

PL-1001: INTRODUCTION TO THE PARALEGAL PROFESSION

Cuyahoga Community College

Viewing: PL-1001 : Introduction to the Paralegal Profession

Board of Trustees:

January 2023

Academic Term:

Fall 2023

Subject Code

PL - Paralegal Studies

Course Number:

1001

Title:

Introduction to the Paralegal Profession

Catalog Description:

Introduction to the practical aspects of working within the paralegal field. Instruction includes the legal status of paralegals, career opportunities for paralegals, legal ethical constraints, sources of American law, an overview of the U.S. legal system, possible career settings for paralegals, and paralegal skills, including organizational skills and attention to detail. Students are encouraged to begin professional development, including membership in paralegal organizations. A significant portion emphasizes the importance of legal writing.

Credit Hour(s):

3

Lecture Hour(s):

3

Requisites

Prerequisite and Corequisite

ENG-1010 College Composition I, or concurrent enrollment; or ENG-101H Honors College Composition I, or concurrent enrollment.

Outcomes

Course Outcome(s):

Delineate the legal status of paralegals in relation to attorneys and the ethical constraints placed on non-attorneys.

Essential Learning Outcome Mapping:

Civic Responsibility: Analyze the results of actions and inactions with the likely effects on the larger local and/or global communities.

Objective(s):

- a. Define career opportunities for paralegals and the paralegal's role in assisting attorneys and the public.
- b. Adhere to the ethical standards which govern the law profession, particularly those which define solicitation, communication, safekeeping of client property, confidentiality, conflicts of interest, and the unauthorized practice of law.
- c. Apply the various ethical codes promulgated by paralegal organizations.

Course Outcome(s):

Identify and comprehend the various sources of American law, the branches and roles of the United States legal system, and legal settings of paralegals, including law firms and governmental agencies.

Objective(s):

- a. Apply and use common law, case law, statutory law, and administrative rules and regulations.
- b. Define and distinguish the organization, operation, and roles of the United States, State of Ohio, county courts, and municipal courts, with emphasized instruction in e-filing of court documents and researching of dockets within the court systems.

- c. Explain the organizational structures and procedures that are utilized by law firms and governmental agencies which impact the professional paralegal.

Course Outcome(s):

Perform tasks commonly required of entry-level paralegals, including tasks requiring organizational skills and attention to detail, emphasizing basic legal writing skills, as instructed through sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, outlining, document development, and proofreading, along with basic oral communication skills as they relate to interviewing of clients and witnesses.

Essential Learning Outcome Mapping:

Oral Communication: Demonstrate effective verbal and nonverbal communication for an intended audience that is clear, organized, and delivered effectively following the standard conventions of that language.

Written Communication: Demonstrate effective written communication for an intended audience that follows genre/disciplinary conventions that reflect clarity, organization, and editing skills.

Objective(s):

- a. Practice interviewing and investigative skills, appreciating the communication process relative to the paralegal/client relationship.
- b. Identify and analyze the legal elements pertinent to tort and contract causes of action.
- c. Compose and format legal documents, including integrating correct grammar in speech and writing, applying correct punctuation, categorizing parts of speech, designing well-constructed sentences, and applying proper verb tenses.
- d. Organize and prepare properly drafted legal documents through organizing logical outlines, composing documents from outlines, and proofreading the documents to correct grammatical and punctuation errors.
- e. Perform basic factual discovery and legal analysis which are incorporated into basic pleadings and legal documents.

Course Outcome(s):

Commence a professional development strategy which will involve researching various occupations within the paralegal field and exploring the usefulness of joining paralegal professional organizations.

Objective(s):

- a. Research and develop a fluid career plan, through inquiry into various fields of law, various sizes of law firms and agencies, and identify the skills and attributes, necessary to succeed in a given paralegal career.
- b. Research local and national paralegal associations, defining the benefits of their membership.

Methods of Evaluation:

- a. Class participation
- b. Oral presentations
- c. Research projects - Legal
 - i. Perform research on law firms and associated Ohio Supreme Court information regarding an attorney.
 - ii. Perform research on skills necessary for a paralegal using Cuyahoga Community College's MyPlan software, identifying required skills for paralegal positions, the coursework offered by the Paralegal Program to satisfy these required skills, and the various certification examinations offered by paralegal organizations to assist a paralegal in their career development.
 - iii. Research and create a client intake form, an agreement for services form, and a conflict of interest check for a fictitious client in an identified civil or criminal matter. Demonstrate proficiency of e-filing a new case through the e-filing software of the Paralegal Studies program and perform a conflict of interest check through the conflict of interest database of the Paralegal Studies program.
 - iv. Create questions for an initial client interview and demonstrate proficiency in interviewing clients through a video demonstration. Identify possible communication and confidentiality scenarios which would cause an ethical infraction in representing the client. Create an investigation plan for assisting the client in the civil or criminal matter chosen.
 - v. Research law firms or entities that the student would like to interact with as a paralegal. Identify the skills needed for this interaction. Conduct additional research on a legal entity and document the information regarding this entity.
- d. Quizzes
- e. Research projects - Writing
 - i. Using law firm letterhead, write a letter to a prospective paralegal regarding the necessary skills to be a successful paralegal. The writing must not contain contractions, sentence fragments, grammatical, or typographical errors.
 - ii. Using an interoffice memorandum template, write an essay pertaining to the career plan the paralegal student hopes to undertake. The student will identify organizations, entities within the college, and professionals who will assist the career path ascribed. The writing must not contain contractions, sentence fragments, grammatical, or typographical errors.

- iii. Create outlines of factual scenarios and legal issues. The student will then convert the outline into Interoffice Memorandums which demonstrate cohesion and paragraph transitions, utilizing the paragraph writing instruction provided. The writing must not contain contractions, sentence fragments, grammatical, or typographical errors.
- iv. Using law firm letterhead, the student will demonstrate mastery of letters to clients, including an informational letter and a demand letter. The writing must not contain contractions, sentence fragments, grammatical, or typographical errors and will demonstrate the use of active voice and parallelism in writing.
- f. Homework assignments
- g. Written examinations

Course Content Outline:

- a. The paralegal profession
 - i. Paralegal schooling options
 - ii. Admittance into the program
 - iii. Course requirements/electives
 - 1. Associate of Applied Business
 - 2. Post-Degree Certificate
 - 3. Practicum options
 - iv. National and local associations
 - v. Qualifications and skills needed
 - vi. Paralegal specialties
 - vii. Regulation/licensing of paralegals
 - 1. Pros and cons
 - 2. Certificate vs. certification
- b. Paralegal environments
 - i. Paralegal employment options
 - 1. Large and small law firms
 - 2. Corporations/businesses
 - 3. Government agencies
 - 4. Freelance and independent paralegals
 - 5. Other opportunities
 - ii. Law firm organization
 - iii. Law firm procedures
 - 1. Filing procedures
 - 2. Billing procedures
 - iv. Professional development
 - v. Creating short-term and long-term career goals
 - vi. Locating potential employers
 - 1. Paralegal Program
 - 2. Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association
 - 3. Major Legal Services
 - vii. Professional etiquette
- c. Ethics and professional responsibility
 - i. Codes of ethics for paralegals
 - 1. National Association of Legal Assistants
 - 2. National Federation of Paralegal Associations
 - ii. Ohio Rules of Professional Conduct
 - 1. The unauthorized practice of law
 - 2. Advertising and solicitation
 - 3. Communication
 - 4. Confidentiality
 - 5. Conflicts of interest
 - 6. Competence
 - iii. Pro bono opportunities
- d. Overview of the legal system
 - i. Federal and state of Ohio court systems
 - ii. Sources of law
 - 1. Constitutions
 - 2. Statutes
 - 3. Cases

4. Regulations
5. Rules
- iii. Criminal vs. civil law
- iv. Substantive vs. procedural law
- v. Basic civil procedure
 1. initial pleadings
 2. discovery process
 3. paralegal's role
- vi. Basic legal concepts
 1. Elements of a tort
 2. Elements of a contract
- e. Paralegal skills
 - i. What do paralegals do?
 1. Locate and interview witnesses
 2. Calendar and track important deadlines
 3. Organize and maintain client files
 4. Conduct legal research
 5. Draft legal documents
 6. File legal documents with the court
 7. Summarize witness testimony
 8. Coordinate litigation proceedings
 9. Attend legal proceedings
 - ii. Paralegal skills and attributes
 1. Analytical skills
 2. Communication skills
 - a. Reading skills
 - b. Speaking skills
 - c. Interpersonal skills
 - d. Writing skills
 3. Computer skills
 4. Organizational skills
 5. Ability to keep information confidential
 6. Professionalism
 - iii. Legal Writing
 1. Sentence construction
 2. Grammar
 3. Punctuation
 4. Persuasive writing versus informative writing
 - a. Active speech versus passive speech
 - b. Parallelism
 5. Organize and outline
 6. Compose a paragraph from an outline
 7. Write an interoffice memorandum from an outline
 8. Write a letter to a client
 9. Format legal documents
 10. Document drafting- overview of documents drafted by paralegals from complaints to settlement
 11. Drafting specific basic litigation documents (i.e. settlement workup, witness statement, affidavit)
 - iv. Analysis
 1. Factual analysis
 2. Legal analysis
 3. Looking for details
 - v. Communication skills
 1. Dealing with clients/witnesses
 2. Dealing with law office personnel
 3. Interviewing techniques

Resources

John M. Scheb; Hemant Sharma. *An Introduction to the American Legal System*. 5th ed. New York:Wolters Kluwer, 2020.

Roger Leroy Miller and Mary Menzinger. *Paralegal Today: The Legal Team at Work*. 8th ed. New York: Cengage, 2022.

Orlik, Deborah K. *Ethics for the Legal Professional*. 8th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.:Pearson, 2014.

Goldman, Thomas F. and Henry R. Cheeseman. *The Paralegal Profession: The Essentials*. 5th ed. Pearson, 2017.

Currier, Katherine A., Thomas E. Eimermann, M Campbell. *Introduction to Paralegal Studies: A Critical Thinking Approach*. 7th ed. Aspen Law, 2021.

Gawain, Arthur. *The Paralegal's Guide to Professional Responsibility*. 5th ed. ABA Book Publishing, 2019.

Therese A. Cannon and Sybil Taylor Aytch. *Concise Guide to Paralegal Ethics*. 5th ed. Aspen Publishing, 2019.

Bevans, Neal R. *Introduction to Law for Paralegals*. 3rd ed. Aspen Publishers, 2014.

Scaros, Constantinos. *Learning About the Law*. 3rd ed. Wolters Kpuwer, 2008.

Majka and Bingham. *Introduction to Legal Writing for Paralegals*. Prentice Hall, 2016.

Charrow, Veda R., Myra K. Erhardt, and Robert B. Charrow. *Clear Effective Legal Writing*. 5th ed. New York: Aspen, 2013.

Mignon Fogarty and Erwin Haya. *Grammar Girl Presents The Ultimate Writing Guide for Students*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2019.

Strunk, William. *The Elements of Style*. 5th ed. Massachusetts: Allyn Bacon, 2016.

Resources Other

National Association of Legal Assistants: www.nala.org

National Federation of Paralegal Association: www.paralegals.org

The American Alliance of Paralegals: <http://www.aapipara.org/>

American Bar Association, Center for Professional Responsibility: http://www.abanet.org/cpr/mrpc/mrpc_toc.html

American Association for Paralegal Education www.aafpe.org

Cleveland Association for Paralegals www.capohio.org/ (<http://www.capohio.org/>)

Key: 3628