

# Rio Salado College

## Paralegal Program Review: Academic Years 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-2015

Review Conducted: AY2015-16

### Degrees and Certificates

#### Certificate of Completion (CCL) (5685) and Associate in Applied Science (AAS) (3126) in Paralegal

##### CCL in Paralegal

The Certificate of Completion (CCL) in Paralegal program is designed to provide students with training required for employment as a paralegal. The program covers foundations and types of law including business and tort law in addition to fundamentals of litigation. Courses focus on paralegal responsibilities in the various areas of law practice, including the development of effective written and oral communication skills, critical thinking skills, computer proficiency, and legal research techniques. Legal theory and ethics are integrated throughout the program. The program includes both a Certificate of Completion in Paralegal and an Associate in Applied Science in Paralegal.

Required Courses:	Credits:	
		36-39
BPC110	Computer Usage and Applications (3) OR	
CIS105	Survey of Computer Information Systems (3)	3
+ CRE101	College Critical Reading (3) OR Equivalent as indicated by assessment	0-3
+ ENG101	First-Year Composition (3) OR	
+ ENG107	First-Year Composition for ESL (3)	3
	PAR102 Foundations of the Paralegal Profession	3
+ PAR104	Ethics for the Paralegal	3
+ PAR106	Legal Foundations for Paralegals	3
+ PAR112	Paralegal Fundamentals of Litigation	3
+ PAR114	Paralegal Litigation	3
+ PAR206	Paralegal Business Law	3
+ PAR208	Introduction to Tort Law	3
+ PAR220	Paralegal Writing	3

+ PAR222	Paralegal Research	3
+ PAR224	Law Office Technology for the Paralegal	3

### **AAS in Paralegal**

The Associate in Applied Science (AAS) in Paralegal program is designed to provide students with training required for employment as a paralegal. The program covers foundations and types of law including business and tort law in addition to fundamentals of litigation. Courses focus on paralegal responsibilities in the various areas of law practice, including the development of effective written and oral communication skills, critical thinking skills, computer proficiency, and legal research techniques. Legal theory and ethics are integrated throughout the program. The program includes both a Certificate of Completion in Paralegal and an Associate in Applied Science in Paralegal.

### **Required Courses:**

Certificate of Completion in Paralegal (5685)	36-39
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### **Restricted Electives:**

6-9

+ PAR230	Family Law for the Paralegal	3
+ PAR231	Elder Law for the Paralegal	3
+ PAR232	Bankruptcy Law for the Paralegal	3
+ PAR233	Real Estate Law for the Paralegal	3
PAR234	Administrative Law for the Paralegal	3
+ PAR235	Corporate Law for the Paralegal	3
PAR+++++	Any PAR Paralegal Studies Course	1-3
POS110	American National Government	3
POS221	Arizona Constitution	1
POS222	U.S. Constitution	2

### **General Education Requirements:**

19

### **General Education Core:**

9

### **First-Year Composition**

3

Met by ENG101 or ENG107 in the Required Courses area AND

- + ENG102 First-Year Composition (3) OR
- + ENG111 Technical and Professional Writing (3)

<b>Oral Communication</b>	3
COM100 Introduction to Human Communication (3) OR	
COM110 Interpersonal Communication (3) OR	
COM230 Small Group Communication (3)	
<b>Critical Reading</b>	0
Met by CRE101 or Equivalent in the Required Courses area.	
<b>Mathematics</b>	3
+ MAT102 Mathematical Concepts/Applications (3) OR	
Satisfactory completion of a higher level mathematics course.	
<b>General Education Distribution:</b>	10
<b>Humanities and Fine Arts</b>	3
Any approved general education course from the Humanities and Fine Arts area.	
<b>Social and Behavioral Sciences</b>	3
Any approved General Education course in the Social and Behavioral Sciences area.	
<b>Natural Sciences</b>	4
Any approved general education course from the Natural Sciences area.	

## **Purpose and Mission of the Paralegal Program**

The Paralegal Program was created and implemented in fall, 2009 to meet the growing needs of the industry. In early research and exploration of the program's viability, the Bureau of Labor Statistics forecast a 17% growth in the industry over the following 10 years.

In 2009 there was one Paralegal program in the district at Phoenix College, requiring in-person attendance. An environmental scan showed that a fully online program was viable due to the college's ability to offer a flexible and affordable option to national online programs that were being offered.

The mission of the program was to prepare students for employment as paralegals. Subject matter experts were contracted to research and develop the content of the courses. The program covers foundations and types of law, including business and tort law, in addition to fundamentals of litigation. Courses focus on paralegal responsibilities in the various areas of law practice, including the development of effective written and oral communication skills, critical thinking skills, computer proficiency, and legal research techniques. Legal theory and ethics are integrated throughout the program. The program offers a Certificate of Completion in Paralegal and an Associate in Applied Science in Paralegal.

[According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), employment of paralegals and legal assistants is projected to grow eight percent from 2014 to 2024, as fast as average for all occupations.

### **Alignment with Rio Salado College Mission Documents**

Recognizing a need and market to create a fully online paralegal program aligns with Rio's culture of innovation, flexibility, and affordability. Other national institutions offering online programs were at least 3 times more expensive than our tuition. Originally, the program offered 6 annual start dates, but to enhance flexibility, it has since aligned with Rio's 40+ Monday starts.

Every year, an advisory committee consisting of practitioners and industry leaders meet to discuss current trends and best practices in the field. Rio is responsive to the needs of industry, and actively engaged with the community by creating specialty courses such as immigration law and environmental law in order to prepare students for the various subfields in law. In addition, an internship course was added to further job opportunities between our students and potential employers. A career-building course also provides personalized service committed to preparing students for interviews and the job application process.

### **Program Viability**

The Rio Salado Paralegal Program is one of two Paralegal programs in the District; it is the only fully online program in the District. Enrollment has been reflective of a more stable economy and college/national trends which unfortunately means declined enrollments across the board.

Based on the alumni survey, students appreciate the flexibility of the online program and since recently switching to flex starts, we are in a unique position to market, perhaps out of state, to attract more students.

## **Program Best Practices**

A best practice in the occupational programs, to include Paralegal, is the collaborative process involving an Advisory Committee to ensure the curriculum is relevant, current, and high quality.

This committee, consisting of practitioners and industry leaders, meets annually to discuss current trends and best practices in the field. Rio is responsive to the needs of industry and actively engaged in the community, as evidenced by the creation of specialty courses such as immigration law and environmental law in order to prepare students for the various subfields in law.

## **Program Decisions and Action Plans**

Based on the current data, the Paralegal department will continue to revise and modify courses to align with NALA certification exam competencies. It will also continue to identify trends and best practices in the field to better prepare students for the job market.

We will also explore the possibility of credit for prior learning, given that many current practitioners are gainfully employed without having attended a formal paralegal program. We can maximize our completion rates by recognizing industry standard certifications such as NALA, which demonstrate mastery of competencies in the field.

The program is in a position to market out of state and compete with other online institutions that charge more than three times as much tuition.

## **Future Reports/Reviews**

Another alumni survey will be distributed after AY2017-18 to determine the success of current and future action plans. A program review in three to five years will allow ample time to properly measure the results of new strategies.

## **Addendum: Review and Adoption of Recommendations**

On September 22, 2016, the Faculty Chair met with a sub-team comprising members of the Assessment Team as well as two Student Services representatives. The following recommendations were discussed and identified as action plans for the Paralegal Program. These recommendations were presented at the Assessment Team meeting on October 18, 2016, and approved by the Vice President of Academic Affairs.

- Collect further data on withdrawal rates and gaps in persistence, and identify course- and program-level interventions.
- Provide flexible options in the internship course to meet the needs of our working students.

- Explore credit for prior learning opportunities for practitioners who pass the NALA certification exam.
- Prepare to scale the program for future out-of-state growth.
- Conduct an alumni survey in AY2017-2018.