

**OAKLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE
LEGAL ASSISTANT PROGRAM
FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY**

Prepared by:
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Office of Institutional Planning & Analysis

for:
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Legal Assistant Program

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Legal Assistant Focus Group Summary

Introduction

On March 25, the Office of Institutional Planning & Analysis conducted a focus group with current Legal Assistant students to gather input on the curriculum, scheduling, and course delivery. A total of seven students (two male, five female) participated in the session, which lasted approximately 1.25 hours.

Findings

Curriculum

Are there specific topics you would like to see covered in LGL classes which you feel are currently left out?

Most participants felt that the Legal Assistant program should include more courses which teach specific legal skills. When asked which skills would be most important, participants mentioned a number of topics: workers compensation, probate, divorce and family law, business partnerships, corporate law, municipal law, criminal law, real estate, immigration, and medical malpractice. Others mentioned that summarizing depositions and doing litigation searches are often part of the legal assistant's job requirements, and that having the chance to learn and practice these skills as part of the Legal Assistant program would be useful.

Several participants felt that while many of these topics are included in the current curriculum, they are not covered in enough depth to be of use in the workplace. Another participant reflected that it is difficult to know how much detail is "enough" until the student enters the job market and is made aware of employer requirements. Several others responded that the best solution is to provide students with a solid core of basic courses and then to offer as wide a variety of special topics as possible.

Are there specific topics currently included in the program which you feel should be emphasized less?

None of the participants felt that any of the topics currently included in the Legal Assistant program should be removed or given less emphasis. As one student noted, "the topics that are covered are good, we just need more of them."

Do you think that there is overlap—either too much or too little—between the courses in the Legal Assistant program?

Participants mentioned that Substantive Law, Civil Litigation, and Legal Research overlap to some extent, although not all felt that this overlap is a negative. In some instances, the same legal cases are used in different classes. Again, however, not all participants felt this was problematic. Some believed that using the same cases in different classes helped them to integrate the material, while others believed exposure to a greater number of cases would have been beneficial.

Are legal ethics adequately covered in Legal Assistant classes?

All participants agreed that legal ethics are adequately covered in their classes. At least one noted that the legal research class devotes an entire section of the course to legal ethics, and others noted that ethics are touched upon in almost all of their classes.

Would you be interested in a computer software class specifically for legal assistant students?

All participants felt that a computer course designed specifically for legal assistant students would be very beneficial. Most felt that CIS 105 or 107—the current computer courses included in the LGL curriculum—was a good basic course, but that legal assistants need in-depth knowledge of the Microsoft Office software as well as packages like Premise, Westlaw, and Lexis/Nexis. In addition, others felt that it is important to have working knowledge of timekeeping software. Several participants suggested that the CIS course or its equivalent should be a prerequisite to a more advanced course focusing only on software used in the legal assistant field.

If Substantive Law were reorganized into several 7.5 week classes, which topics would you like to see offered?

Most participants questioned whether a beginning student, if given the option to pick and choose between 7.5 week special topics courses, would know enough about the requirements of the legal assistant field to be able to choose wisely. One participant suggested that these special topics courses be offered not instead of but in addition to the Substantive Law survey course. This way, students would have at least a common core of knowledge before being given the option to pick and choose.

Participants disagreed as to whether 7.5 weeks was enough time to thoroughly cover a single topic. Some felt that this time period might not be sufficient, while others believed that students wanting additional coverage should go to law school. There were also mixed opinions about 7.5 week courses in general; some students found the shortened time frame convenient while others found them too cramped.

Participants agreed that all of the topics proposed for the short courses—employment, workers comp, immigration law, real estate, wills and trusts, probate, divorce, family law, business organizations, criminal law, environmental law, product liability, and bankruptcy—would be useful.

Scheduling

What are your preferences for course scheduling?

Participants' opinions regarding course scheduling were mixed. Some of the participants who currently work fulltime like the current evening class schedule, while others would like to see some daytime options.

Would you take courses offered back to back on the same day?

Most participants felt that back to back courses on the same day would be inconvenient given fulltime work schedules. However, some would prefer the option to attend classes back to back as it would eliminate the need to come to campus more than once a week.

Would you prefer the LGL program to begin only once a year?

Participants agreed that students should be able to start the program at any time during the year. In addition, many felt that the courses should be offered more than one semester a year, in order to avoid the possibility of having to wait a full calendar year if registration is missed or a class is full.

Where did you get your information about the LGL program? Is this information adequate?

One participant just starting the program who is currently working as a legal secretary reported that after deciding to get a legal assistant degree, she decided to attend OCC since she knew that the campus location would be convenient to her home and work. Others reported that they did research before enrolling at OCC, calling different schools to gather information on their legal assistant programs. Another participant had been referred to the OCC program by his employer. None of the participants had seen any literature on the LGL program until they contacted OCC and asked to receive information.

Delivery

What qualities do you feel are most important in a legal assistant instructor?

Participants agreed that legal assistant instructors must be both knowledgeable and well-organized to be effective in the classroom. These qualities are important for all instructors, but are of particular significance for legal assistant instructors due to the

amount of material which must be covered in each class session. In addition, most felt that it is important for instructors to show some enthusiasm about the topic at hand, as well as an appreciation for students and the challenges they face.

Some participants made the distinction between knowledge and applied knowledge, noting that legal assistant instructors need to have a sense of the practical as well as the theoretical. These instructors should be able to prepare students for the realities of the workplace, and to do so they must have an understanding of what legal assistants actually do.

There was disagreement among several of the participants as to whether legal assistant instructors should be held accountable for cooperative learning in the classroom. One felt that, as a student, it is his responsibility to absorb as much knowledge and information from the instructor as possible, and that doing so should not require cooperation or interaction with other students. Others disagreed, reflecting that “if you have an atmosphere of isolation in the classroom, and that’s all you know before going into a workplace, you will never learn how to interact with other people”, and that these skills are as important as any others taught in a legal assistant course.

Do you feel that your OCC instructors have these qualities?

Participants agreed that, for the most part, OCC legal assistant instructors do have the qualities mentioned above. While there are a few exceptions, participants did not feel that the legal assistant program had more than its fair share of poor instructors. One participant noted that if instructors did not have these qualities, they would not have become the successful legal professionals that they are today.

Do you feel that LGL students would benefit from an entry interview with the program coordinator?

All participants felt that a mandatory entry interview could be useful for new students. However, several of them noted that they had essentially conducted their own entry interview by initiating a meeting with the coordinator on their own. Several participants felt that receiving up-to-date information about the job market would have been useful prior to starting the program. Others felt that it would have been useful to receive information about employment options—for example, the differences between working for a large firm and a small firm. One participant noted that she had no legal background at all prior to starting courses, and that she would have welcomed any information or assistance which might have oriented her to the program.

Are off-campus meetings (such as trips to the courthouse) a valuable part of the curriculum?

All participants agreed that off-campus visits (such as those to the courthouse or the law library) are an invaluable part of the legal assistant program. Several participants spoke

of the level of intimidation and confusion they felt upon entering the courthouse for the first time, and noted the importance of having the chance to familiarize themselves with these settings before entering the workforce. Others noted that it is important for students planning to enter the legal assistant field to understand how a courthouse actually operates.

Summary

Most participants felt that the legal assistant program currently addresses many of the legal topics important for employment in the field. In general, participants agreed that legal assistant students could benefit from courses which addressed some of these topics in greater depth, suggesting that the concept of 7.5 week short courses might be welcomed by current students.

Some participants expressed concern that the program does not currently provide students with enough depth in certain areas, making it difficult to gain employment after completing the program. Others disagreed, noting that no single program can teach every skill required in the workplace, and that some skills will be learned on the job rather than in the classroom.

Opinions on course scheduling were mixed. Some were satisfied with the current schedule of evening classes, while others would prefer some daytime options. In addition, participants' opinions on back to back courses were also mixed.

Participants agreed that effective legal assistant instructors are knowledgeable, well-organized, and enthusiastic. All felt that most OCC instructors possess these qualities. There was also agreement that LGL students could benefit from an entry interview with the program coordinator, and that information on the job market and employment options would be particularly useful.

Finally, all participants agreed that off-campus visits to the courthouse and law library are a very important part of the curriculum, as they provide students the chance to become comfortable in a real legal environment.

March 25, 1997

Caitlin Hawkins,
Institutional Planning and Analysis
Oakland Community College
Orchard Ridge

Barry N. Silver
Legal Assistant Student,
Orchard Ridge

Dear Ms. Hawkins,

I am very grateful to have been included in the upcoming Legal Assistant program discussion. Pursuant your March 4 letter of invitation involving program review, suggestions, and potential improvements, the accompanying outline is presented for your review.

With recently obtained information that state testing and licensure for graduating legal assistants may be forthcoming, reflective of the Bar exam, these suggestions are credible and indeed timely comments upon the recently granted O.C.C. Legal Assistant program certification by the A.B.A., and its competitive value to the school as a marketing and census enhancement tool. The issues to follow are in sum a contrasting comment to the worth of the legal assistant program, and certainly to the time, energy and finances spent by each student. Duly noted, if this level of training is worthy of Bar recognition, then there is genuine cause for concern.

This position is based on personal investigation and observation, and upon corroborating comments by program students at O.C.C. and elsewhere, that if there is indeed a true, substantial market for the upcoming legal assistant/paralegal graduate, we, as a student body, are not supplied with the job-ready breath and depth of skills any prospective employer in a cost-intense environment may require. It is safe to say that this program is rudimentary and does not provide comprehensive job-ready training.

Therefore, in addition to O.C.C.'s program, examples of legal assistant program information from other colleges are attached. In each example, pertinent and practical courses are lacking or selectively exist which are vital to the worth and employability of a legal assistant student. It strongly suggests that this and other schools have not thoroughly

evaluated the market for practical needs nor have consequently formulated appropriate programming, rather relying on questionable national statistics that do not reflect local conditions or needs and in some cases a form-over-substance certification. Program design appears too general and lacks the necessary training to make a student readily employable.

Developing a training program in any area, which is the definition of education, means researching the discipline, and educating potential employers on the value of the legal assistant or any student. That is at the heart of marketing. The approach, as witnessed and widely commented upon, is unfairly weighted when the school markets and sells a program, with credentials such as certification, that have one-sided value. It is regularly heard that certification lends no credibility to this program when the potential employer looks for other or non-legal training, or in observed cases, some level of job-only experience, which reduces or totally ignores the value of legal training. It strongly suggests that the school is out of touch with reality and is working for itself.

These assessments emphasize the frustration personally encountered in search of an enriching position. In the past nine months, forwarding over one-hundred resumes, the following obstacles have been encountered, under the heading of training and specific skills:

- 1) Lack of litigation training sufficient for entry-level needs.
- 2) Inadequate training to assume responsibilities in a bankruptcy environment.
- 3) Inadequate training to undertake tasks in a real estate law firm.
- 4) Inability to secure employment within a court because of a lack of training in court practice, procedure, and docket maintenance.
- 5) Inadequate depth of training to work in a family law practice.
- 6) Inadequate training to work in a corporate legal department setting, undertaking specific in-depth assignments.
- 7) Lack of specific in-depth training in contract law.
- 8) No specific area training to gain employment within a State Bar office or Legal Aid Clinic.
- 9) No substantive school training to assume a legal assistant position within the Oakland Prosecutor's office.

These are examples. They serve to highlight the inability to secure meaningful employment because the legal assistant/paralegal student is inadequately trained and prepared for the working world as it indeed exists. Another view holds that firms, courts, companies and the like do not actively seek legal assistants, rather assistants with general experience.

Reality has dictated that, unless this student accepts simple file clerk or court running positions, he will not find meaningful employment. This was the assessment given by professionals in the field prior to entering the program. It was offered by certain instructors as well.

O.C.C. offers a special topics class for selected areas of law. It would appear that this is a university-inspired seminar design, dependent on the wishes of the enrolled students, and offered or subsequently cancelled by the number of students registered for it. Fundamentally, it is not the student who should in sum design a course of law. By comparison, other schools offer specific full-length required or elective courses in specialized areas of law, topics which are job-specific, a reality in the working world. This comparison does not imply that other schools offers a better legal program, but suggests that others have certain courses that reflect real needs.

Course offerings as seen should be grouped to form a package of training, allowing the student a choice of interest, direction, and foundation towards future employment choices. It would indicate to the prospective employer that a student is trained for a specific area, instead of generalized training falling under the ambiguous heading of legal assistant.

Pointedly, this school worked feverishly to obtain the certification of the Bar Association. While it lends certain enhanced credibility to the College and makes it a formidable force for recognition, census enlargement, and student dollars, especially in light of declining enrollment in a healthy economy, in reality the program is at best a rudimentary review of law.

No student has been met, here or elsewhere, who has the confidence of training to obtain a meaningful position. It has been seen that students have searched for up to two years before gaining modest, permanent employment. By comparison, a paramedic student, a stenographer student, a data processing student will fare better and sooner in a job search because they seem to have the essential job-ready training that employers recognize and want. It is suggested that this legal assistant program is out of touch with reality and serves selected interests.

Significantly, this student has petitioned the Oakland Circuit offices, specifically every jurist except one and the Court administrative offices, including probate, and the Macomb prosecutor's office, only to be told by all that this legal assistant is typically not hired. In all cases the hiring requirement is recognition as a first-year law school student, or having business, secretarial or office management experience. Pointedly, only Judge Schnelz had the courtesy to respond. If only this judge had the courtesy to reply, then is it a given that a student cannot expect to find employment within the courts, under any jurist.

Yet it has been heard, in a selected class from an instructor/jurist, that we as legal assistant students are looked upon as ideally suited for these positions. Clearly, this is a school-serving politically correct and reality-incorrect statement. As a recent newspaper investigative study revealed, hiring has much to do with nepotism and nothing to do with training. It falls under the old maxim of who you know and not what you know. It is an insult to the student.

A parallel issue is the school's lack of a substantive job board. This student was told at the outset that the job opportunity program was not yet in place and running, due to lack of prior secretarial staff maintenance. To date, one year hence, there is no change. There is a reasonable amount of internship opportunities and few solid full-time jobs. Few students can afford to accept a five-dollar per hour part-time position, unless they live at home. Few students can type ninety words per minute, which appears a ludicrous last-concern issue to the legally-trained student. Students personally surveyed found a paucity of opportunities for regular-hour full-time work through this school. It is noted that certain other schools have a substantial job opportunity office, and actively seek meaningful employment for their students.

The lack of an assortment of quality job postings in an A.B.A. accredited school highlights a critical point, that there are no jobs for the graduating students of this program, because these students lack specific reality-based skills, or that the school vision of the job market is, as noted, at best nationally based or out of touch with reality in the region it serves. As one instructor noted, A.B.A. certification means nothing.

To date, every attorney and government official contacted has said legal assistants are typically not hired. Each does not see the value in a legal assistant student who inevitably has to be trained to be of any worth. Instead, it is the legal secretary who is in demand, proved by the wealth of classified advertised positions. It is equally admitted, by professionals and currently employed secretaries, that a legal assistant program is best suited for the existing or potential legal secretary.

Of note in a rapidly changing employer-employee relationship is the rise in contract employment, the temporary position. As seen, legal and other departments of major utilities, auto manufacturers, health care providers, collections agencies and others, who admit that legal assistant training is secondary to other training or experience, have followed a cost-cutting move to contractual workers, leaving the individual without the conventional array of benefits and retirement options. For example, it forces the worker to accept a low-pay or any position, or grab at the next because of a longer-term assignment, and offers no historical security.

It is seen that the legal assistant student/potential employee is not unaffected by this new reality in employment. In the areas mentioned, the office staff consists of temporary workers. Indeed, half of the internal staff of a major utility is comprised of contract workers. The change has forced regular employees to accept early retirement buyouts or in defense, initiate class-actions lawsuits.

The legal department of an auto company headquarters has taken a new, evolving step in hiring practices. It is reducing reliance on temporary agencies for workers and instead is offering direct employment under the following design: A worker is designated a supplemental employee. The worker is paid hourly for time worked. There is no guarantee of the usual 40-hour week, nor of future permanent employment. There are no benefits, sick pay, vacation pay, retirement, promotions, salary or simple cost-of-living increases, or the like. The worker may in fact remain at the same company if the contract agreement of one agency is sold to another and the employing company elects to buy the new agency agreement and retain the worker. That is essentially the new form of job security.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Provide a structured, consistently-offered sequence of courses that timely compliment each other, with necessary prerequisite knowledge and skill development.

As noted to Judge Mester, Substantive Law is a perfect companion course to Legal Research. The elements of why law is formed, and case material provided, parallel the instruction in and the assigned tasks of legal research and case analysis.

To date, it is seen that students enroll in various courses with no school or student attention to proper foundation. Students have taken Trial Prep before Litigation, or Trial Prep before Substantive Law. Others leave Sub. Law until last, up to a year or more after taking Legal Research, and unfortunately miss the timely comparison with a research course.

2. Restructure the program to offer, one: general training as a prerequisite foundation; and two, provide separate enhanced areas of interest and study, giving the student concrete legal assistant training for specific legal work.
3. The school has arbitrarily cancelled courses that are necessary to structured learning, and has changed the curriculum requirements in mid-stream. Registered students find that formerly elective courses supplant once required courses.

For example, students registered for Substantive Law in Spring '96 only to find a first-day note indicating cancellation and replacement with other courses. There was little physical time to make the necessary drop-add adjustments. Many students missed the registration deadline.

4. Pertinent courses cannot effectively be taught in seven weeks, no matter how skilled the instructor. It must be recognized that there is vital information to cover, and much has been overlooked for lack of time to internalize and digest. It must be recognized that many students work, and take other courses.

For example, Criminal Law as taught by Elias Escobedo, was admittedly abridged. He noted that sound instruction in criminal applications cannot be given in seven weeks. Instead, students were given research paper assignments. This student submitted a thirty-three page document on fingerprinting, an offered topic, yet has complete

inadequacy in practical application and assessment of criminal procedure.
It was glaring evident in the brief span of an internship.

5. The required CIS 105 presented overly-congested material which many students could not fully grasp, nor had they enough time to learn because of the pace of the course. It was equally admitted by the instructor.

Critical material, PowerPoint, was not taught for lack of time, and exposure to Access was reduced. The result has been the working student, with other courses in tow, could not adequately master the material. That negatively affects employability. It also is a reflection on the school, when the prospective employee presents credentials from O.C.C.

6. It is within the purview of the instructor to determine what shall be taught. In Trial Prep, Mr. Gelman, a skilled and knowledgeable attorney, did not have students prepare a trial notebook. As a result, students have said they do not know how to prepare a trial notebook, let alone know what one looks like.

Family Law, in fifteen weeks, could require students to present a mock trial, or mediation conference, based on contemporary family issues.

It may require students to prepare material for legal discussion, utilizing Michigan law. This also would be a sound companion course to Legal Research, if properly structured. It is a worthy instructional base if the student chooses to enter the family law arena.

A course in Mediation, a fact of life in family litigation, should be offered, as legal assistants would prove vitally useful in interviewing and interrogatory preparation. Mediation training could conceivably concentrate on many different areas of litigation.

7. Ms. Garin is also a skilled attorney. In Legal Research instruction, the focus was hands-on manual research. Her point was well taken, that many, including lawyers, do not know how to use a library. Yet, a contemporary sophisticated legal environment requires knowledge of Lexus, WestLaw and other computer-based research tools. Thus, Legal Research students do not know how to utilize this vital tool unless they have had access through job-related exposure. Without this skill no reputable firm or company would consider employing this student. It can only be assumed that this and other instructors are given parameters within which to teach.
8. Internship should be made a requirement. Areas of internship should by design follow areas of instruction and

student future-employment interest. It cannot be a generalized, optional course, with no specific job focus in mind.

In social work, teaching, and psychology/counseling programs by example, it is mandatory, for obvious reason.

9. The four-topic sequence of courses replacing Substantive Law should be relegated to prerequisite or elective status, depending upon a student's area of work interest. These four, Family Law, Discovery, Criminal Law, and Preparation of Evidence should be included in and made part of designed areas of interest, as should Real Estate Law, Bankruptcy, Taxation, and Federal, Circuit, and District Court and municipality administrative employment. These are real areas of employment. There is no reason that a legal assistant student cannot be taught, and provided the necessary tools to function as a competent assistant in any of these areas.
10. There is no course offering training in legal office and personnel management. Students surveyed felt wholly inadequate to assume office duties without knowledge of office practices. This is an essential ingredient in legal administration.
11. The program in sum, acknowledged by instructors, is taught from the perspective of employment as a lawyer, not a legal assistant.

SUMMARY

Advertised positions for District Courts list a high school diploma and some office experience as requirements. An under-thirty person obtains a job in a high profile law firm as a legal assistant, having only generalized office experience, and receives legal training from the firm. Another obtains employment in a nationally recognized law firm as a legal administrator, because of training and experience in computer applications, and not because of legal training.

Students at O.C.C. and elsewhere express the same concerns about instruction, lack of specific content areas, and paucity of jobs. Their assessments are virtually identical criticisms of such programs, initially thought to either to provide a career, a tool for career change, or relief from legal secretarial occupations. The end analyses are that these programs only lend general enhancement to the legal secretary position, with some influence upon remuneration.

These are not isolated examples. Lawyers, municipalities, and even instructors in this program at least intimate that the job market for a legal assistant is ambiguous at best.

No one to date has offered this student a legitimate, experience generating position. It has even been remarked that this forty-something male will not get a job as a legal assistant.

Instructors have openly stated that instruction is geared to practicing as a lawyer, not as a legal assistant. They state that this program is a useful base for entering law school. Personal observation from the outset confirmed this. If that is indeed the case, the program is a poor attempt to provide students, returning adults or high school graduates, with the tools to change careers or enter the job market under the career heading described and offered by the school. In that light, students are ill-equipped, and as personally experienced, encounter embarrassment in applying for a legal position if not outright frustration from failed attempts in finding one.

Comments are, upon the fact that a trustee of this school, a working adult with a Bachelor degree returned to school, to O.C.C. for a Paralegal Certificate, that such a certification did not enhance this person's employability, or factually on its own merit did not influence the placement of this person in a position at O.C.C. It is said that this is good press, yet rife with the politics of Collegiate competition for student dollars. If that is the case, then student employability needs seem far lower on the ladder. It matches teacher comments that legal assistant students are in demand in the administrative sector of the court system.

It is hoped this has been informational and will aid in developing an in-depth, positive, and competitively structured program enabling students to assume qualified positions in this field.

Thank you,

Barry N. Silver

March 25, 1997

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Barry N. Silver
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Dear Caitlin,

It was a pleasure participating in today's discussion of the Legal Assistant Program, and I'm grateful you had the opportunity to read my notes beforehand. You have mirrored my comments and depth of concern to the letter, by presenting pertinent and fact-finding questions that are vitally important to current and prospective students in this program.

Your acknowledgement of my concerns in particular, the effort I have made to present factual and critical information about realities in this field, and the depth of training and areas of needed improvement are truly appreciated. It is, as I have said, the essence of education. For every student, whether continuing on from high school or returning to campus after a lengthy absence, it is a personal effort and sacrifice. And for that, it is nothing less than expecting a sound program to prepare for the working world. It is the student's responsibility to produce, but the school must provide them with the best tools.

As noted, I hold deep disappointment in the outcome of my scholastic efforts. While the school cannot be held accountable for increasing company competition, dramatic changes in employment practices and the rise in contract workers, it remains the primary issue that the school must fully grasp market conditions and fully prepare the student to compete. It cannot state what exists when personal investigation and corroborating statements of students here and elsewhere reveals otherwise. As a result, what I have taken from O.C.C. will not allow me to compete. It has created frustration and negativism.

A recent interview again underscores what I have repeatedly seen. The requirement for a court clerk position was typing speed and filing capability. It had nothing to do with legal knowledge and the like. To deepen the frustration, it was said

some other court position may be likely were I entering law school. I am not entering law school.

The court official felt compelled to say that when such a position is offered, not only is the office inundated with applications from law school students, but lawyers who can't find employment also send an equal or greater amount of applications. Clearly, a legal "assistant" would not have a chance.

Wholly side-stepped in his comment was the training as a legal assistant, indicating that it has no bearing on a position either as a court clerk or another, obviously best filled by a law school student. And this has been my point. Students hear one thing from certain instructors and administration, and something else is heard in the real world. In-school statements are ridiculous if not outright fraudulent.

To illustrate another contradiction, collection agencies now use the term legal assistant to caption positions with such companies. In years past, no legal experience was needed, nor advertised as a requirement. The new slogan as personal experience has shown, taken from popular catch-words, portrays legal tasks, yet nothing has changed about the nature of the work. Required investigative skills were heretofore never defined as legal, but rather as skills in sales or management acquired by experience or accumulated through years of training and changing jobs to advance. Simply using the phone and getting information and, simply, giving it to some person, lawyer or supervisor, in another department. No one went through a legal assistant program.

In current student discussion, it simply means not a collaboration between school and employer but a school creating yet another program to accumulate student dollars and certainly status, and employers taking words from a school catalog and updating their advertisements for jobs. Too simple a scenario it isn't. Schools like this one, and its administrators, create programs and glorify it with credentials that are useful competitive marketing tools, without foresight or consideration of what a student needs to compete and get a job in the field of study. Hence, situations like the class-action suit against the American Institute of Paralegal Studies. The student thinks there is a new job with real work to capture, but realistically it's the same old job that in former years never required these 'skills', and the remuneration is, still, appalling.

While O.C.C. and other schools will continue to offer this program, they cannot ignore that the demands of employers and their needs as the school expresses them, or what the field is supposed to offer upon graduation, must be consistent with instruction. If there is generality without specialization, and generalized comments that we as legal assistants are needed, there is no service to the employer or the student. The school,

and maybe yourself, can market the program, sell it in orientations, and increase the enrollment and earn tuition dollars. Without a clear picture of what the market needs and how to honestly fill those needs, the loser is the student, for spending the money, the time, enduring the pressure to excel and building expectations, only to find there are no qualified opportunities. The job opportunities that have come before are still the same today, under a newer title.

The end result of my expenditures is that I am no further ahead in efforts to change career direction. It is as if I had not gone back to school. That is an incredible loss and an immensely frustrating experience. At my stage of life, I cannot afford to spend several years in school and leave it no different than before I entered it.

That class-action suit is a prime example of self-serving income-generating effort. Candidly, the student is not a prospective customer. It's an American truism to generate growth and profit, but it is also a moral principle rooted in American life, to give students the proper tools to make their way in a free economy. Were I a party to that mentioned litigation, this in sum is what would be heard.

Notably, I am pleased and appreciate your confidence in my letter in distributing it to the program participants, and administration and staff as you may determine. It may not be my last comment on what has become an identifiable tragedy, but I hope that people who read these remarks learn from them. Certainly, if I cannot comment or present facts, shed light on questionable school-forum statements or employment practices in certain legal areas, or propose necessary changes, then I should not comment at all unless my name remains attached to those comments. That's as American as I can get.

Sincerely,

Barry N. Silver

cc: Richard Thompson, Chancellor
Sarah Keidan, Legal Assistant Program Director
Hon. Fred M. Mester, Instructor
Austin A. Howard, Esq., Instructor



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March 31, 1997

Mr. Barry N. Silver
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Dear Barry,

I received the copy of your note to Caitlin Hawkins dated March 25. Caitlin and I are going to review the results of the focus-group conversations in the near future.

It was good of you to take the time to summarize your comments. We are fully aware of the changing marketplace for paralegals and appreciate input, not only from employers, but also from the people who have gone through the program.

Sincerely,

Sarah W. Keidan, J.D., Coordinator
Legal Assistant Program

cc: Caitlin Hawkins, Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis
Richard Thompson, Chancellor
The Hon. Fred M. Mester, Instructor
Austin Howard, Instructor

Legal Administration

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Telephone: (313) 993-6306

The Legal Administration program is designed to assist individuals in acquiring the skills necessary to manage the complex mixture of personnel, technology, and business that is the modern law office.

The program is multidisciplinary. A Legal Administration major must complete a 39 credit hour core that consists of courses from Accounting, Management, Computer and Information Science, the Legal Assistant program and Legal Administration. The student may select 12 credits of electives from such areas as Legal Assistant, Management, Accounting, Computer and Information Science, Criminal Justice or Psychology courses. The specific electives will be selected to meet a student's individual needs.

Legal Administration Requirements

Baccalaureate Degree (126 Semester Hours)

ACC 201	Principles of Accounting I	3 cr.
BUS 311	Organizational Management	3 cr.
CIS 100	Introduction to Computers	3 cr.
LA 110	Introduction to Law and Legal Terminology	3 cr.
LA 280	Legal Research and Analysis I	3 cr.
LAD 346	Personnel Management in the Law Firm	3 cr.
LAD 310	Roles and Problems of the Legal Administrator	3 cr.
LAD 340	Employment and Labor Relations in the Law Firm	3 cr.
LAD 351	Legal Accounting	3 cr.
LAD 410	Legal Administration Systems Management	3 cr.
LAD 411	Legal Computer Applications	3 cr.
LAD 420	Management Skills for Legal Administrators	3 cr.
LAD 450	Marketing the Law Firm	3 cr.

Electives

12 cr.

A grade of "C" must be maintained in all courses required for the major. A GPA of 2.0 must also be maintained.

Students must also complete General Education Core Requirements.

Legal Assistant

Office: 101-A Bethesda, Outer Drive Campus
Faculty: R. Berg

Telephone: (313) 993-6306

The Legal Assistant program at University of Detroit Mercy is fully approved by the American Bar Association.

The Legal Assistant is a trained professional who, under a lawyer's supervision, carries out a great variety of tasks, such as research, investigation, interviewing, document preparation, filing, data organization and case preparation. The legal assistant cannot give legal advice to the client and is always under the direction and supervision of a lawyer.

The Legal Assistant program is designed to give the graduate a strong general background in the many areas that comprise the American legal system along with the skills necessary to assist the attorney in the preparation of the attorney's work. The Legal Assistant Associate degree or certificate candidate must complete 18 credit hours of required courses and an additional 12 credit hours in legal specialty courses. One three-hour course in computer fundamentals is also required.

Associates Degree

Professional Sequence:

LA 110	Introduction to Law and Legal Terminology	3 cr.
LA 120	Roles of the Legal Assistant	3 cr.
LA 221	Skills: Training for Legal Assistants/Ethics	3 cr.
LA 241	Law Office Management	3 cr.
LA 280	Legal Research and Analysis I	3 cr.
LA 281	Legal Research and Analysis II	3 cr.
	Any four additional legal specialty courses	12 cr.

Required supporting course: CIS 100

3 cr.

Total 33 credits

Students must also complete General Education Core Requirements.

In general it is recommended that students take Introduction to Law, Roles of the Legal Assistant and Legal Research I before taking legal specialty courses. Exceptions may be arranged with the advisor.

A grade of "C" must be maintained in all required Legal Assistant and supporting courses. A GPA of 2.0 must also be maintained.

Certificate Program

A Legal Assistant certificate program is also offered for students who already have obtained a four year bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university. This is a non-degree program.

The Certificate Program requires completion of 30 credit hours in the Legal Assistant Curriculum and 3 credit hours in Computer and Information Science. The required courses are as follows:

Professional Sequence:

LA 110	Introduction to Law and Legal Terminology	3 cr.
LA 120	Roles of the Legal Assistant	3 cr.
LA 221	Skills: Training for Legal Assistants	3 cr.
LA 241	Law Office Management	3 cr.
LA 280	Legal Research and Analysis I	3 cr.
LA 281	Legal Research and Analysis II	3 cr.
	Any four additional legal specialty courses	12 cr.

Required supporting course: CIS 100.

* A grade of "C" must be maintained in all required Legal Assistant Certificate and supporting courses. A GPA of 2.0 must also be maintained.

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE

B.S., Legal Assistant Studies

For this degree students must complete the required major courses below, the General Education requirements, plus electives to total 125-128 credits. Students may elect a specialty area as listed below or a minor as approved by the Legal Assistant Studies Coordinator.

Required Major Courses					
(45 credits)					
LA102	Lgl Res/Case Anal	3	LA202	Lgl Wrtg/Anal	3
LA150	Lgl Asst Prof/Eth Cons	3	LA125	Cvl Lit & Proc	4
LA140	Prsnl Inj Lit/Inv Tech	3	LA250	Law Off Mgmt, Sys/Tech	3
LA320	Real Estate Law	3	LA321	Family Law	2
LA322	Probate Law & Proc	3	LA401	Evidence & Trial Pract	3
LA450	Adv. Legal Writ. & Interviewing Sem.	3	LA	Elective**	3
BA254, 255	Bus Law I & II	6	CJ319	Substantive Crim Law	3

General Education					
(33 credits)*					
EN110	Fresh Composition	3	EN210	Research Paper Process	3
SD101	Fundamentals of Speech	3		Natural Science	8
	Humanities	8			
Social Sciences-Must select					
PS110	Intro to Am Gov & Pol	8	or	PS467	Const Law & Cvl Lib
					8

Cognates - Required					
(16-18 credits)					
OA119	Acctg Procedures***	4	LA299	Lgl Assistant Intern & Prof Dev	6-8

				Seminar	
CJ409	Proc Criminal Law	3			
Word Proc Comp Science; Choose One Of The Following					
DP225	Word Proc Techniques	3			
DP151	Computer Appl	3	CS100	Intro Micro Appl	3

Electives
(11-12 credits)

Electives are to be chosen in consultation with advisor.

*Note: The Legal Assistant B.S. Degree requires 8 credits in Social Science, Natural Science or Mathematics beyond those for General Education. These requirements may be fulfilled in part or in total through the Specialty section or the minor. Students should consult with their advisors.

**Note: See LA300, Seniors in Legal Assistant Studies; also consult with Legal Assistant Advisor.

***Note: AC132 may be substituted for OAl19 for students special-izing in Legal Administration Specialty/minor required (20 credits) A student shall obtain a minimum of twenty (20) credits in any one of the specialties listed below. Specialty courses should be selected in consultation with your Legal Assistant Studies Advisor or Dean. As an alternative, a student may choose a minor of study that must be approved by the Legal Assistant Studies Advisor or Dean.

SPECIALTY LISTNOTE: At least nine (9) credit hours shall be at the 300-400 level.

CRIMINAL LAW SPECIALTY:					
CJ101	Intro to Crim Justice	3	CJ106	Juvenile Justice	3
CJ250	Correctional Law	3	CJ343	Investigation	3
CJ344	Criminalistics	3	SO101	Intro to Sociology	3
SO226	Races and Minorities	3	SO214	Criminology	3
SO338	Deviance	3	PY101	Intro to Psychology	4
PY259	Abnormal Psychology	3			

LABOR LAW SPECIALTY:						
EC201	Prin of Macroeconomics	3	or	EC202	Prin of Microeconomics	3
EC403	Priv Entrprs/Public Pol	3		LA406	Wrkrs Disabltly Comp Law	2
MN360	Prin of Mgmt	3		MN365	Human Resource Mgmt	3

MN451	Labor Law	4	MN464	Org Behavior in Bus	4
MN469	Collective Bargaining	3	SO313	Work and Organization	3
PY228	Organizational Behavior	3	PY383	Industrial Psychology	3

LEGAL ADMIN SPECIALTY					
AC132, 133	Prin of Acctg I/II	8	AC232, 233	Inter Acctg I/II	8
AC332	Cost Accounting I	4	AC334	Acctg Info Systems	3
AC421,422	Fed Tax Acctg I/II	6	FN341	Managerial Finance	4
FN443	Insurance	4	MN360	Prin of Mgmt	3
MN365	Human Resource Mgmt	3	MN461	Management Simulation	3
MN464	Org Beh in Bus	4	MK281	Mktg Prin/Strategy	4
MK387	Adv Theory in Pract	3	BA226	Records Management	3
SD320	Public Relations	4	PY228	Organizational Behavior	3
EC302	Managerial Economics	4			

LEGISLATIVE/CONSTITUTIONAL LAW SPECIALTY:						
EC201	Prin of Macroeconomics	3	or	EC202	Prin of Macroeconomics	3
EC305	Public Finance	3		HS131,132	U.S. History I & II	8
LA305	Tribal Law and Gov	3		PS130	Intro State/Lcl Gov	4
PS201	Intro to Public Admin	3		PS301	Policy Anal/Eval	4
PS364	Pol. Parties, Interest Groups & Pub. Opinion	3		PS367	Congress & the Pres	4
PS401	Prin of Pub Admin	3				

PERSONAL INJURY SPECIALTY:						
HE209	Pharmacology**	3		BL105	Func of Human Body	4

BL121,122	Hmn Anat/Phys I/II	7	CH104,105	Life Chemistry I/II	7
FN443	Insurance	4	LA405	No-Fault Automobile Law	3
LA406	Wrkrs Dis Comp Law	2	PY101	Intro to Psychology	4
PY217	Social Psychology	3	PY357	Personality Theory	3
PY385	Health Psychology	3	TC101,102	Construction I & II	6
	Electives	(9-10)			

Electives are to be chosen in consultation with advisor

*LA300 Seminar in Legal Assistant Studies may apply to certain specialties and can be taken with approval of Legal Assistant Coordinator. In the alternative, these special topics may be used as the required Legal Assistant Elective.

**Prerequisites: BL122 or BL105 or CH105

B.S., Legal Assistant Studies Sample Four-Year Schedule

FIRST YEAR					
EN110	Freshman Comp.*	3	LA125	Civil Litig & Proc	4
LA102	Lgl Res Case Analy	3	LA140	Pers Inj Inves Tec	3
LA150	Lgl Ass't Prof and Ethical Con	3	PS110	Intro Am Govt Pol	4
	Cognate	3	SD110	Fund of Speech	3
	Elective	2	OA119	Accounting Proced	4

SECOND YEAR					
EN210	Res Paper Process*	3	LA322	Probate Law Proc	3
LA202	Legal Writ & Analy	3	BA255	Business Law II	3
LA320	Real Estate Law	3	LA250	Law Office Mgmt Sys & Tech	3
LA321	Family	3	BA254	Business	3

	Law	3		Law I	1
	Electives	6	RA	Elective	1

THIRD YEAR					
LA401	Evid & Trial Prac	3	CJ409	Proced Crim Law	3
CJ319	Subst Criminal Law	4	NS	Elective	4
NS	Elective	4		Specialty/Minor	6
	Specialty/Minor	4		Elective	4
LA	Elective	3			
FOURTH YEAR					
PS467	Const Law Civil Lib	4	LA450	Adv Legal Writ Int	3
	Specialty/Minor	7	LA299	Internship	6
HU	Elective	4		Specialty/Minor	3
RA	Elective	1	HU	Elective	4

*May be taken Fall or Spring semester. -

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Direct comments or questions to: Webmaster@lakers.lssu.edu

MEMORANDUM

Date: 01/17/97

To: Marty Orlowski *over*

From: Sarah W. Keidan

RE: Request for Focus Groups for LGL Program

Per our telephone conversation a few days ago, I have drawn up a list of questions relative to two topics which the LGL Program needs to explore:

- ◆ Curriculum/Course Content
- ◆ Scheduling Matters

This list is attached for your review and editing suggestions.

We wish to interview students currently enrolled in the program as well as program graduates. Perhaps the other people to interview are employers, although as you know, we conduct employer surveys through your office periodically in compliance with ABA guidelines. Would additional focus group activity with employers be redundant?

Many of the questions we have are pertinent to our program faculty. However, they are going to be invited to a Saturday working session in March so we can deal with much of this with them in that setting.

As to the focus groups, I understand that we send out the letter of invitation to the focus groups, your office follows up with phone calls, and that those who participate in the groups will receive some appreciation item such as a coffee mug for taking the time to participate.

gift certificates

- How many potential interviewees should we contact?
- We wish to conduct these interviews in March on a Friday or Saturday—the weekend of March 14th or March 21st. If we must look at April it would be the weekend of April 4th or 5th.

faculty meeting: Sat. March 22 - look at

course content - info. to come, committee

grades: any types of skills necessary with employment?

LEGAL ASSISTANT PROGRAM
Oakland Community College
Focus Group Questionnaire—Winter 1997

1. Curriculum/Course Content

- a. Is there too much overlap in course content, between Litigation, for example, and Trial Prep?
- b. Is there too much emphasis on litigation skills in our course program. Rather than substantive law (content)?
- c. Are there topics you are aware of that should be taught in a course but which either are given little emphasis or are ignored, despite the catalog course description or a faculty member's syllabus?
- d. Is legal ethics emphasized in each course you have taken? Please illustrate topics covered.
- e. LGL 204 ("Substantive Law") is a survey course covering workers comp, labor (employment) law, medical malpractice, personal injury and product liability law. Two practice area courses (LGL 260 and LGL 261 series) are equivalent to the one Substantive Law course for purposes of credits in our LGL Program. Would you prefer in-depth (7 1/2 week) courses on all substantive law topics rather than the survey course?
- e. What areas of Substantive Law interest you: employment, workers comp, immigration law, real estate, wills and trusts, probate, divorce, family law, business organizations, criminal law, environmental law, product liability, bankruptcy? Other? (7 1/2 wks/short course)
- f. Would you be interested in a computer software class directed solely at legal assistant students? The curriculum would include emphasis on software packages for law office environments.
- g. Do you have basic word processing skills---WordPerfect 5.1 or Microsoft Word? Did you have these skills before you entered the LGL Program? Did you have to take CIS 105 or BIS 107 to become proficient before you entered the LGL Program?
- h. Would you like courtroom field trips built into your course of study?

2. Scheduling and Course Delivery Issues

- a. Are the classrooms on campus well equipped? Enough chairs and desks? Enough room to store books, briefcases, coats, etc.?
- b. Is there adequate notice when your class will meet at the Courthouse?
- c. Is meeting at the Courthouse relevant to your course work? Which courses have had class meetings at the Courthouse?
- d. Would you attend day classes in the LGL Program (between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m.) if they were offered?
- e. Would you attend Saturday morning classes if they were offered?
- f. Would you attend two classes on one day if one class were offered from 3-6 p.m. and the other from 6-9 p.m. or 6-10 p.m., depending on the credit hour value of the second class?
- g. Would you like all legal research section taught on the same night of the week? Doubled up on two nights (e.g., two sections of Research I on the same night, for example)?
- h. Would you like the LGL Program to begin in only one cycle per year (September)? (We currently enroll in two cycles—September and January.)
- i. Currently information about the LGL Program is available through the college catalog, LGL Program brochures, handouts at the LGL Program Orientation, counseling offices across the college, and periodic notices provided in classes. What further types of publicity would you like to see in order to be well informed about program prerequisites, courses, etc.?

1) mixed messages on scheduling

2) what qualities make for a good instructor?

3) benefits of from an interview w/ coordinator before starting? - evaluative?

Thinking of dropping