

# Instructional Program Review Narrative Report

## Paralegal Studies

<b>1. College:</b>	<b>Merritt College</b>
<b>Department or Program:</b>	<b>Paralegal Studies Department</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>February 17, 2010</b>
<b>Members of the Instructional Program Review Team:</b>	<b>Linnea Willis, Lawren Ward, Jerry Skomer, Dr. Stacy Thompson</b>

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### **2. Narrative Description of the Discipline, Department or Program:**

The Paralegal Studies Program offers a Paralegal Certificate or AA in Paralegal Studies. The Paralegal Studies Program, previously known as legal assisting, was first offered at Merritt College in 1974. The Paralegal performs various legal tasks and provides staff support for attorneys in a law office or legal environment, including conducting research, drafting legal documents, preparing attorneys for trial/depositions and other legal tasks. The mission of the Paralegal Studies program is to:

- Provide students with the education, skills, knowledge and training to enable the students to perform as top level Paralegals in the legal community
- Educate and train students to draft legal documents, conduct legal research and perform other legal tasks
- Prepare students for the law office work environment and how to effectively communicate and interact with attorneys
- Provide students with a basic understanding of law and the legal profession, the state and federal court structures and the justice system
- Educate students in areas of substantive law, including Family Law, Criminal Law, Tort Law, Estate Planning and Probate Procedure, Legal Research and Business Law

The Paralegal Studies Department has been revamped over the last five years with the hiring of its new full time Instructor and Department Head Linnea Willis. As a result, the department has been reshaped and revitalized to reflect the current needs of the legal community. In addition, each of the Instructors in the Paralegal Studies Department work together as a team to ensure that the Program meets its intended Student Learning Outcomes, and continuously work to coordinate the curriculum and the flow of curriculum.

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### 3. Curriculum:

- ***Is the curriculum current and effective? Have course outlines been updated within the last three years? If not, what plans are in place to remedy this?***
  - Yes. The curriculum is current and reflects the needs of the legal community. Currently it is being evaluated and updated to ensure Paralegal students are prepared to meet the needs of the legal community. In addition, the Internship Program was developed in the last four years or so in order to give the students hands on experience in the legal field while obtaining their Paralegal Certificate. Each of the courses have been updated continuously to ensure Paralegal students are prepared for the legal community.
  - Yes. Most Paralegal course outlines have been updated within the last two or three years. There are just a few more classes that need to be updated. The Department is taking steps now to ensure those class outlines are updated by fall 2010.
  - Yes. The curriculum is effective. The curriculum has been significantly improved in the last five years to ensure that Paralegals are adequately prepared to perform as successful Paralegals in the field. The Paralegal students in the program are given hands on experience with various legal tasks that they actually will perform as Paralegals in the community – including performing legal research, drafting motions and other legal documents. Many former students and current attorneys and legal professionals have acknowledged that the Merritt College Paralegal Program provides the students with more writing and hands on experience than the competitors in the community. In addition, the Internship Program was developed within the last four to five years, and has further added to the Paralegals’ work experience and opening opportunities in the legal community.
  
- ***Has your department conducted a curriculum review of course outlines? If not, what are the plans to remedy this?***
  - Yes. Curriculum review of course outlines has been conducted for the last three to five years and will continue to be updated.
  
- ***What are the department’s plans for curriculum improvement (i.e., courses to be developed, updated, enhanced, or deactivated)? Have prerequisites, co-requisites, and advisories been validated? Is the date of validation on the course outline?***
  - Courses to Be Developed – The Paralegal Department Head (Linnea Willis) and its instructors are currently discussing further courses to develop in particular areas of law – some of the courses the departments are considering include but is not limited to: a Paralegal Studies Business Law class, Intellectual Property Law, Employment Law
  - Course Updating and Enhancement – The Paralegal Studies Department faculty have worked very hard as a team to ensure each class is updated and enhanced in order to meet the intended Student Learning Outcomes and enhance the development of the Paralegal students. This is a continuous process discussed at regular Department meetings.

- Prerequisites/Co-Requisite Advisories Validated – Yes, in conjunction with updating the course outlines, the prerequisite and co-requisite advisories have been updated. In addition, the instructors have been ensuring that students do not take the classes that require prerequisites. More work will be done to ensure the catalog and system are updated with the prerequisites and co-requisite requirements.
- ***What steps has the department taken to incorporate student learning outcomes in the curriculum? Are outcomes set for each course? If not, which courses do not have outcomes?***
  - The faculty in the Paralegal Studies Department have worked extremely hard to ensure that the Student Learning Outcomes are incorporated into the curriculum. First, the Paralegal Studies Department Head serves on the Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Committee and is very active in assisting the Paralegal Studies Departments and other departments with developing and incorporating their Student Learning Outcomes. In addition, Program Student Learning Outcomes have been developed, and each class has been aligned with the Program Learning Outcomes. Further, the Paralegal Department faculty have already done assessment of the Program outcomes, by assessing student work and whether or not the program outcomes are being met. The Paralegal Department faculty further have continuous discussion on how to improve teaching methods to ensure optimal student learning.
- **Describe the efforts to develop outcomes at the program level. In which ways do these outcomes align with the institutional outcomes?**
  - The Paralegal Studies Department has 5 very strong Program outcomes that align directly with the institutional outcomes. In addition, as stated above, the Paralegal Studies Department faculty have taken significant steps to ensure the program outcomes are being achieved, and continuously changing methods of teaching/projects to ensure the outcomes are met/to ensure optimal student learning.
- ***Recommendations and priorities.***
  - Update the remaining course outlines
  - Ensure each course outline also contains the Student Learning Outcomes addendum for each class
  - Continue to develop and evaluate Paralegal Studies curriculum
  - Continue assessment of program outcomes and course student learning outcomes

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#### 4. Instruction:

- ***Describe effective and innovative strategies used by faculty to involve students in the learning process. How has new technology been used by the department to improve student learning?***
  - Instructors use various effective and innovative strategies to involve students in the learning process, including guest speakers, demonstrative videos, requiring the students to participate in various hands on activities and projects, continuous use of the computer lab, taking them outside of the classroom to the Law Library and courtrooms, and various other strategies.
  - Students are exposed to various different teaching methods by the different faculty to involve students in the learning process, including but not limited to: collaborative projects, teamwork, presentations, using/conducting research using internet-based legal databases such as Lexis Nexis, contacting attorneys in the community, quizzes, assignments that involve actual assignments/projects Paralegals will perform as Paralegals in the legal community.
  - Technology is used to improve student learning – including overhead projectors, the use of a computer classroom to allow students to conduct online research and utilize legal programs such as billing/timekeeping programs and legal form programs.
  - Where appropriate, students are given assignments that require them to access Internet-based legal databases. These assignments require not only simple searches for various routine legal matters (e.g. finding specific legal statutes, forms, etc.) but also some modest legal research and analytical synthesis.
  
- ***How does the department maintain the integrity and consistency of academic standards within the discipline?***
  - The Paralegal Studies Department maintains its integrity and consistency of academic standards within the discipline by having regular meetings with all faculty to discuss teaching methods, to assist each other, and to ensure consistency/coordination between the courses.
  - Faculty also share course outlines and syllabi and coordinate assignments/projects as much as possible to ensure maximum student development and progress.
  
- ***Discuss the enrollment trends of your department. What is the student demand for specific courses? How do you know? What do you think are the salient trends affecting enrollments?***
  - The Paralegal Studies Department has grown significantly in enrollment in the last few years. In addition, the FTES and FTEF have increased such that the Paralegal Studies Department has become increasingly productive.
  - The current economy has had an effect on enrollment trends.
  - Student demands for certain courses has increased such that the Paralegal Studies has increased the enrollment caps for most of its courses and had to grow the equipment and seating in its classrooms.

- ***Are courses scheduled in a manner that meets student needs and demand? How do you know?***
  - Enrollment in the day sections have increased over the years.
  - As the Program enrollment continues to increase, more Paralegal classes will be need to be offered during the daytime.
  
- ***Recommendations and priorities.***
  - Increase the number and expand the variety of classes offered.
  - Optimize Course Schedule – class offering improvement, improve course offering schedule (times offered, online courses, summer courses)
  - Provide monies for Paralegal faculty to attend various legal professional conferences
  - Increase/improve regular contact with the local legal community to identify trends, developments such that students can be trained accordingly to meet the legal needs.
  - Technology – improve computers in classrooms, increase use of computers/technology in all classes, purchase more legal programs related to calendaring, billing, research, legal document programs etc.
  - Marketing/Increase enrollment – need marketing tools – website, brochures, train all Peralta Counselors re Paralegal program, participate in job fairs and career fairs etc.

**5. Student Success:**

<b>Student Retention Rate</b> <i>Students who do not withdraw or drop</i> <b>by Ethnicity</b>		
Ethnicity	Baseline Fall 04-07	Fall 08
African American	68%	63% (149)
Asian	78%	94% (35)
Filipino	75%	50% (4)
Hispanic/Latino	74%	68% (34)
Native American	50%	100% (3)
Other	35%	76% (17)
White	74%	78% (59)
Unknown	74%	84% (37)
<b>PARLG Average</b>	71%	72% (338)
<b>College Average: 72%</b>		

Student Course Completion Rate (SCCR) Students who receive grades A, B, C or Credit by Ethnicity		
Ethnicity	Baseline Fall 04-07	Fall 08
African American	58%	44% (149)
Asian	75%	86% (35)
Filipino	75%	25% (4)
Hispanic/Latino	64%	38% (34)
Native American	33%	100% (3)
Other	25%	53% (17)
White	67%	54% (59)
Unknown	63%	62% (37)
<b>PARLG Average</b>	62%	52% (338)
<b>College Average: 60%</b>		

Student Course Completion Rate (SCCR) Students who receive grades A, B, C or Credit by Gender		
Gender	Baseline Fall 04-07	Fall 08
Female	62%	53% (228)
Male	61%	54% (79)
Not Supplied	70%	42% (31)

- ***Describe student retention and program completion (degrees, certificates, persistence rates) trends in the department. What initiatives can the department take to improve retention and completion rates?***
  - The Paralegal Studies Department current retention rate was 72% as of Fall 2008, which is consistent with the Merritt College retention rate average of 72%.
  - The faculty have been working on more personal contact with the students, more understanding and patience with student issues/needs, and more receptive to determining the barriers that complete students from completing their certificate.
  
- ***What are the key needs of students that affect their learning? What services are needed for these students to improve their learning? Describe the department's efforts to access these services. What are your department's instructional support needs?***
  - Most students are working adults and many have children. As such, the full panoply of family support services – everything from babysitting to financial aid for textbooks is needed.

- Basic skills such as English (reading and writing), typing, oral communication
- Some students have minor to moderate learning disabilities. These students require moderate to intense psychological counseling and behavior modification.
- Members of the department are very familiar with the college's counseling services and often recommend students seek help there. The college does a good job supporting at-risk students.
- Various students already have undergraduate degrees and are taking Paralegal courses to prepare for law school. Paralegal instructors provide resources and advice to assist those students to get into law school while working on their Paralegal Certificate.
- ***Describe the department's effort to assess student learning at the course level. Describe the efforts to assess student learning at the program level. In which ways has the department used student learning assessment results for improvement?***
  - At the course level, the teachers have tests, quizzes, writing assignments, projects and various other assignments to assess student learning.
  - At the Program level, the Paralegal Studies faculty have regular meetings in which the department takes program outcomes and assesses the program outcomes on the course level – over multiple courses. The Paralegal faculty meet, assess and analyze the student work, and then discuss methods in which the faculty can improve teaching methods and increase student success.
  - The faculty in the Paralegal Studies Department have worked extremely hard to ensure that the Student Learning Outcomes are incorporated into the curriculum. First, the Paralegal Studies Department Head serves on the Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Committee and is very active in assisting the Paralegal Studies Departments and other departments with developing and incorporating their Student Learning Outcomes. In addition, Program Student Learning Outcomes have been developed, and each class has been aligned with the Program Learning Outcomes. Further, the Paralegal Department faculty have already done assessment of the Program outcomes, by assessing student work and whether or not the program outcomes are being met. The Paralegal Department faculty further have continuous discussion on how to improve teaching methods to ensure optimal student learning.
- ***Recommendations and priorities.***
  - Continue integrating program student learning outcomes and course level student learning outcomes into each class
  - Continued assessment of the program student learning outcomes and course level student learning outcomes, such that student learning is improved and faculty teaching is improved
  - Technology – improve computers in classrooms, increase use of computers/technology in all classes, purchase more legal programs related to calendaring, billing, research, legal document programs etc.
  - Marketing/Increase enrollment – need marketing tools – website, brochures, train all Peralta Counselors re Paralegal program, participate in job fairs and career fairs etc.
  - Ongoing relationships with students who have complete the program – feedback on additional skills needed once employed
  - Regular seminars regarding applying to law school/how to get into law school
  - Improve Community involvement in the Paralegal program –

- create advisory board
  - create more buy-in between the legal community and the Program
  - better determine the legal community's needs and make sure Merritt College Paralegal Department can serve those needs
  - identify community feelings towards the department, how it can improve, what the legal community needs from the paralegal students
  - Increase/Improve Internship Program – continue to grow it such that all students participate in the program prior to graduation, increase employers participating in program, improve placement of Paralegals in positions upon completion of certificate
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## **6. Human and Physical Resources (including equipment and facilities)**

- ***Describe your current level of staff, including full-time and part-time faculty, classified staff, and other categories of employment.***
  - There are two contract faculty in the Department (one full time) – Linnea Willis (1.0) and Jerry Skomer (0.6)
  - There are three adjunct faculty in the Department -
  - There are four African American faculty in the Department and one white faculty
  - The Paralegal Studies Department has no other staff or classified staff
  - The Paralegal Studies Department is in desperate need of a student assistant
- ***Describe your current utilization of facilities and equipment.***
  - Use of computer lab classroom P218
  - Use of P204 classroom for non-computer classes
  - The Paralegal Studies Department currently uses approximately 50+ computer stations, in addition to an overhead projector, a television, and a VCR player
- ***Are the human and physical resources, including equipment and location, adequate for all the courses offered by your department (or program)? What are your key staffing and facilities needs for the next three years? Why?***
  - The Paralegal Studies Department is in desperate need of a student assistant in order to provide support for Paralegal full time faculty, and support the growth and development of the Internship Program
  - New computers in P218
  - Technology – improve computers in classrooms, increase use of computers/technology in all classes, purchase more legal programs related to calendaring, billing, research, legal document programs etc.
- ***Recommendations and priorities.***
  - Hire student assistant
  - Technology – improve computers in classrooms, increase use of computers/technology in all classes, purchase more legal programs related to calendaring, billing, research, legal document programs etc.
  - Purchase a DVD player and an additional projector
  - Improve the use and functionality of P218 classroom to be more effective



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## 7. Community Outreach and Articulation

*For vocational programs:*

- ***Describe the department's connection with industry. Is there an Advisory Board or Advisory Committee for the program? If so, how often does it meet? Is the program adequately preparing students for careers in the field? How do you know?***
  - The Paralegal faculty have existing relationships with various law firms, legal aid clinics and other legal organizations.
  - At the moment, there is no Advisory Board for the program. Establishing one is a short-term goal. Paralegal faculty, as practicing attorneys, are sensitive to the field's needs and reliance upon Paralegals.
  - Paralegal Faculty all receive periodicals and industry trade magazines which help spot upcoming trends and problems.
  - Paralegal Faculty meet on a regular basis where needs, trends and improvements are discussed.
  
- ***Have students completing the program attained a foundation of technical and career skills? How do you know? What are the completion rates in your program?***
  - Yes, students completing the Paralegal Studies Program attain a foundation of technical and career schools through their schooling here in the Paralegal Studies Department.
  - Students are well prepared for actual work experience by giving Paralegal students real actual assignments, tasks and projects that they will be asked to complete as a Paralegal – such as drafting Memorandum of Points and Authorities, Motions, Declarations, Orders, legal forms and other legal documents. Students also are assigned various tasks that require them to perform legal analysis.
  - Students are well prepared if they complete the required and elective classes offered in the Paralegal program. The classes are rigorous and specifically designed to take a novice and train them to be a competent Paralegal.
  - Students are graded on a variety of carefully designed, practical assignments. To pass the courses and receive a certificate, they must complete these assignments satisfactorily.
  - Former students have advised that they are more prepared to approach the actual legal tasks than many of their other peers who attended other paralegal programs.
  - The student retention rate is 72% (same as college average).
  - The course completion rate was 52% in the Fall 2008 (college average was 60%).
  
- ***What are the employment placement rates? Include a description of job titles and salaries. What is the relationship between completion rates and employment rates?***
  - We are unaware of the actual data at this time.

- ***What industry trends are most critical for the future viability of the program? How do you know? What are the implications of these trends for curriculum development and improvement?***
  - Of all jobs, the Paralegal profession continues to sustain and thrive even in a down economy. There is always a need for a Paralegal.
  - The other programs in the area provide competition for the Merritt College Paralegal program – and the fact that some of them are approved by the American Bar Association while the Merritt College Paralegal Studies Program is not, sometimes has a negative impact.
  - In addition, other national programs are starting to market online paralegal classes. The Merritt College Paralegal Program will need to be prepared to possibly take some classes online, obtain the funding to make substantial marketing efforts and other steps.

***For transfer programs:***

- ***Describe the department's efforts in meeting with and collaborating with local 4-year institutions. Is the program adequately preparing students for upper division course work? How do you know?***
  - The college has a very robust Transfer Program and holds meetings and encourages counseling sessions for students interest in attending 4-year schools, which the Paralegal students are encouraged to attend.
  - All Paralegal Program classes are taught on a college level and are part of the general curriculum of the college, which is a community college that has as one of its missions the preparation of students for 4-year state colleges and institutions.
  - Paralegal students are assigned various writing projects to adequately prepare them for upper division course work.
  - In addition, various Paralegal students go on to attend law school – the Paralegal faculty are helpful, instrumental and resourceful in helping those students apply to law school, be prepared for law school and get into law school.
- ***Recommendations and priorities.***
  - Develop structured outreach to local high schools, court programs and the legal community.
  - Develop a Paralegal Studies Advisory Board, consisting of former students and members of the legal community – to currently assess the needs of the Paralegal Studies Department
  - Develop relationships with the legal community, and set up even more locations for internships for the Paralegal students
  - Work with the Merritt College data collection services to determine the placement of Paralegals once they complete the program.
  - Work with the Merritt College Career Center to assist Paralegals in getting jobs and to identify employers to hire Merritt College Paralegals.