

Paralegal Studies Advisory Committee

Minutes: October 12, 2018

Meeting Facilitators:

Jesse Raskin and Maria Segarra

I. Call to order

Committee Members in attendance: Daniela Guillen, April Herrera, Genneviv Herald, Roy Kilian-Miles, Federico Kluss, Jesse Raskin, Maria Segarra, Michelle Shores

II. Updates

A. ABA approval. Jesse commended the Advisory Committee for their hard work during ABA site visit. Per Jesse, ABA approval was the result of a commitment to student success from faculty, staff, students and the Advisory Committee. In the ABA report, the site team noted how cohesive the program is and how those who are connected to the program are consistently thinking about how to advance the program to benefit the students. Jesse also addressed questions regarding the practical implications of the ABA approval, such as whether the diploma issued at the end of the school year would indicate that the program is ABA approved.

B. Justice Corps internships. Jesse announced that the program has collaborated with Justice Corps Bay Area to develop internship opportunities among paralegal students with the local county court. This internship will begin in 2019.

C. ABA recommendation: Maria reminded the members of the ABA recommendation to seek to increase the number of paralegal managers and the attorney as members in the Advisory Committee. Barbara and Daniela indicated that they may have recommendations and will forward them to Jesse and Maria.

III. Discussion of Assessment Results

A. 2018 Employer Survey

1. Background: Last year, the program surveyed a broad group of local legal employers (approximately 550 employers) and had already implemented some changes based on the survey results. Earlier this year, in Spring term, we considered conducting

a focus group of employers. After consulting with PRIE, we realized that a focus group may not be the best format and it may not be practical to request busy practicing attorneys and legal managers to come to campus for a two-hour focus group. The program decided to administer a focused survey instead. We invited local employers who may have had some familiarity with the program through program students or alums to participate in the electronic survey and to provide their input.

2. Key Results:

- a) Almost all of those who had responded has had contact with program students or graduates. Most of the employers who had worked with students or graduates provided positive feedback regarding their experience.
- b) When asked to rank a number of legal skills, employers ranked litigation support and language fluency as most important.
- c) When asked to identify the single most important skill, the top response was organizational skills and attention to detail, followed by emotional intelligence (e.g. curiosity to learn, grit).

3. Discussion. The Committee provided comments and feedback regarding the employer survey results. April highlighted the importance of procedural law knowledge and research skills as well as the necessity of being flexible and organization. She noted how she has had to switch from being a paralegal to a solo practitioner to a small firm. The switch entailed having to adjust to providing support to multiple attorneys in the firm. The Committee also discussed how the instructors could incorporate course activities intended to develop organizational skills and attention to detail. Michelle noted how some big law employers incorporate a hands on test as part of the interview and in this test, each applicant is required to organize the material in a logical way. Jesse also answered questions regarding course sequencing and noted the need to balancing our open access college system with ensuring that advance courses are sequenced appropriately.

4. 2019 Plan. For 2019, the program plans to interview a handful of local legal employers to get more detailed and deeper insights regarding what they look for in an entry-level legal professional.

B. 2017 Survey of Graduates

1. Background: In Fall 2017, the Program surveyed those who have recently graduated. We received 13 responses (72 percent response rate).

2. Key Results: All of those who responded rated the program well. And, all except one stated that the program prepared them well for paralegal work. Some graduates recommend including more hands-on tasks as part of the curriculum and incorporating more field experience such as a visit to the Law Library and a trip to the courthouse. Six out of the nine graduates currently employed (at the time survey was administered) worked in the legal field.

3. Discussion. The Committee made suggestions regarding future graduate survey questions. One suggestion made pertains to salary. Instead of asking for annual salary range, ask for hourly rate instead since the majority of paralegals would likely be employed hourly employees. That way, the hourly rate would be easier to compare, regardless of whether the graduate is working part-time or full-time.

4. Implementation of Key Results: The Program has begun to implement feedback from the graduate survey. For example, in Maria's LEGL 240 course this term, she took her students to a tour of the San Mateo County courthouse and of the Law Library.

C. Recent Surveys of Current Students

1. Background: We conducted two recent surveys of current students: one in Fall 2017 and another one in Spring 2018.

2. Fall 2017 Survey: Key Results. Over 90 percent of students found the topics, activities, and learning materials in their respective courses relevant. And over 90 percent stated that the activities and materials are appropriately challenging. The same proportion self-reported that they developed relevant legal knowledge and skills in their courses. Students also provided feedback regarding their instructors: virtually all students viewed their instructors as competent and welcoming.

3. Spring 2018 Survey: Key Results. With regarding to course topics, activities and learning materials, we received substantially the same feedback from students. One ABA recommendation from the site visit pertains to assessing the effectiveness of alternative delivery courses. In the Spring 2018 survey, we added questions about the hybrid courses. PRIE staff design the survey in a way that only students in hybrid courses would be asked these alternative delivery questions. We also added questions regarding Saturday courses and textbooks. The responses show that the students in hybrid courses were able to locate the readings, found the online discussions useful, and were able to submit the assignments online and review the feedback from their instructor. These responses indicate that the structure of the hybrid courses were effective for the students.

4. Discussion. The Committee made suggestions regarding student survey and hybrid courses. One suggestion is to ensure that each student enrolled in a hybrid course understands the format and technology requirements for the course by having the instructors detail this information explicitly in the beginning of the semester.

5. Plan for student survey for current term. This Fall term, we will survey students in December. We will keep the hybrid questions so we can continue to assess the effectiveness of these courses.

IV. Action Item: The Program plans to submit the names and work affiliation of the Committee members to the college marketing department and this information will be published in the campus website. Maria stated that the information will not include contact details such as phone numbers and email addresses. Jesse reminded members to inform program staff if they wish their names or work information to be removed from the list for publication.

V. Program Service Coordinator

A. The ABA has recommended that the College provide more staffing for the program. In response, the College is currently recruiting for a part-time program services coordinator for the paralegal program. Jesse shared the job posting with the members and requested the members to forward the posting to individuals whom they believe would be a good match and would add value to the program.

VI. Meeting Adjourned

Next Advisory Committee Meeting:

Date: Spring 2019
Time: 3:00 PM
Location: Skyline College (Room: TBD)