No

Safety/Mandate Explanation:

Update on Action

Updates

Update Year: 2020 - 2021

09/25/2020

Status: Action Discontinued

Program Review - Paralegal

Due to Strong Workforce funding expiring leading to the elimination of the paralegal classified staff position, this action is discontinued until such time that the paralegal program is approved support staff or a second full-time faculty member is hired. This is an ongoing process. The paralegal coordinator continues to do outreach with the Tulare County Bar Association, Rotary Clubs, and the Sequoia Paralegal Association in order to promote internship programs, and most importantly, the Paralegal program in general. Conversely, the consideration is whether the WEXP Internship should remain as a requirement of the program. There is no guaranteed placement or an 'agreement' with any law office and/or entity to assure that a student will be placed. If COS continues to require an internship as part of the program, there should be a mechanism in place to assure student placement. However, attorneys, courts, and other legal based entities are subjective, self-determiners on whether they will accept a paralegal intern. Therefore, it is my strong recommendation that WEXP is an elective versus a requirement.

Impact on District Objectives/Unit Outcomes (Not Required): District Objectives - 2.2 - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate annually.

District Objectives - 2.4 - Increase Career Technical Education course success rates and program completion annually.

Link Actions to District Objectives

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District Objectives: 2015-2018
District Objectives - 2.2 - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate annually.
District Objectives - 2.4 - Increase Career Technical Education course success rates and program completion annually.

Action: (2021-2022) Marketing Campaign to Increase Enrollment

This action can only be achieved if there is additional staffing. Therefore, it is marked as a low priority although it would be vital to the growth of the paralegal program. Market the paralegal program through marketing tools, e.g., paralegal brochure, newsletter, attend college night, speak at Rotary meetings, legal association meetings, and outreach to high schools and law offices if personnel resource is approved.

Leave Blank:

Implementation Timeline: 2021 - 2022

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Identify related course/program outcomes: District Objective 1.1: Increase overall enrollment by 1.75% annually.

District Objective 2.4: Increase Career Technical Education course success rates and program completion annually.

Person(s) Responsible (Name and Position): Pura M. Cordero, Business/Paralegal Instructor

Rationale (With supporting data): The program has seen a downtick in enrollment numbers for various reasons. Although the objective of marketing the program is to stimulate interests in a career as a paralegal, this action has been downgraded in priority due to the lack of support staff.

Priority: Low

Safety Issue: No

External Mandate: No

Safety/Mandate Explanation:

Program Review - Paralegal

Update on Action

Updates

Update Year: 2020 - 2021

09/25/2020

Status: Continue Action Next Year

The paralegal program hopes to resume the marketing campaign that was implemented at the time the program received grant funding for part-time classified staff.

Impact on District Objectives/Unit Outcomes (Not Required): District Objective 1.1: Increase overall enrollment by 1.75% annually.

Link Actions to District Objectives

District Objectives: 2018-2021

District Objective 1.1 - The District will increase FTES by 1.75% over the three years

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District Objectives: 2021-2025

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District Objective 4.1 - Increase the effective use of data and transparency in decision making at all institutional levels from 2021-2025.

District Objective 4.3 - Improve professional development practices District-wide for all District employees to support equity and operational effectiveness from 2021-2025.

Action: (2021-2022) 2nd Phase, ABA Approval of the Paralegal Program

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Collect, review, and document all materials according to ABA standards.

Leave Blank: Continued Action

Implementation Timeline: 2020 - 2021, 2021 - 2022

Leave Blank:

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Identify related course/program outcomes: Associated with District Objectives 2.2, 2.4, and 3.2

Person(s) Responsible (Name and Position): Pura Cordero, Paralegal adjuncts, Jesse Wilcoxson

Rationale (With supporting data): At present, there is not a college in the surrounding local area offering an ABA approval program. However, the demand for students to graduated from an ABA-approved program is growing as a requirement for employment.

Priority: Medium

Safety Issue: No

External Mandate: Yes

Safety/Mandate Explanation: Though the paralegal program approval is optional, it does improve employment state-wide for graduates and has been recommended by the COS Law Advisory Committee *** see attached documents

Update on Action

Updates

Update Year: 2020 - 2021

09/25/2020

Status: Continue Action Next Year

This action remains as an action for assessment of the program.

After reviewing the ABA approval guidelines, the projected approval visit will be delayed by at least one academic year.

Due to administrative changes and the inconsistency of availability of paralegal adjunct instructors, the ABA application process is on a temporary hold until the dean is able to review the ABA guidelines and regulations.

Impact on District Objectives/Unit Outcomes (Not Required): District Objectives - 2.2 - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate annually.

District Objectives - 2.4 - Increase Career Technical Education course success rates and program completion annually.

District Objective 1.1 - Increase overall enrollment by 1.75% annually.

Resources Description

Personnel - Classified/Confidential - The hiring of a permanent paralegal classified staff - 20 to 24 hours per week. The paralegal program as well as, to some degree, the Pathway to Law School program is seeking a permanent position of a classified staffer. (Active)

Why is this resource required for this action?: The need for a classified staff member is paramount to the viability of the program. Since the program has only one faculty member, the amount of duties and responsibilities placed on one faculty has increasingly untenable. The goals of the program coupled with meeting the district's objectives directly correlate with the need to have a classified staffer, who would provide and maintain administrative communications with faculty, adjuncts, students, and with data collection. Without a permanent hire - not grant-funded - of a classified staffer, the program will remain stagnant and be negatively impacted in terms of growth, outreach, and added services that cannot be met with only one faculty member.

Notes (optional):

Cost of Request (Nothing will be funded over the amount listed.): 33000

Related Documents:

[ABA Excerpts Program Review.docx](#)

[ABA paralegalguidelines2013.pdf](#)

Link Actions to District Objectives

District Objectives: 2018-2021

Program Review - Paralegal

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