

2011 EMPLOYER SURVEY

Mt. San Antonio College and the University of La Verne Joint Survey

In Spring 2011, Mt. San Antonio College and the University of La Verne joined in a survey of the legal community. The community surveyed was the immediate legal community surrounding the two schools, primarily eastern Los Angeles County. Thirty surveys were completed.

TYPES OF LAW PRACTICES

The types of firms which responded were overwhelmingly private firms, with some corporate offices and two others. These were primarily small firms, with the majority, 57%, having five or fewer attorneys. Fifty per cent have one or two paralegals. The majority who did not hire paralegals stated they did not have the resources to do so. Five of the firms indicated they had hired a paralegal in the last year.

The District Attorney's Office, with 1000 attorneys, states there is only one paralegal. This is probably not accurate, and the person may have reflected his own paralegal and not the entire organization's, or the paralegals have other titles.

One corporation with 42 attorneys has 14 paralegals, and does not have high educational requirements (see below). Another firm has 40 attorneys and 21 paralegals, which makes that a firm to study to see how the high percentage of paralegals affects the work flow and profit.

Type of firm

	#	%
Private Law Firm	22	73%
Corporation	6	20
Government Agency	1	3
Public Interest Agency	1	3

Number of paralegals employed by the firm or department

Number of paralegals	#	%
0	5	17
1	6	20
2	10	30
4	2	7
14	1	3
18-21	2	7
No response	4	13

The number of attorneys in the organization

Number of attorneys	Number of Responses	%%
1	9	30
2	2	7
3	3	10
5	3	10
11-12	4	13
33	1	3
40-42	2	7
100-105	2	7
1,000 DA office	1	3
No response	3	10

Reasons do not hire paralegals

Do not have adequate resources currently	9
Do not see any benefit to a paralegal over a secretary	1
Would rather hire a law clerk	1
Would rather do the work myself	3

Almost two-thirds of the respondents do litigation in their practice. Most handle more than one area of law. Forty percent do real estate law and thirty-seven per cent do wills and trusts. One surprise was the number who did business law and labor or employment law. This reaffirms our program's focus on litigation and gives students ideas of specialty areas they might want to study.

Areas of practice

	#	%
Litigation	19	63%
Real Estate	12	40
Wills, Probate, Trusts and Estates	11	37
Labor/Employment	11	37
Corporate/Business Law	9	30
Insurance	6	20
Family Law	5	17
Bankruptcy	4	13
Criminal Law	3	15
Administrative law	2	4
Immigration Law	1	3
Workers' Compensation	1	3
Other HOA law, personal injury, evictions, government affairs, entertainment, construction disputes, ADR		

HIRING PARALEGALS

Over 60% of the respondents wanted a paralegal certificate and a degree, with slightly more stating a four year degree. Prior experience was also highly rated. Eleven, 37%, want both education and experience. This is the first time that the number of firms wanting a bachelor's degree and certificate has exceeded those who want the associate's degree and certificate.

Almost all the respondents highly valued ethics, oral and written communication skills, the ability to work well with others, and initiative. Personal appearance and self confidence were highly valued by a little over half, and very few were concerned with the applicant's grades in school. As some said, once the applicant has the degree and certificate, grades are not looked into.

Other desired skills were:

Follows up on task until completed
 Independent worker, needing only limited supervision
 Able to research on line
 Technology skills
 Reliable
 Flexible
 Able to multitask
 Common sense
 Attention to detail
 Ability to research
 Ability to organize case files
 Able to understand the concepts
 Good outlook
 Strong team orientation with collaborative skills

All of these “soft skills” are extremely important, and cannot always be taught.

Education and Experience of Paralegals

	#	%
Four Year Degree plus Paralegal Certificate	10	33
Two Year Degree plus Paralegal Certificate	9	30
Experience as a paralegal	5	17
Four Year Degree	5	17
Some law office experience	4	13
Experience as a paralegal in a particular area of law	3	10
Some College	2	7
Two Year Degree	2	7
Paralegal Certificate only	1	3
No Experience	0	0

Desired Personal Characteristics of Paralegals

Twenty-five people responded to this question so the percentages are based on that number.

Characteristic	Highly important		Important		Not important	
Strong personal ethics	22	88%	2			
Good oral communication skills	21	84	4			
Good writing skills	21	84	3			
Ability to work well with others	21	84	3			

Ability to take initiative	20	80	3		1	
Self-confidence	15	60	8		1	
Personal appearance	14	56	10		1	
Wide variety of skills	9	36	13		1	
Grades in college courses	5	20	12		7	

The general starting salary for paralegals

	#	%
Over \$20/hour or \$41,601 annually if full-time	9	38
Between \$15.01 and \$17/hour (\$31,201-\$35,360 annually if full-time)	6	25
Between \$17.01 and \$20/hour (\$35,361-\$41,600 annually if full-time)	4	17
Between \$10.01 and \$15/hour (\$20,801-\$31,200 annually if full-time)	4	17
Less than \$10/hour or \$20,800 annually if full-time	1	4
No response	6	

The larger firms tended to pay the highest, but this is not absolute. Two large firms paid between \$15.01 and \$17 per hour, and two sole attorney firms paid the high salaries. It is encouraging that 38 per cent do pay over \$20 per hour. Some firms did indicate that the salaries do go up with experience. The wages are higher than the survey done in 2008.

Recruitment Methods

Advertisements	12
Through paralegal programs	5
Through paralegal associations	5
Employment agencies	2
Other Promote from within upon earning paralegal certificate, call ULV, call local schools, internet, internal job posting	

PARALEGAL DUTIES

In regard to the duties paralegals do, if the categories “often” and “sometimes” are combined, almost all the duties listed are highly valued and used. Paralegals are used less often in interviewing and investigation and seldom in preparing client bills.

The most frequently performed duty is document preparation, with client contact next. After those, several duties that relate to documents and organization are included. Trial preparation,

calendaring, factual research and letter writing are done fairly often. Legal research is not done often by most paralegals, but more do computerized legal research.

The use of computerized legal research relates to the new course our program offers, Advanced On-Line Research. It is a real asset to students to be able to function on-line skillfully. Also, the emphasis on document preparation means our program will continue to emphasize that in courses. Perhaps more teaching needs to be done in the areas of document control and organization.

The Duties of Paralegals

Function	Often	%	Some	%	Combined Often & Some %	Rare	None
Document prep	20	77%	5	20	97	0	0
Client contact	17	68	5	20	88	1	2
Document control	14	56	6	24	80	1	2
File organization	13	52	7	28	80	3	1
Discovery prep	12	48	7	28	76	4	0
Trial preparation	12	48	7	28	76	4	1
Calendaring	11	44	6	24	68	4	2
Factual research	10	40	9	36	76	4	1
Letter Writing	10	40	11	44	84	2	1
Computerized legal research	9	36	10	40	76	3	2
Court filing	9	36	8	32	68	6	1
Database management	8	32	7	28	60	4	1
Legal research	6	24	13	52	76	4	2
Interview & investigation	3	12	10	40	52	4	5
Preparation of client bills	2	8	5	20	28	2	14

Percentages are based on 25 responses.

ELECTRONIC USE IN THE OFFICE

WordPerfect Corel is still alive and well, despite all past speculation. However, most offices which use it, also use Microsoft Word. Westlaw and Lexis/Nexis use is pretty equal.

Considering the location of the survey group and the average size of the firms, the fact that 33% have included electronic discovery in a case is interesting. Electronic discovery was unknown to many just a few years ago. Many respondents did not answer the question about trial presentation, and that portion of the survey should be redone to find out the actual use of software in trials.

Computer Programs Used

	#	%
Microsoft Word	22	79
Westlaw	16	57
Lexis/Nexis	13	46
Excel	12	43
Corel WordPerfect	9	32
Time keeping program	9	32
Hotdocs	5	18
Essential Forms	5	18
Other online research tool	4	14
TimeSlips	4	14
Summation or Concordance or other such database	4	14
Dissomaster	3	11
CaseMap	3	11
CompuLaw	3	11
Sanctions	2	7
TeamConnect	2	7
Other word processing	1	4
Other (1 response only) Legal Solutions, Abacus, Practice Master/TABS, Internet, CLMS, Outlook, Quicken, PCLaw, Trial Director, Amicus, Exhibitor		

Based on 28 responses

Thirty-three per cent of those responding have participated in electronic discovery.

While most respondents did not indicate they had used any electronic programs for trial presentation purposes, the programs mentioned were:

PowerPoint
Trial Director
Sanctions
Case Map
Exhibitor

CONCLUSIONS

The survey seems to reflect the types of firms around the program. Litigation should continue to be emphasized. Students should be aware of the high percentage doing real estate work, so that they can knowingly choose electives.

In marketing paralegals, the degree and the paralegal certificate are necessary, and reflects the programs decision to give a certificate to all degree graduates. Experience remains extremely important, and this is why the program has decided to require the internship.

The skills that law firms look for in paralegals should be shared with the students, so that they can prepare themselves in areas not particularly taught in courses.

Emphasis on document preparation should be continued and even expanded. Use of Westlaw for research should be encouraged. Either Westlaw or Lexis may be useful, being that the program cannot afford to teach both. Also, electronic evidence is expanding rapidly and should be taught to the students more in depth.

Finally, these results will be posted on the web site along with the graduate results and will be shared with the advisory committee and faculty.