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PARALEGALS CONNECT NEWSLETTER

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Paralegals Connect: Who We Are

"Our Groups are Accelerating Paralegals, Future Paralegals, and Future Attorneys Worldwide"

Paralegals Connect was established in 2013 and we have grown significantly since that time. We now have five groups which are all dedicated to providing valuable information and support to succeed in the legal industry. Our groups provide support at every stage of your paralegal career.

Currently, our groups have approximately ***15,700+ combined active members worldwide***. We have become the largest paralegal networking group worldwide!

Paralegals Connect
https://www.facebook.com/groups/ParalegalsConnect
Our first and largest group created for paralegals and paralegals-in-the-making to interact with other paralegals worldwide and provide valuable information to succeed in the paralegal industry.

Paralegals Connect: Study Group
https://www.facebook.com/groups/ParalegalsConnectStudyGroup
A group created for those attending a paralegal school or studying for a Paralegal Certification Exam where you can post questions about your legal studies.

Virtual/Freelance Paralegals Connect
https://www.facebook.com/groups/Virtual.FreelanceParalegalsConnect
A group designed for Virtual and/or Freelance Paralegals and those intending to break free of their 8-5 to go out on their own.

Paralegals Connect Employment Board
https://www.facebook.com/groups/PCEmploymentBoard
A group designed for those seeking legal employment or internships, and for those seeking to hire legal professionals for their firm.

LSAT Connect
https://www.facebook.com/groups/LSATConnect
A group designed for those studying for the Law School Admission Test.

Meet our Affiliates

Paralegals Connect is always looking for Affiliates that can offer our paralegals, legal assistants, future paralegals, and future attorneys the skills and services to help them succeed in their legal careers. We strive to provide information to the latest resources, education, and cost-effective opportunities that will enhance the skills, knowledge, and competencies of our members.

To Become an Affiliate with Paralegals Connect please contact Crystal@ParalegalsConnect.com for additional information or visit http://www.paralegalsconnect.com/*become-an-affiliate.html.*

We would like to thank our Affiliates because they are the ones that make it possible to print and distribute our Newsletter to our members, various paralegal schools throughout the US, and large firms throughout the US.

Becoming an Affiliate with our groups offers world-wide visibility to approximately 15,700+ combined group members in the legal industry.

****Only official Affiliates are permitted to advertise within our Groups.***

Center for Advanced Legal Studies

Center for Advanced Legal Studies was founded in 1987 to provide education and training for those seeking to enter the legal profession as a paralegal. The **Paralegal Certificate** program provides students with essential paralegal skills and includes courses such as Introduction to Law and Ethics, Legal Research and Writing, Interviewing and Investigation, Corporate and Business Law, Civil Procedure, Computers and the Law, Family Law and Personal Injury. Students can choose from on-campus morning or Saturday courses, or attend 100% online.

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CENTER FOR ADVANCED LEGAL STUDIES

Those seeking a more comprehensive preparation for their paralegal career, or those seeking their first college degree, can continue to the Associate of Applied Science Degree Paralegal program which includes additional paralegal electives such as E-Discovery, Oil and Gas, Intellectual Property, and Immigration Law. Academic general education courses round out this paralegal degree program.

www.Paralegal.edu

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DeVincenzo Consulting provides virtual paralegal/administrative services, legal software training, and operations consulting to attorneys and boutique law firms. DeVincenzo Consulting also offers life and business coaching for paralegal entrepreneurs looking to start or scale their virtual paralegal business. **info@DeVincenzoConsulting.com**
www.facebook.com/DeVincenzoConsulting/

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Virtual Paralegal Services | Career Coaching

Meet our Admins

Meet the Women Behind the Scenes

These are the busy women behind the scenes of Paralegals Connect. We are working hard to make these professional successful groups, and creating ideas to help paralegals, future paralegals, and future attorneys become a legal success!

Crystal Cornett

Founder of Paralegals Connect. Crystal has been a Paralegal since 2004. She earned her first Paralegal Certificate from University of Houston in March 2006.

Crystal received the degree of Associate of Applied Science from the Center for Advanced Legal Studies and her second Paralegal Certificate in 2010. She is a member of the Lambda Epsilon Chi National Honor Society for Paralegal / Legal Assistant Studies (LEX).

Crystal currently practices Real Estate Law in Houston, Texas. Crystal also serves on the Paralegal Advisory Committee (PAC) for Center for Advanced Legal Studies.

Eunice Colón

Eunice has been a paralegal since 2003. Eunice has a bachelor's degree in Psychology and in Spanish from the University of Houston.

Eunice is also the owner of a hand-made jewelry business, and she has extensive experience in creating and running Facebook Groups and websites.

Eunice currently practices Real Estate Law in Houston, Texas.

Kira Muren

Kira Muren joined the Paralegals Connect admin team in 2018. She has been working as a civil litigation paralegal in Frederick, Maryland since 2013.

Kira has her associate degree in Paralegal Studies and is working on her Bachelor's in business administration at Frostburg State University.

In addition to work and school, Kira also currently serves on the Paralegal Advisory Committee (PAC) for Frederick Community College.

Amanda DeVincenzo

Amanda DeVincenzo is a freelance virtual paralegal and career coach. Her 20+ years of experience spans paralegal, administrative, and technical roles in the private and public sectors. She has worked with such agencies as Oregon Judicial Department and U.S. Attorney's Office.

Amanda earned her A.S. and Certificate in Paralegal Studies from Southwestern College. She also holds her M.A. in Public Policy & Administration from Northwestern University, B.A. in Sociology from University of Oregon, and A.A. in Journalism from Southwestern College.

Currently, Amanda runs her own virtual paralegal services business and offers career coaching for paralegal entrepreneurs looking to start or scale their virtual business.

2020 Vision for Paralegals: Forecast, Formal Training & Finding Work

By: Tami Riggs

Texas has the fourth highest employment rate for paralegals and legal assistants in the United States.[1]

Dallas-Ft Worth and Houston Metropolitan areas, representing six major US cities, account for the highest level of jobs in the profession in Texas.

The outlook for paralegals and legal assistants is not just good, it's great! According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Projections Central, employment in the field is expected to grow much faster than average, compared to other occupations, with a 15% increase projected nationwide through 2026.[2] Prospects for legal roles in Texas are even higher, with a projected annual increase of 22%. This means more jobs, more positive employment opportunities and an optimistic outlook for the profession.

A paralegal is a legal support staff member who is not a lawyer but is qualified to perform substantive legal work, with the exception of certain restricted legal activities. Despite popular belief, paralegals are not secretaries who only perform administrative tasks. The role of a paralegal spans many functions such as researching legal precedent, performing investigative work on cases and preparing legal documents. Job descriptions for paralegals are diverse and will vary by firm, practice area and industry. However, one thing is certain: education and training are fundamental for paralegal success. According to the National Federation of Paralegal Associations, "…the role of higher education and formal paralegal education is increasingly important in the growth and development of the paralegal profession."[3]

Paralegals can obtain qualifications through a formal training program like those available at Center for Advanced Legal Studies (CALS). CALS teaches to the highest standards and offers paralegal programs on campus in Houston, Texas and online nationwide. CALS also conferred more paralegal credentials in 2016-2017 than ***any*** other accredited program in Texas and ranked fourth in the United States.[4] With 30+ years of experience specializing in the education and training of paralegals nationwide, CALS is uniquely positioned to help you begin or advance your career.

How you start working in the paralegal profession depends on many factors. CALS has posted blogs on a variety of topics: paralegal program length and non-accredited short-term programs, overcoming "no experience obstacles", the importance of relationship building, effective writing and communication, and other skills necessary to ensure success; available at www.paralegal.edu/blog. Bottom line - be prepared!

The following recommendations will increase your chances for success:

1. Complete your formal education from a fully accredited program that meets industry recommended standards and contains at least 24 semester hours of skills-based paralegal training. Maintain strong attendance and good grades. Law firms often correlate academic achievement with ability.

2. Hone skills that will enable you to perform legal tasks. Foster good personal habits. Maintain ethical standards. In order to be successful as a paralegal the American Association for Paralegal Education (AAfPE) recommends that paralegals demonstrate computer proficiency and a common core of legal knowledge and competencies which includes critical thinking, organization, research, writing, verbal communication, and interpersonal skills.[5]

3. Intern or volunteer with a legal entity to gain legal experience.

4. Network with career counselors, paralegal organizations and recruiters to strengthen your connections and build contacts.

5. Draft a resume that will wow your future employer. Make details of your background compelling but don't embellish or exaggerate. Be able to explain breaks in employment or other gaps in your history.

6. Present yourself as someone who wants a legal position. This means showing up on time for the interview dressed appropriately with a resume that reflects your training and background. Ask questions so that you understand the role, the firm, it's organizational and cultural structure and how you would be a good fit for the job. Finally, mail a thank you note after the interview.

Not only is the prospect for more jobs apparent, but as new practice areas also evolve to address emerging issues, a variety of new and different jobs are anticipated on the legal landscape. The scope of work for paralegals is expanding and the outlook is bright. Paralegals have been in high demand and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future.

Tami Riggs is Director of Outreach and Career Services at Center for Advanced Legal Studies in Houston, Texas. She has an extensive and varied professional background that spans criminal justice, paralegal education, and international school marketing and communication. Her career has been guided by a focus on developing strategic partnerships that facilitate school growth and student opportunity. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice from Texas State University. Connect with Tami on LinkedIn.

[1] Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Paralegals and Legal Assistants, on the Internet at https://www.bls.gov/ooh/legal/paralegals-and-legal-assistants.htm (visited June 06, 2019).

[2] https://projectionscentral.com/Projections/LongTerm *(visited July 03, 2019).*

[3] National Federation of Paralegal Associations, "Paralegal Responsibilities", on the Internet at https://www.paralegals.org/files/Paralegal_Responsibilities.pdf *(visited July 03, 2019).*

[4] U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. (2016/2017).

[5] American Association for Paralegal Education, "Paralegal Students", on the Internet at https://www.aafpe.org/paralegal-students *(visited July 03, 2019).*

PARALEGAL.EDU
CENTER FOR ADVANCED LEGAL STUDIES

Pursue your interest in law and become a paralegal.

Center for Advanced Legal Studies (CALS) is a private, nationally accredited paralegal college. Established in 1987, our focus is providing exceptional paralegal education to our students and dedicated career services for our graduates.

Specialized Paralegal Training

"100 percent of our resources are devoted to paralegal education and training."

What is a Paralegal?

+ Paralegals and legal assistants perform a variety of tasks to support lawyers, including maintaining and organizing files, conducting legal research, investigating the facts of a case, interviewing clients and witnesses, and drafting documents to file with the court.
+ Paralegals and legal assistants are found in all types of organizations, but most work for law firms, corporate legal departments, or government agencies.

Your Success is Our Priority

+ Expect smaller classes and more attention from instructors.
+ Courses are designed to educate and prepare graduates for gainful employment.
+ Practicing attorneys and experienced paralegals teach law specialty courses.
+ Financial Aid is available for those who qualify. (**FAFSA School Code: 026047**)

Attend Class Online or On Campus

+ **Online** - Attend your paralegal program in a highly interactive online classroom where students can see and speak with their professor and classmates in real-time. Attend classes on your computer, laptop, smartphone, or tablet. We bring the classroom to you.

+ **On Campus** - If a classroom setting is your preference, we've got you covered. Classroom instruction provides traditional in-person lecture and increased opportunity for teamwork and collaboration. Weekday and Saturday classes are available.

Secure Employment after Graduation

+ **Career Services** - We offer a multitude of services to help graduates begin their careers.
+ **Resume Review** - Professional guidance in preparing your resume.
+ **Employer Connections** - Leverage our relationship with hundreds of law firms and employers.
+ **Externships Available** - Gain real world experience before you graduate.

Accreditation, Memberships & Associations

Council on Occupational Education
Higher Education Coordinating Board
Texas Workforce Commission
Texas Veterans Commission
American Association for Paralegal Education
National Federation of Paralegal Associations
National Association of Legal Assistants
Paralegal Division of the State Bar of Texas

Curriculum

Paralegal Certificate
Essential Paralegal Skills
8 months . 24 semester hours
$9,300

If you already have a college degree or are working toward your first college degree, this program is perfect for you!

Core Courses
Introduction to Law and Ethics
Interviewing and Investigation
Legal Research and Writing
Corporate and Business Law
Civil Procedure
Computers and the Law

+ 2 Electives chosen from
Personal Injury*
Family Law*
Intellectual Property
Real Estate

* *Recommended for those continuing on to AAS Degree Paralegal Program*

★★★

AAS Degree Paralegal Program
Comprehensive Paralegal Skills
22 months . 62 semester hours
$23,550 *($14,350 after Paralegal Certificate)*

Our Paralegal Degree Program includes all 24 semester hours completed in the certificate program plus an additional 18 to 21 semester hours of law specialty courses. These electives provide students with the opportunity to study some of the most interesting and exciting areas of law.

This program meets or exceeds the law specialty requirements suggested by various state and national paralegal authorities.

Core Courses *(included in certificate)*
Introduction to Law and Ethics
Interviewing and Investigation
Legal Research and Writing
Corporate and Business Law
Civil Procedure
Computers and the Law
Personal Injury
Family Law

General Education
English Composition I
English Composition II
General Psychology
American Government I
Introduction to Speech Communication
Anatomy & Physiology I

Advanced Electives
+ 6 Electives including Externship (7 w/o Externship)
Wills, Trusts and Probate
Criminal Law and Procedure
Real Estate
Intellectual Property
Immigration Law
E-Discovery
Advanced Civil Procedure
Advanced Research and Writing
Oil and Gas Law
Externship

Other Requirements: Business Math

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Interviewing Crystal Cornett, Founder of Paralegals Connect

By: Eric H. Happe

As of this writing, Paralegals Connect on Facebook has 10,375 members and is growing. Under the guidance of paralegal and group founder, Crystal Cornett, and a small group of dedicated site administrators, Paralegals Connect has grown rapidly since its founding in 2013.

Center for Advanced Legal Studies has a special fondness for Crystal and has enjoyed watching her group's development over the years. Recently, Crystal has added several companion groups that are also doing very well. Virtual / Freelance Paralegals Connect now has over two thousand members, as does the associated Paralegals Connect Employment Board. There are also groups dedicated to LSAT prep and student study groups.

I recently interviewed Crystal to learn more about her and her paralegal career path, and what led to the development and growth of Paralegals Connect. I think you will find her story quite compelling and motivating.

Crystal, can you tell me a little about yourself? Family, hobbies, interests?

Of course. I remarried in 2015 and we have a blended family with three kids; a 10-year-old daughter, sons that are 12 and 16, and three dogs. I absolutely love to travel, photography, and I really enjoy SCUBA diving. I have over 100+ logged dives. I also love to ride bicycles. I rode in the MS150 in 2017 and plan on doing it again someday.

It sounds like you like to keep busy! Were you working in another industry before becoming a paralegal?

For several years before becoming a paralegal, I worked as an accounting clerk performing accounts receivable and payable, invoicing, etc. for a few different companies.

When did you first know you had an interest in the law?

In 2003, I had a son as a single mother. I knew the minute he was born that I would need a better job to be able to support us both. After he was born, while looking through the newspaper searching for employment, I noticed that the salary range for paralegals was a lot higher than the accounting positions I was applying for, so it sounded like a win-win.

Ah, yes. Newspapers! Those were the days! When and how did you first become a paralegal?

I have been in the legal industry for 15 years now. My very first position was as a legal receptionist/accounting clerk for a solo practitioner at a family law firm in 2004. My past accounting experience was added value and helped me secure the position. While there, I prepared annual accounting reports for guardianships as well as took care of the firm's accounting needs. I also started learning paralegal duties as I tried to help as much as I could.

We see that a lot with our students. Many times, they find themselves in a supporting role in a law firm without having the benefit of paralegal training. In fact, many of our students are already working in a law firm when they enroll. Did you attend a training or educational program for paralegal studies?

Two years after starting my first legal position, the paralegal at that firm was let go. I really wanted her position and felt that I could perform her duties. However, I was told that the firm needed a more experienced and trained paralegal. I was very disappointed. So, almost immediately after I was declined her position, I decided to get a paralegal certificate from the University of Houston. Two short months later, in 2006, I graduated at the top of my class and earned my first paralegal certificate. As soon as the attorney learned that I had graduated with a paralegal certificate, I was promoted to paralegal at my first firm. Shortly thereafter, a teacher from University of Houston referred me to a wonderful downtown law firm practicing health law and I was hired as the firm's paralegal. I was with them for 6 years and learned so much.

In 2008, I wanted to venture into becoming a freelance paralegal so I could work from home and spend more time with my family. However, the University of Houston paralegal certificate program I had attended was a quick two-month program and I didn't feel that I had learned all the skills and knowledge I needed to be successful. I decided to become a student at Center for Advanced Legal Studies ("CALS").

After graduating from CALS in 2010 with my Associate Degree in Paralegal Studies, I felt I had the education and qualifications to work wherever I wanted. Immediately after graduating, my downtown firm offered me a pretty large salary increase to stay there, so I decided not to freelance after all.

Yes, you were a fantastic student! We don't designate valedictorians, but if we did you would have been ours. You had perfect grades in a really demanding program, was an Honor Graduate, and was inducted into Lambda Epsilon Chi (LEX). What was your favorite subject?

The skills that I have learned from CALS still help me every day in my career as a paralegal. I thought it was silly to learn how to shake someone's hand with a firm handshake in Interviewing and Investigation, but I still think of those moments in class every time I am introduced to someone new, or as I greet a new client at my firm.

I thought speech class was such an unnerving experience, but it has helped me a lot throughout my career, when interviewing, or when giving a graduating commencement speech. The legal research class, including how to use the bluebook and how to properly write citations, has helped me tremendously with litigation practice at my firm. I really enjoyed all my classes. It was a great experience.

That's very interesting. Developing good communication skills is vital to becoming a successful paralegal. Did you have any favorite instructors?

Most of the instructors at CALS were very impressive and they were all attorneys. I think that anything taught by Mr. Thomas Swanson or Mrs. Ziemnicki at CALS was my favorite subject. I see them both as such wonderful and thorough teachers who have taught me the most. I can still hear Mrs. Z today stressing about widow/orphan control, and I think of her every time I see other's botched legal work. (laughs) I believe that almost 10 years after I graduated, both teachers are still instructing at CALS!

Yes, they are indeed. Mr. Swanson is our Academic Dean and has been teaching at CALS since 1987. Mrs. Ziemnicki teaches a lot of classes online now, including Legal Research and Writing, and she loves the online environment. After taking more classes and subjects, in what areas have you been able to apply what you learned and the skills you gained?

In the past 15 years I have been employed by four firms. I have worked in family law, guardianships, elder law, health law, social security, heavy litigation in intellectual property and bankruptcy, and in real estate law.

So, on both the litigation and transactional sides? That's fantastic!

What do you like most about being a paralegal?

It's called practicing law because the laws and technology are always changing, so lawyers are always 'practicing', and to a certain extent so are paralegals. I enjoy learning new things every day. If there is anything I don't know, I enjoy researching it until I can figure it out. It becomes a personal challenge for me.

Is there anything you really don't like about being a paralegal? Any special challenges?

I think the things I like least about being a paralegal is a tie between working with difficult attorneys and the stress of having so many deadlines. However, if you cannot handle these two things, being a paralegal may not be for you. Sometime throughout your legal career you encounter or work with difficult attorneys, and probably miss one of those crucial deadlines. It takes a special kind of person to be reliable and tough-skinned, who can multi-task, handle working under pressure, deal with stress, remain professional, and be self-sufficient in different working environments. It's challenging but also very rewarding.

It can be a challenging profession indeed, but that is also what makes it so worthwhile. What do you think makes you a valuable paralegal to the attorneys in your office and your firm?

I think what makes me a valuable paralegal is that I can work independently, and I do not need reminders or micro-managing. I know what is due and I know it's deadline. I try to do as much as I can until I absolutely need to ask for additional instructions or directions. I enjoy a challenge, learning new things, and working under pressure and to deadlines. I also do whatever it takes to get the job done. If I am needed until 2 AM to prepare for a case, I will be there and wake up first thing in the morning to help with preparing for court. I have never once in my career said that any job was beneath me, or that I do not get paid to do that task. I think it is this level of dedication that has helped me the most thus far in my profession.

You are so right about that. Attorneys appreciate those traits and knowing they can rely on you. The best 'ability' is 'availability', right? You become very valuable to them and they won't want to lose you.

How important are interpersonal or 'soft skills' for paralegals?

Interpersonal or 'soft skills' for paralegals are definitely employable skills. You must be able to speak to and treat people, including attorneys, clients, coworkers, other legal staff, court staff, etc. in a professional manner in order to be taken seriously in this profession. Communicating professionally and working together as a team are valuable skills that every paralegal will need to know in order to have a successful career. Always stay extremely professional, especially when dealing with attorneys where there is a conflict of personalities. There may be times during your paralegal career where you may work with attorneys who are less than professional in the way they speak or treat you. Attorneys deal with a lot of stress and most of the time have very heavy caseloads. Always be respectful and sensitive to your firm's clients who are coming to you for assistance.

That is great advice. It is sometimes difficult to convey this in a classroom setting, but it is a lesson quickly learned once working in the field.

How important are computer or technical skills? Can these skills be learned?

Computer skills and technical skills are a definite MUST for a paralegal. I believe that any skill can be learned it you put your mind to it, and if you apply yourself and remain determined. I once applied to a position where I needed to type over 75 words per minute. At that time, I could not type that fast. In one weekend, I sat and practiced a typing test and learned to pick up my typing speed to exceed 75 words per minute. If you are personally lacking in any skill, do all that you can to learn that task and make it a strength. I have learned a lot from watching YouTube videos, including learning advanced Microsoft Office skills, which is another must for paralegals. Watch as many tutorials regarding advanced Microsoft Word and Excel skills as you can including creating a mail merge, creating table of contents, table of authorities, red lining, track changes, formatting, inserting page numbers, learning about the rulers and tab markers, reveal codes, etc., because those are the skills that you will need on a daily basis.

The better you are at these skills, the easier your job will be and the more time you will have to learn new things in your career.

It looks like you are ready to teach our Computers and the Law course! When can you start? What advice would you give someone who has an interest in the law and wants to become a paralegal?

You can be very successful in this career if you take the time to apply yourself, act and speak professionally, and are willing to accept advice. You will most likely need to start at or near the bottom in any firm and work your way up. You will need to be willing to learn new things daily and research answers on your own. You will get out of your paralegal career exactly what YOU put into it. You can choose to be a paralegal that merely answers the phone and files, or you can continue to study, learn, be dedicated, and push your paralegal career to the limits. A paralegal can do almost anything an attorney can do except for a few tasks such as representing a client in court, undertaking representation, setting legal fees, or giving legal advice. Therefore, you can study the law, perform legal research, draft and edit legal documents, meet with clients, prepare for depositions, hearings and trials, and perform most other tasks that are often performed by attorneys. It is also always a good idea to attend CLE's (Continuing Legal Education) in the area of law in which you specialize. Always try to leave after meeting people by making some contacts and with a good reference, as those are the people that your future employers will likely be contacting. I have been in the legal profession for 15 years and I can say that I am proud that I was able to take care of myself and my kids during the times that I was a single mom. I did it all with only a paralegal certificate, associate degree, dedication, and the willingness to learn.

I began this article referencing a certain Facebook group; you may know it, called Paralegals Connect. How did you get the idea and how did it come into existence?

Six years ago, in 2013, I created Paralegals Connect. My goal was to create a community of paralegals worldwide to connect with, learn and grow from. Since then, we have created five groups which are all dedicated to providing valuable information and support to succeed in the legal industry.

We've been watching it grow and expand. What are some of the ways Paralegals Connect helps working or future paralegals?

Our five Paralegals Connect groups are designed to assist you in every stage in your legal career. Our groups benefit those deciding to become paralegals, those in paralegal school who need study support, those searching for employment, and those seeking virtual or freelance information. Support for experienced paralegals includes study groups designed to help further their legal careers by preparing to take a paralegal certification exam or the LSAT exam. Currently, our groups have approximately 14,000+ combined active members worldwide. I believe we have become the largest paralegal networking group in existence! (beams)

Our groups were created for paralegals, future paralegals, and future attorneys to interact with others, provide valuable information to succeed in the legal industry, rant and rave about the legal profession, share networking tips and ideas, share and collaborate about how to become a freelance/virtual paralegal, job search assistance, and assistance in finding paralegals for your firm.

I am a member of Paralegals Connect too! If someone wants to join Paralegals Connect, what should they do?

The easiest way is to visit www.ParalegalsConnect.com which contains all the information about Paralegals Connect. You can also sign up to receive our quarterly newsletter at:

http://www.ParalegalsConnect.com/Newsletter.html

*You can join our **Facebook** groups at:*

Paralegals Connect
https://www.facebook.com/groups/ParalegalsConnect

Paralegals Connect: Study Group
https://www.facebook.com/groups/ParalegalsConnectStudyGroup

Virtual/Freelance Paralegals Connect
https://www.facebook.com/groups/Virtual.FreelanceParalegalsConnect

Paralegals Connect Employment Board
https://www.facebook.com/groups/PCEmploymentBoard

LSAT Connect
https://www.facebook.com/groups/LSATConnect

That is fantastic, Crystal. We wish you much continued success in your career and with Paralegals Connect. You recently became a member of CALS' Paralegal Program Advisory Committee. What do you enjoy about being a member of the PAC?

In 2017, I was honored to be asked to join CALS' Program Advisory Committee. I enjoy meeting with the other professionals in the PAC to help with the CALS curriculum and establishing performance standards. I think I am helpful in this position since I am a past student of CALS and have firsthand knowledge of the curriculum, and because I know what skills I was lacking while working in the paralegal industry. I also hear from other paralegals in Paralegals Connect to understand what is needed in a paralegal school.

We are very happy you decided to join our Program Advisory Committee. What's on the horizon for you and your career?

Once my kids are a little older, I would like to start a freelance paralegal business that I have been dreaming about for years. Hopefully, I can then work in many different areas of law from the comfort of different beach chairs around the world in between my scuba dives. (laughs)

In the meantime, my household depends on a steady income and health insurance. For the past five years, I have been working at a law firm in the Galleria focusing on real estate law and working with homeowners' associations; namely enforcing deed restrictions for communities. I really enjoy this position and the attorneys I work with, and I'm learning something new every day. I hope to stay and grow with this firm for many years to come.

Thank you so much Crystal for your time and willingness to share details about yourself and your journey toward becoming such a valuable member of and leader in the legal community. I'm certain many current and aspiring paralegals will appreciate your advice and encouragement.

We wish you much continued success in your paralegal career and with Paralegals Connect. We look forward to seeing you at our next Program Advisory Committee meeting in December.

Interviewing Crystal Cornett, Founder of Paralegals Connect (Continued)

About the Author

Eric H. Happe is Director of Distance Education at Center for Advanced Legal Studies in Houston, Texas. He is a graduate of the Paralegal Certificate program and worked as a paralegal for six years before returning to Center for Advanced Legal Studies in various administrative capacities. Eric managed the development of online paralegal programs at CALS and works closely with faculty and staff to provide students with quality paralegal education and training opportunities both on campus and online.

This interview is also posted at: https://www.paralegal.edu/blog/cals-alum-crystal-cornett-and-paralegals-connect

Please feel free to connect with him on **LinkedIn**

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"No, I said 'paralegals'."

Job Searching 101: 5 Things to Do When Unemployed

By: Laura Preusse, M.S.

Everyone knows being unemployed can be a difficult, depressing time. One must continue to press on and seek that next opportunity. But in the meantime, here are five ideas to keep your mind and wellbeing sharp.

1. Engage in Your Higher Power

Whatever higher power fills your inner core, embrace it! If you don't have a higher power, try meditation or any form of relaxation techniques such as breath focus, body scan, guided imagery, yoga, or any other programs that ease stress and relax.

2. Find Temporary Forms of Income

Sign up with a temp agency. This may bridge your financial gap and possibly open opportunities for full-time work. Go through your home and reorganize and clean. Then, utilize social media or eBay to sell items. Consider joining Lyft or Uber if these are available opportunities in your area. Another option to head your career in the direction of a virtual paralegal investigate micro job sites. Micro job sites allow you to sell your skills in return for payment but take a portion of your fee. (Please read the terms of service and legal agreements.) Keep in mind, there are a lot of micro job sites, but here are a few of the top well-known sites:

- Fiverr https://www.fiverr.com/
- SeoClerks https://www.seoclerk.com/
- Gigbucks http://gigbucks.com/

3. Focus on YOU!

Exercising, eating healthy, and organizing your life are some ways to focus on yourself without a hefty price tag. Focusing on yourself in these three areas can offer valuable motivation and determination to offer your next employer a better you and a healthier lifestyle!

4. Focus on Others!

Volunteering is a remarkable way to utilize your time when you are in a job search. Additionally, you can highlight your volunteer experiences on your resume. This also is a great way to fill an employment gap on your resume. Another benefit is that it can help you build your network to acquire job leads as well as help you stay optimistic during your job search.

5. Learn Something!

Knowledge does not have to be expensive. Increase your skills by enhancing your current talents. Research job support ministries in your area. Normally, larger churches and non-profit organizations hold classes on interviewing techniques, resume writing, salary negations, and so on. Also, while you attend these, you can strengthen your network by building relationships with others that may offer support or job leads.

Another option to learn is to take courses online for FREE! You can add these learning outcomes to enhance your resume. Some of these online courses are taught through prestigious institutions such as Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania, and Princeton University. For a one-time fee, they may even offer a certificate. The two most popular are:

- EDX: https://www.edx.org
- ClassCentral: https://www.classcentral.com/subject/law

GCF Global (https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/) is one of the best sites to refresh your computer skills as well as employability skills. It is free, user friendly, and easy to follow.

If more education is in your future, Kahn Academy https://www.khanacademy.org/ is top notch to get the brain functioning towards embracing higher education. From offering refresher courses from high school to college preparation courses and much more, Kahn Academy is the way to go for FREE.

Don't let your unemployment situation define you! Look at this time in your life as a stepping stone to your next big opportunity and most importantly focus on making a better you, because you are selling YOURSELF to your next employer.

About the Author

Laura Preusse, M.S. is an Educator and Freelance Career Coach.

Ms. Laura Preusse has a background in public education and currently applying to doctoral programs in the field of Adult Learning and Workforce along with presently working as a freelance resume writer and career coach. Also, she is active on two nonprofit boards, LIT College Tours and Houston Area Resource Council for Texas Youth, helping underprivileged youth overcome obstacles to improve through education and employment opportunities.

You may connect with Ms. Preusse via LinkedIn.

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Two-Step Statutory Analysis

Step One: Listing the Elements, Step Two: Written Analysis

By: Michael Sullivan

Many times, on legal essay scenarios, students are asked to interpret and apply one or several statutes to a set of facts provided. Typically, this is a very intimidating process for students and entry level paralegals to undertake. With a little practice, utilizing this simple two-step process will prove very helpful.

Step One: Pulling the Elements

The first part of the process is breaking down a statute by its separable elements. Statutory elements are the key parts of a statute that must be satisfied to logically conclude the statute at issue has been violated. We can practice this by using a typical robbery statute.

Robbery - Taking property of another, except a motor vehicle, from another or the presence of another through force or the threat of force.

Seems relatively simple, but there are actually several elements included in just this short statute. Equally important for effective interpretation is identifying what are referred to as statutory terms and connectors.

Terms and connectors are what separate the various elements of a statute. In paying special attention to these two parts of the statute while reading it, one can easily highlight the **elements** and **terms and connectors** as follows:

Robbery - Taking property of another, except a motor vehicle, **from another or** the **presence of another** through the **threat of force or** the **use of force**.

Outlined another way:

1. Taking property of another, except a motor vehicle
2. From another, or
3. Presence of another
4. Through threat of force, or
5. Use of force.

Having the elements separated makes it whole lot easier, particularly in a stressful testing environment, to apply the facts presented to the elements of the statute and begin to formulate logical conclusions. Now you are ready to commence step two-written analysis.

Step Two: Written Analysis

This is where it so often goes wrong for many. I've seen countless students perfectly identify the elements of a statute only to see their application of the elements to a set of facts go up in flames. This problem typically boils down to a lack of organization and practice. Simply put, written legal analysis and logical reasoning is not something learned overnight!

One of the most well-established methods taught for statutory analysis is the IRAC method. Here's how it works:

- **Issue:** What is the problem presented? Present an introductory sentence or two that states the issue(s) that you will be discussing in your response. Often this is phrased as a "whether" question.
- **Rule:** What is the law/statute that is provided to you? State the rule of law that governs the particular issue(s) in the factual scenario presented.
- **Analysis:** How does the statute impact or effect the client's case? Explain in detail how the statutory language determines the outcome given the specific key facts presented. Key facts are those facts, if changed, cause the court to reach a different result. Keep in mind a logical reasoning essay question often will present several immaterial facts otherwise known as "filler" or "distractors." Make sure you spend the time to digest the scenario fully. This is the most important part of the essay response and one where you must outline your thoughts in detail prior to writing.
- **Conclusion:** What your answer to the most likely result will be. Use a few sentences to conclude the issue you are analyzing and conclude the answer or move onto the next issue. Do not leave the reader wondering what the answer is.

Practicing with a Simple Example:

Facts Presented:

On Friday, October 10th, John Smith, 33, was at the Good Times Tavern having dinner at the bar. The time was approximately 8:30 p.m. when Mr. Smith received his bill. The bartenders name was Jimmy Sullivan. When the bartender was making change for another customer, Mr. Smith noticed that the register was left partially open. Once the bartender turned his back to talk to another customer, who was named Jenifer Jones, John opened the cash register the rest of the way and took $1.00 from the drawer. Using the sample Robbery statute above, analyze any potential culpability.

Issue:

Whether or not John Smith committed robbery, which requires taking property from a person or presence of another through force or the threat of force when he opened the cash register drawer and removed $1.00.

Rule:

Robbery requires the taking of property, except a motor vehicle, from another or presence of another through force or the threat of force.

Analysis:

First, in the facts presented, the Defendant, John Smith, took money from the bartender's register while he was looking the other way. Since John Smith took money, it seems likely that he took the property other than a motor vehicle of another thereby satisfying the first part of the statute. The statute does not indicate a certain monetary amount must be taken to constitute robbery. As such, the fact that only $1.00 was taken is irrelevant to the question of guilt.

Second, since the money was taken from the drawer and not the clerk himself, a court would likely conclude that the money in this scenario was not taken "from another." However, the statute further states that the taking property from the presence of another can equally satisfy it. Accordingly, analysis about whether this taking took place within the presence of another would be appropriate. The facts, as presented, do not indicate specifically how close the bartender was during the taking. Rather, they only indicate that the he was looking the other way. As such, based on the facts it's not possible to determine conclusively whether or not such activity would be classified to have taken place "within the presence of another."

Third, while the "within the presence of the person" element might be difficult to draw a conclusion on, the other necessary elements of the statue regarding "force" or the "threat of force" were likely not satisfied. More specifically, there are no facts presented that indicate that the Defendant, John Smith, used any force to open the register where the money was located. Indeed, the fact are clear that the bartender had left the cash register open while making change for another patron. The register did not need to be broken into with physical force to gain access. Additionally, the facts do not indicate that John Smith threatened any force on the bartender or anyone else in the vicinity in order to succeed in taking the money from the drawer.

Conclusion:

While the Defendant, John Smith, did take property and did so arguably within the presence of another, he did not accomplish the taking through force or threatening the use of force. As such, John Smith would likely not be guilty of Robbery.

Final Point:

Take note of the unnecessary facts that were not part of the answer. For example, the time of the act (8:30 p.m.) was not a key fact. Likewise, the bartenders name or the name of the other customer at the bar was not material to the answer. Accordingly, none of them should have been included in the answer. In more complex scenarios, students often get tripped up and/or sidetracked by focusing on immaterial facts in the matter presented.

Don't forget that statutory interpretation is a skill set that takes a long time to develop. It takes a whole lot of practice and patience. The most effective way to improve your interpretation and analysis skills is to take statutes and practice this two-step process over and over again. You will find that your efficiency at finding the key elements and subsequently analyzing them based on a set of facts presented will improve significantly!

About the Author

Michael K. Sullivan, Esq. is an Associate Professor and Program Director of Paralegal Studies. Mr. Sullivan has also served as an educational consultant assisting Paralegal Studies programs in securing and maintaining American Bar Association (ABA) approval status. Mr. Sullivan has close to twenty years of paralegal teaching experience in the following areas: Contracts, Litigation, Torts, Constitutional Law, Criminal Law & Procedure, Legal Research & Writing, and certification exam prep. Mr. Sullivan is one of the founders of The Paralegal Education Group, LLC, a learning platform that provides online certification exam review courses and study resources.

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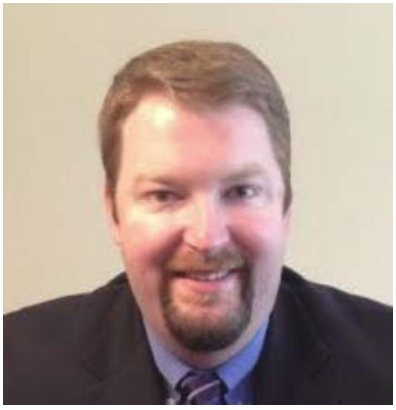

Paralegal Billing Basics for Employees & Freelancers

By: Amanda DeVincenzo, MPPA

One of the hottest topics among our members is about paralegal billing. This article will help you understand why it is a vital function for employees and freelancers, and how to stay ahead of the billing curve.

Billable Hours are the time you spend working on a client's case that will be charged to that client based on the contractual rate. **Bottom line, it's what brings home the bacon for us all!** Billable time generates income for law firms. Non-billable time adds to overhead costs and ultimately cuts into profits, so there is tremendous pressure for paralegals to satisfy billing requirements. Get used to tracking all the time you spend on every task, for every client file you touch. Improper and inaccurate billing practices can not only cost revenue but can get you and your supervising attorney into hot water!

There are key differences between billing as an employee and as a freelancer. First, you need to understand how workers are classified[1]:

> Employees are in-house paralegals employed for wages, salary, and benefits. Your employer controls your work, what tasks will be done, and how they'll be carried out.
>
> Freelancers are self-employed paralegals who are paid based on their contract with clients. You control your own billing procedures and negotiate your own rates.

Paralegals bill their time much like attorneys bill their time. The ABA Model Guidelines for the Utilization of Paralegal Services provides that attorneys may delegate to paralegals most tasks normally performed by attorneys, except those restricted to non-attorney staff by law.[2] The U.S. Supreme Court further determined that paralegal time is compensable and a cost-effective way to deliver services to clients.[3]

Paralegal services must meet certain requirements to be compensable. For firms to lawfully bill for paralegal services, billable work must be legal in nature and be completed by a professional with proper education, training, and work experience in the field. As a general rule, substantive legal work is billable and administrative or clerical work is usually not.

> Billable (Substantive) Tasks may include factual investigation, legal research, preparation of legal documents, contact with clients, and assisting in discovery/trial.
>
> Non-Billable (Admin/Clerical) Tasks may include making copies, organizing files, speaking with potential clients, billing, invoicing, internal meetings, and training.

Profitable paralegals create more revenue than it costs to employ them.[4] Attorneys bill out substantive work at the paralegal's rate to save their clients' money. Remember, this is what your time is billed at and *not* what you earn per hour. You may be a bit peeved to learn that your firm likely bills your time at a rate (at least) triple your hourly wage. The upside is that you're not responsible for paying overhead costs like your employer.

Freelancers are responsible for setting and negotiating their own rates for substantive, administrative, technical, and other services. Unlike employees, you can negotiate for higher rates to supplement *your* costs of doing business. Most freelance paralegals bill hourly for their services, although a fixed rate is often used for document packages like in bankruptcy or social security cases.

Billing Entry is an account of what you are doing on each case file. A quick Google search provides tons of sample billing entries. Keep in mind, every attorney and firm bill differently. Check with your supervising attorney to make sure your billing entries are in accordance with office policies and fee agreements.

Billing Requirements are billable hours a paralegal is required to bill to client files. Firms may set the number of billable hours paralegals are expected to produce, which for our members ranges between 1,500 and 2,000 hours per year. Requirements are often broken down by month or week to carryover slower seasons. A major downside is that often there is no time left for activities that don't directly generate revenue, like training and supervision.

Best Practices for Paralegal Billing

(1) Implement Standard Billing Practices

- Set billing expectations at the outset, including billing requirements
- Establish standard procedures for tracking and entering your billable hours
- Create written policies outlining terms for billing rates, type, increments, schedule, and form

(2) Track & Record Your Time Promptly

- Develop habit of tracking and recording time immediately after completion
- Stay on top of billable hours to meet any billing requirements
- Add time to billing software at end of day, week, or billing period

(3) Craft Detailed & Specific Billing Entries

- Be accurate, thorough, and concise when writing descriptions
- Provide clear description of tasks completed, by whom, and for how long
- Itemize tasks and corresponding time as single time entries (NO block billing)

(4) Send Timely Invoices to Clients

- Provide a consistent billing schedule, monthly is most common
- Don't let excessive time pass between billing your time and sending invoices
- Use invoicing software to simplify and automate procedures

(5) Review & Update Billing Practices Regularly

- Run regular reports to improve billing process
- Revise procedures as needed
- Review ethical considerations to ensure all laws and guidelines are properly followed by staff

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Amanda DeVincenzo is a freelance virtual paralegal and career coach with over 20 years of professional paralegal, administrative, writing/editing, and technical experience. She has worked in Contracts, Family, Immigration, Employment, Real Estate, Criminal, Civil Litigation, Post-Judgment Collections, and Bankruptcy. She has also published numerous legal articles as well as white papers for legal software companies.

Amanda started DeVincenzo Consulting to provide virtual paralegal services to solo attorneys and boutique law firms across the U.S. She branched out and now shares her knowledge and expertise with fellow paralegal entrepreneurs as a life and business coach. In her coaching programs, she helps her clients set achievable goals, explore career options, increase knowledge and skills, develop productive marketing strategies, and stay motivated in pursuing their dream career.

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[1] Internet Revenue Service. "Independent Contractor Defined." Retrieved from https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/independent-contractor-defined *(visited October 29, 2019).*
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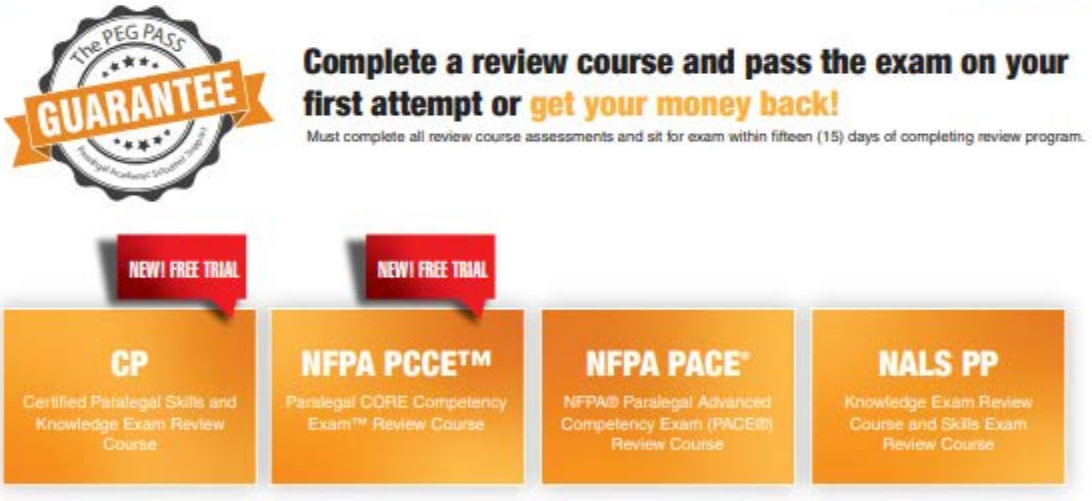

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