

# Comprehensive Program Review Report



## Program Review - Paralegal

### Program Summary

**2023-2024**

**Prepared by:** Pura Cordero

**What are the strengths of your area?:** The Paralegal Program provides our local legal community with a well-educated pool of graduates. Students who successfully complete the program are ready to enter the field as valuable assets to their prospective employers. With that stated, the program has experienced an uptick in enrollment from last year and predicts a consistent enrollment in the future academic years. The strengths of the program are outlined below.

1. The Paralegal (Para) program is a hiring resource for many local attorneys. Unfortunately, due to a lack of resources for the program, i.e., a one-faculty program with no classified help, I can no longer provide attorneys with assistance with recruitment. Although I refer the various offices to COS's JobSpeakers, the feedback I am receiving is not optimistic. Users of the site/job board state it falls short of being helpful. When the Para program had a designated classified person, we were able to meet the needs of the law offices and, in turn, have the office reciprocate the help by opening their offices to paralegal student interns.

2. The employment indicators for the paralegal profession remain positive. Employment of paralegals and legal assistants is projected to grow 4 percent from 2022 to 2032. About 38,000 openings for paralegals and legal assistants are projected each year, on average, over the next decade. The mean annual wage is \$59,200. Locally, compared with the other regional colleges/district-wide within the Central Valley, COS graduates earn, on average, higher wages.

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 2022-2023, total 217 - an increase of 67 from the previous three-year assessment. That is impressive for a niche program, given the general COS downtick in enrollment numbers due to COVID-19.

4. The paralegal program strives to achieve an elevated level of success. The paralegal program is experiencing an uptick in enrollment and overall success rate. Last year's data for Fall 2022 reflects a 61% overall student success rate – face-to-face 82.50% and DI 46.67%, which is an increase from the Fall 2021 success rate of 55% – face-to-face at 67.39% and DI at 38.24%. The disaggregated data shows the following: Fall 2022 - 100 students enrolled, up 20 from the previous fall, with the gender breakdown of 78 females, 18 males, and 4 "unknown," which is an uptick in the Male identifier by 14. Spring 2023 data shows 99 students enrolled – 75 females, 20 males, and 5 binary/unknown. Compared to Spring 2022, the enrollment numbers disaggregate as follows: 67 students enrolled - 56 females, 10 males, and 1 non-binary. Retention and Success rates for Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 have increased: Fall 2022 Retention 83% and Success 61%. Compared to Fall 2021, retention of 82.5% and success at 55%. Spring rates: 2023 Retention at 94.95% and Success at 76.12%. Compared to Spring 2021: retention rate of 92.54% and success rate of 76.12%.

5. The retention rate for the paralegal program, in general, is still impressive. Although COVID became a factor in the spring of 2020, in 2019-2020, the program maintained a retention rate of 78%, In 2020-2021, 76%. In 2021-2022, 92.54%, and 2022-2023 it is at 92.54%. According to CCCC's data, the majority of student enrollments are under the age groups of 20-24 years of age and 30-34 years of age. It may speak to those students who are first-year college students and returning students, respectively. When looking at those categories along with all enrollees, ethnicity reflects the area's demographics. However, in terms of gender, disproportionately, the high enrollment numbers stem from students who identify as female. In reviewing Tableau's overall Business Division Awards and Recipients, the paralegal program awards (degrees and certificates) are only third to Bus Adm and Accounting within the Business Division. In terms of declared majors or degree tracks, Paralegal is 20 out of the 60 or 61 degrees/certificates offered at COS, with AS-RN being at 1.

6. I continue to remark on another aspect of the paralegal program's success rate, demonstrated or recorded in the data collection. A sizable number of students declare a paralegal major and then change to an AA-T in Law Public Policy and Social Science, which is transferable to a 4-year university, with the desire to pursue a bachelor's and possible law degree. Whereas the

AS paralegal degree core curriculum units are non-transferable. The paralegal program provides a direct and complimentary conduit to the Pathway to Law School program, which has a 100% matriculation rate to a 4-year university.

**What improvements are needed?:** It seems every year, I comment on the same issues. There is no need for me not to reiterate the various points that would help the program grow and build student enrollment. The program needs resources, namely a classified staffer or one additional faculty. I know the public sector is vastly different than the private sector. However, the basic functions remain the same. A program has no assistance in terms of human capital. Without resources, it will remain inert, as do I as a professional. Being only one individual attempting to promote the paralegal program as well as Pathway to Law School has become untenable. The weaknesses I face as the program director 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. It is professionally challenging not to have the ability to collaborate and strategize with a colleague who works within the same discipline on how best to enhance the curriculum and overall paralegal program. At present, paralegal classes and business law, Bus 018, which historically has one of 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. In turn, the program review process lies squarely on one faculty member's shoulders. The success or improvements of a program require more than one perspective. It is vital to have appropriate discourse and points of view when assessing a program's strengths and weaknesses, but it must come from someone who understands the discipline - the legal profession.

2. As noted in previous program reviews, 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. Simply getting adjuncts to submit a request for courses is a hurdle. The Business Division Chair and I have experienced issues with adjuncts failing to meet contractual deadlines, not submitting paperwork, or simply 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 limits student success. Adjuncts teach their assigned class and leave. They are not required to maintain office hours. Lastly, being the sole full-time faculty member for the program stifles professional development both laterally and vertically.

3. Far more important are the students and what is best for their success while at college and beyond. With no classified or another faculty member, the ability to offer the best learning experience for students is strained. I often meet with paralegal students beyond my office hours to help them in their study groups, zoom meetings, or whichever manner works for them. Students voice their frustration that there is no ancillary help on campus for the program - namely for any law class, business law, Law and Democracy, Legal Research and Writing, and other paralegal courses. On campus, paralegal students are not afforded the same resources as other majors, such as tutoring, and legal writing lab assistance. Although I have heard some on-campus state they worked at a law firm, things have changed, and the requirements of the profession have changed. I would think that part of student success "push" would be to provide requisite resources for students for all programs. Given the lack of resources and assistance in the paralegal program, a classified staff or the addition of a faculty member should be viewed as a necessity and not simply a resource.

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 (not for POST majors), 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.

5. Last, many paralegal students end up changing majors to a transferable degree, such as the LPPS / Pathway to Law School program, with a goal of being admitted into law school proceeding 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. Although last year's 2022-2023 Program Review noted a flattening of employment opportunities in the Tulare Country region, the newest data shows an uptick, which may stem from people retiring in the field, newly practicing attorneys, and out-of-the-area firms opening satellite offices within the Central Valley - all of which is good news for the program.

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 commission's 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 to the quality of COS' paralegal program and would open doors of employment opportunities 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 ensure 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 are in the process of being reassessed for the academic year 2023-2024. Previous academic year, the achievement rate superseded the targeted rate of 70%.

**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.

## Action: (2023-2024) Complete an in-depth assessment of curriculum standards

Complete an in-depth assessment of curriculum standards

**Leave Blank:**

**Implementation Timeline:** 2021 - 2022, 2022 - 2023, 2023 - 2024

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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:** Medium

**Safety Issue:** No

**External Mandate:** No

**Safety/Mandate Explanation:**

### Update on Action

#### Updates

**Update Year:** 2023 - 2024

10/12/2023

**Status:** Continue Action Next Year

Each year, the Paralegal Program assesses courses and curricula to ensure that the information disseminated to students is current with any changes in the law, as well as revising, adding, or deleting course material to remain aligned with the program's objectives.

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

**Update Year:** 2022 - 2023

09/19/2022

**Status:** Continue Action Next Year

The curriculum assessment is an ongoing, yearly review of COS's program course offering and curriculum in conjunction with the

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advisory standards and guidelines of the American Association for Paralegal Educators (AAfPE).

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

## Link Actions to District Objectives

District Objectives: 2018-2021
<b>District Objective 1.1</b> - The District will increase FTES by 1.75% over the three years
<b>District Objective 2.1</b> - Increase the percentage of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and Non-CTE) by 5 percentage points over three years
<b>District Objective 2.2</b> - Increase the number of students who transfer to a four-year institution by 10 percent over three years
<b>District Objective 2.4</b> - By 2021, Increase the percentage of CTE students who achieve their employment objectives by 5 percentage points
<b>District Objective 4.1</b> - Increase the use of data for decision-making at the District and department/unit level
<b>District Objective 4.3</b> - 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
<b>2013-2015: District Objective #1</b> - 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
<b>District Objectives - 2.2</b> - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate annually.
<b>District Objectives - 2.4</b> - Increase Career Technical Education course success rates and program completion annually.
District Objectives: 2021-2025
<b>District Objective 2.1</b> - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and non-CTE) by 5% from 2021-2025.
<b>District Objective 2.2</b> - Increase the number of students who are transfer-ready by 15% and students who transfer to four-year institutions by 10% from 2021-2025.
<b>District Objective 2.4</b> - 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.
<b>District Objective 4.1</b> - Increase the effective use of data and transparency in decision making at all institutional levels from 2021-2025.
<b>District Objective 4.3</b> - Improve professional development practices District-wide for all District employees to support equity and operational effectiveness from 2021-2025.

## Action: (2023-2024) Provide students with Instructional and Program Consistency in order to meet the standards of ABA and District Objectives for Student Success

Course curriculum to align the paralegal program with the requirements of the ABA

**Leave Blank:**

**Implementation Timeline:** 2019 - 2020, 2020 - 2021, 2021 - 2022, 2022 - 2023, 2023 - 2024

**Leave Blank:**

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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 142: Real Estate Law

Para 237: Family Law

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

**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 is at the forefront, and 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 to have paralegals with more formal education is to allow them to draft documents or represent clients, which, currently, only attorneys can 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:** Medium

**Safety Issue:** No

**External Mandate:** Yes

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

## Update on Action

### Updates

**Update Year:** 2023 - 2024

10/12/2023

**Status:** Continue Action Next Year

Currently, the Paralegal Program is implementing changes in some of its curricula. We have requested a new faculty hire, so the program can meet the ABA guidelines for program approval.

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

**Update Year:** 2022 - 2023

09/19/2022

**Status:** Continue Action Next Year

The paralegal program lost two adjunct instructors. However, we have hired additional adjuncts for paralegal and business law courses. Therefore, we are working collectively to ensure the needed objectives are being met for the individual courses and the program at large.

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

## Resources Description

**Personnel - Faculty** - Full-time Faculty to assist in building the program and teach the courses consistent with the objectives of the degree and profession. A Business/Paralegal faculty would provide the program with a more balanced, committed effort to ensure course objectives, assessments, and outcomes are being met. Adjuncts, as noted in the Summary, are not required to participate in Division meetings, are not participating in attending conferences, and can only teach a limited number of courses. A Business/Paralegal instructor will be able to teach the Paralegal courses, as well as

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numerous classes within the Business Division, which would reduce or fully eliminate adjuncts required for the program. In turn, unlike when I was hired, a new hire faculty would have the working knowledge of the program by having the ability to work alongside the current full-time faculty and help develop and/or restructure the program to align itself with the growing demand for higher-level professionals in the field of paralegalism. ABA guidelines require, at minimum, two full-time faculty members. Given that no other Business Division full-time faculty teaches any of the paralegal courses beyond myself, hiring a full-time faculty would bring back the program to equilibrium. Historically, the Paralegal Program has had two full-time faculty up until roughly 2008. The loss of Professor Faller, followed by the end of the tenure employment of Professor Reynosa, left the program with only adjuncts and no leadership to guide it for several years. I, too, will retire at some point in the future; it would be in the best interest of the students and the College to address the hiring issue now to ensure the ongoing success of the paralegal program. (Active)

**Why is this resource required for this action?:** The data collection and requirements of the ABA are enormous and, frankly, undoable without meeting the faculty requirements of the ABA guidelines.

**Notes (optional):** In reviewing COS's Master Plan 2015 -2025 Efficiency and Success of the Business Division (pp. 93 and 94), the data is very positive for the Paralegal Program. The Business Division encompasses the general classifications of disciplines as Acct, Bus, Comp, and Para. The successful course completion rate for paralegal is 69%, the highest in the Division, and the Statewide Successful Course Completion Rate of COS's paralegal courses is 72% the highest of the disciplines. I can only assume that with a new hire faculty member, the number of enrollments and success of the program would continue to exceed expectations and remain as one of the premier paralegal programs offered in the Central Valley.

**Cost of Request (Nothing will be funded over the amount listed.):** 155000

## Link Actions to District Objectives

District Objectives: 2018-2021
<b>District Objective 1.1</b> - The District will increase FTES by 1.75% over the three years
<b>District Objective 2.1</b> - Increase the percentage of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and Non-CTE) by 5 percentage points over three years
<b>District Objective 2.2</b> - Increase the number of students who transfer to a four-year institution by 10 percent over three years
<b>District Objective 2.4</b> - By 2021, Increase the percentage of CTE students who achieve their employment objectives by 5 percentage points
<b>District Objective 4.1</b> - Increase the use of data for decision-making at the District and department/unit level
<b>District Objective 4.3</b> - 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
<b>District Objectives</b> - 1.1 - Increase overall enrollment by 1.75% annually
<b>District Objectives</b> - 2.1 - Increase the number of students who are transfer-prepared annually.
<b>District Objectives</b> - 2.2 - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate annually.
<b>District Objectives</b> - 2.4 - Increase Career Technical Education course success rates and program completion annually.
District Objectives: 2021-2025
<b>District Objective 1.1</b> - The District will increase FTES 2% from 2021 to 2025.
<b>District Objective 2.1</b> - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and non-CTE) by 5% from 2021-2025.
<b>District Objective 2.2</b> - Increase the number of students who are transfer-ready by 15% and students who transfer to four-year institutions by 10% from 2021-2025.
<b>District Objective 2.4</b> - 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.

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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: 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, 2022 - 2023

**Leave Blank:**

**Leave Blank:**

**Identify related course/program outcomes:**

**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:**

### 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 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 - 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.