

Comprehensive Program Review Report



Program Review - Paralegal

Program Summary

2020-2021

Prepared by: Pura Cordero

What are the strengths of your area?: The paralegal program offers various benefits and advantages 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 of the attorneys in the local legal community. Although the program is understaffed, the program continues to gain credibility within the student body and the legal community.
2. College of the Sequoias Paralegal program is in the unique position of being one of few institutions to offer a degreed paralegal program. In turn, COS continues to meet the personnel demands of the local legal community in filling paralegal / legal assistant vacancies in various private law practices as well as government entities.
3. The program remains relevant with positive indicators. 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. Students obtaining an AS degree are in a much better position for career growth within the legal field. *See repository
4. The paralegal program strives to achieve a high level of success with last year's data reflecting a 78% student success rate. The disaggregated success data shows a slight decrease of 4.8% in Hispanic success rate, which may be attributable to students identifying as multi-ethnic, a 22.9% increase in Multi-Ethnicity, and 3.4% in White.
5. The retention rate for the paralegal program is 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%.
6. Another overarching success of the paralegal program, which is not reflected in the data, is the number of students who catch the "legal bug" and decide to pursue a law degree. In doing so, students switch majors because the paralegal degree is a non-transferable degree. The students that are part of the Pathway to Law School program have a 100% transfer rate to a 4-year university.

What improvements are needed?: 1. One of the program's greatest strengths is also one of its greatest weaknesses: having only one faculty member with no support staff. 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. It is a challenge to maintain a cohesive curriculum, which is necessary in order 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 Dean have personally 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 growth of the program; it limits the number of specialty courses offered, and it is, at times, professionally exhausting.

3. 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, e.g., high school educational outreach, marketing campaigns, community newsletter, paralegal students' surveys, have ceased for lack of support staff. I believe the business division will attest to the importance, effectiveness, and essential function the classified staff member played within the division and in assisting students, especially when I was on emergency leave spring of 2019. In turn, having a dedicated classified staffer allowed me to concentrate on substantive program matters rather than keeping up with

housekeeping issues.

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, administrative law, that are considered 'specialty' courses are important in broadening the students' marketability, skill set, and creating a more robust program curriculum.

5. Last, many of the 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 2019-2020. The achievement rate supersedes the targeted rate of 70%. The overall achievement is 78% with a retention rate of 79%.

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: (2020-2021) Complete an in-depth assessment of curriculum standards

Complete an in-depth assessment of curriculum standards

Leave Blank:

Implementation Timeline: 2020 - 2021

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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

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

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.

Action: (2020-2021) 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

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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

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

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

Action: (2020-2021) Ongoing expansion of the Paralegal Internship

Increase the number of worksites and participants in the paralegal internship program if allocated additional resource, i.e., part-time classified staff.

Leave Blank:

Implementation Timeline: 2019 - 2020

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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. However, the number of students is increasing, but the number of worksites remains stagnant. As more students enroll in the WEXP, the program needs to meet the demands for internships in order for students to have real-life experience when they complete the program and begin seeking employment opportunities.

Priority: High

Safety Issue: No

External Mandate: No

Safety/Mandate Explanation:

Update on Action

Updates

Update Year: 2020 - 2021

09/25/2020

Status: Action Discontinued

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

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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

District Objectives: 2018-2021

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

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 - 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: (2020-2021) Marketing Campaign to Increase Enrollment

Market the paralegal program through marketing tools, e.g., paralegal brochure, 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: 2019 - 2020, 2020 - 2021

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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 a decline 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: 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

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.

Resources Description

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Personnel - Classified/Confidential - Permanent hire of a part-time classified staffer to aid on the paralegal program, as well as the Pathway to Law School program. (Active)

Why is this resource required for this action?: This resource request is a continuum and additional reasoning for a part-time classified: The strides of both the Paralegal program and Pathway to Law School directly correlates with the added assistance of a classified staffer. When the Paralegal Program had a grant-funded part-time classified staffer, the program increased overall enrollment. The loss of the classified has been greatly felt. A designated classified is instrumental in scheduling and coordinating with faculty, adjuncts, students and outside affiliates in our efforts to promote COS' Paralegal Program/Pathway to Law School. The paralegal program, Pathway to Law School Program, and the business division as a whole heavily relied on the classified employee, while I was on leave, to help facilitate various aspects of the programs. Since grant-funding has expired, the loss of the classified staffer has been widely felt by the paralegal and pathway programs. In turn, none of the student workers are trained in paralegal studies. It is critical to have a classified that has a working knowledge of the law field and the ability to understand the needs of internship worksite demands. In addition, the Pathway to Law School has a symbiotic relationship with the paralegal program, which requires classified support staff to maintain records, contact students, schedule campus tours, assist in presentations. More so, hiring a classified that can aid in the navigation and leveraging of social media to promote the paralegal program

Notes (optional): Please reference the Document Repository, 2018-2019 program review, which provides detailed information on the strides the paralegal program was undertaking in student recruitment and expansion of the program.

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

Related Documents:

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

Link Actions to District Objectives

District Objectives: 2018-2021

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

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

Action: (2020-2021) 2nd Phase, ABA Approval of the Paralegal Program

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

Leave Blank: Continued Action

Implementation Timeline: 2020 - 2021

Leave Blank: 10/30/2015

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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: High

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

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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. This became even more apparent in my sudden and unforeseen leave of absence in Spring 2019. If not for the classified staffer, the program, as well as the business division, would have suffered hardship in maintaining the program functional. Since the program has only one faculty member, the amount of duties has increasingly become untenable. The goals and strides of the program directly correlate with the need to have a classified staffer in providing and maintaining administrative communications with faculty, adjuncts, students and data collection. Without a permanent hire of a classified staffer, the program will be negatively impacted in terms of growth, outreach, and added services that cannot be met with only one faculty member.

Notes (optional): At present, the grant-funded position terminates December 2018. The request for a permanent classifies and the augmentation of hours to full-time stems from the great needs presented for both the paralegal and Pathway to Law School programs. Both programs are symbiotic with the objective being student success in the legal field.

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

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

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.

