

RESULTS OF 2012 GRADUATE SURVEY

In late 2011 and early 2012, through email and U.S. mail, a survey was sent to 84 graduates who completed in 2008, 2009 and 2010. Twenty-seven responses were received, for a 32% return rate. Twenty-three were bachelor degree graduates and four earned only the Paralegal Certificate.

Twelve of the respondents worked as paralegals, with five in law related jobs, including attorney. Five were in other areas of employment and five were unemployed.

OCCUPATION	NUMBER	PERCENT	PERCENT LAW
Paralegal	12	44	62.5
Law related	5	18.5	
Other area	5	18.5	
Unemployed	5	18.5	

Eleven (41%) of the graduates continued their education, with three studying toward a J.D. and the rest for various Master's Degrees or Certificates.

PARALEGAL JOB INFORMATION

Some of those who were not now paralegals or in law-related positions had previously worked in the field. Also, some who were in law-related positions did not work in an office where they could answer the questions in this section. Therefore, in this section, percentages are based on the number of answers, which in most case were 19.

TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Law firm	14	74
Corporate	2	11
Government	1	5
Courts	1	5
Self-employed	1	5

SIZE OF OFFICE

# FIRMS	# ATTORNEYS	#PARALEGALS	
1	0	1	
1	1	0	8 firms with one attorney 44% of total
4	1	1	
2	1	2	
1	1	3	
1	2	2	
1	3	5	
1	4	3	

1	5	2	
1	6	0	
1	6	3	
1	20	4	
1	94	17	
1	260	50	

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Many offices handle more than one type of practice. To determine percentages, the number of offices listed, 19, is used.

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Litigation	11	58
Corporate/Business Law	8	42
Wills, Probate, Trusts	8	42
Bankruptcy	5	26
Real Estate	5	26
Family Law	4	21
Insurance	3	16
Administrative Law	2	10
Workers' compensation	2	10
Criminal Law	1	5
Unlawful Detainer	1	5
Employment	1	5
Collections	1	5
Public Entity	1	5
Small Claims	1	5
Immigration Law	0	0

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

Not all answered this question, so only the numbers are shown. The question asked what is the education and experience of a typical paralegal hired by the organization.

Paralegal Certificate only	5
Two year degree	1
Two year degree and Paralegal Certificate	2
Four year degree	3
Four year degree and Paralegal Certificate	5

No experience	1
Some law office experience	8
Experience as a paralegal	3

These findings indicate that the Paralegal Certificate is extremely important, and that the four year degree is sought by most of these firms. Considering that these are primarily local firms, this is surprising, as until recently, the two year degree was sufficient in the local market.

However, experience continues to be very important, which is also reflected in some comments about the education. Overwhelmingly, experience was required, although any experience in a law office was sufficient.

OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF EMPLOYEES

Graduates were asked the importance of various personal characteristics in the firm's hiring practices.

CHARACTERISTIC	HIGHLY IMPORTANT	PERCENT	IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT
Good writing skills	15	79	3	0
Ability to work well with others	15	79	3	1
Good oral communication skills	14	74	5	0
Strong personal ethics	13	68	3	2
Ability to take initiative	12	63	5	1
Self confidence	10	53	8	1
Wide variety of skills	10	53	7	2
Personal appearance	6	32	9	4
Grades in college courses	1	5	5	13

Very interesting that communication skills, written and oral, along with being able to work well with others were the highest attributes looked for in employees. In the employer survey recently completed, strong personal ethics was the top listed characteristic with the three top here following. It appears the graduates do not perceive that employers are looking for ethics as number one.

DUTIES OF PARALEGALS

Function	Often	%	Some	%	Combined Often & Some %	Rare	None	Employers Percent Often & Some
Document control	15	79	3	16	95	1	0	80
Letter Writing	15	79	2	11	89	1	1	84
Document prep	14	74	4	21	95	0	1	97
Client contact	14	74	2	11	85	2	2	88
File organization	13	68	3	16	84	2	1	80
Database management	12	63	3	16	79	2	2	60
Calendaring	12	63	2	11	74	2	3	68
Court filing	11	58	2	11	68	2	3	68

Trial preparation	7	35	4	21	56	3	4	76
Discovery prep	6	32	5	26	58	5	3	76
Factual research	5	26	8	42	68	3	2	76
Computerized legal research	3	16	10	53	69	2	4	76
Legal research	3	16	8	42	58	4	4	76
Interview & investigation	3	16	5	26	42	5	6	52
Preparation of client bills	2	11	3	16	27	3	10	28

The top activities of paralegals are document control, document preparation, letter writing, client contact, file organization, database management, calendaring and court filing. This pretty well lines up with the attorneys' responses, although database management and document control (related functions) were much lower in the attorneys' surveys. However, there is a large disconnect between the attorneys' responses and the graduates in the areas of trial preparation, discovery preparation, factual research, and both legal research and computerized research, with the attorneys stating the paralegals did all these more often than the paralegals say they do.

Interviewing and investigating are still at the bottom of what paralegals do in these offices.

SOFTWARE

Graduates were asked what software was used in their offices. In addition to the listed ones, numerous other programs were listed.

	#	%
Microsoft Word	19	100
Google	18	95
Excel	17	89
Westlaw	12	63
Time keeping program	10	53
Corel WordPerfect	9	47
Lexis/Nexis	8	42
AbacusLaw	7	37
Child support calculator	5	26
Essential Forms	4	21
Other online research tool	4	21
Hotdocs	3	16
Summation or Concordance	2	11
Other Legal Solutions (4) Outlook (4) Adobe (2) Amicus Attorney (2) ProLaw (2)		

Livelink	
Perfect Law	
Net Documents	
Thunderbird	
Collier	
Serengeti	
Worldox	
Docstar	
Access	
PC docs	
AS 400	
Equitrac Pro	
A-1 Law	
Proforma	

All who listed WordPerfect also listed Word. All who listed Lexis also listed Westlaw.

Most of the programs listed in “other” are case or document management, accounting, or open source programs like word processing.

Word, Excel, and Westlaw are definitely the most used and the more the program can teach the students in those areas, the better. It should be noted that 37 percent of the firms do not have either Westlaw or Lexis. However, the use of Google for all kinds of information is across the board.

This survey shows that graduates must be prepared for whatever programs are used in an office. They must be able to take the skills they learn on one program and transfer that to others, and to be able to teach themselves how to use specific programs.

Summation or Concordance was used in only two firms, one a 20-attorney firm and the other a small office.

Only three graduates had participated in electronic discovery. Most did not respond to the trial presentation software question, but PowerPoint, Excel and Word were mentioned. One student wrote that her attorneys used easels and charts.

SALARY

	\$20K- 24,9	\$25K- 29,9	\$30K- 34,9	\$35K- 39,9	\$40K -449	\$45K- 49,9	\$50K- 59	\$55K -59,9	\$60K 64,9	\$65 K- 69,9	Over 70K
Starting	4	4	3	1	0	1					
Current		1	1	0	4	1				1	2

Starting pay in this area can be very low, minimum wage or \$10.00 per hour. However, most graduates move up fairly well.

The two highest paid graduates work for corporations. One is in a huge corporation with many attorneys and paralegals, but the other is in a small one, and she earns \$130,000. She had this job prior to attending La Verne and has moved up with her education.

JOB SEARCH INFORMATION

Graduates found their first jobs through friends, Craigslist, Monster.com, the University of La Verne, networking and the newspaper. Eight contacted one to three employers before obtaining the job and three contracted over ten. Nine found the first job in one month or less, while two took over seven months. Of course, five are unemployed and five are working in other fields, some of whom want to work in the legal field but cannot find a position. There appears to be a defect in the survey instrument, in that those who had never worked in the legal field were asked to complete that section and then skip to question 30. However, the rest of that section was on the next page and only one answered it, probably because others did not see it and skipped straight to question 30.

IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION TO OBTAINING FIRST JOB

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Essential	8	50
Extremely Important	2	12.6
Important, but equal to other factors	5	31
Not important	1	6

Some students had a paralegal job prior to enrolling or obtained it before graduation. Of those, Four indicated they received a promotion and salary increase after graduation. One stated she received a salary increase and one indicated a promotion without a salary increase.

Other factors in addition to education that helped the graduates obtain the position were internship, experience and volunteering.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Of those who work in the legal field, 79% stated the program prepared them adequately for their initial employment. Of those who indicated otherwise, the reasons stated were:

1. Not prepared for out-of-state employment
2. Need more education in research
3. Need experience
4. Need better secretarial skills

When those who have not worked in the field are asked a similar question, responses include the need for:

1. Experience
2. More on-line research
3. More research skills

4. Better internships

One of the most important questions was what the graduates recommend be included in the program.

1. More research and on line research – Mentioned seven times
2. Required internship or better internship – Mentioned seven times
3. Employment preparation – students mentioned:
 - Resume writing
 - Learn law office culture
 - Practice peaking on the telephone
4. Law school preparation, LSAT – Mentioned two times
5. More forms done and more documents in all classes – Mentioned two times
6. Other things mentioned were:
 - More litigation
 - Taught to pay attention to detail in document handling and preparation
 - Summation and concordance
 - Billing
 - Unlawful detainer
 - Immigration
 - E discovery
 - Complex writing
 - Family law and bankruptcy be required
 - Employment law
 - Court filing procedures
 - More electives
 - Intellectual property
 - Bankruptcy
 - More computer programs
 - More English courses
 - Put computer programs in each class as appropriate and drop the computer class

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The percentage of those working in the legal field is pretty good, but there needs to be help for those who are still unemployed. This matches with the recommendations of the students that internship should be required.
2. The great majority of the students will work for solo practitioners doing litigation.

3. Writing and oral skills are the most important criteria for hiring. There was no criticism that the program was not doing enough in this area, but the need should be stressed to current students.
4. Many of the skills performed most often by the paralegals involve document control and organization, and those skills can be developed in the courses. Research needs to be done to see how best to do that.
5. Students need to be prepared to learn any computer program which may be used by the law office. Word is universal in Southern California now, and Westlaw is used more often than Lexis. All those who used Lexis also had Westlaw.
6. Students need to know that starting salaries can be low, and those who are planning to change from a current career should be so advised.
7. Students over and over stated an internship of experience is necessary. We have started a mandatory internship class and hopefully, this will assist them. It also will teach resume building, law office culture, job search skills.
8. Although graduates indicate they do not do that much legal research, they stated they wanted more research taught, including on-line research. The new course, Advanced On-line Research excellently meets this need and the students become better in research and in memo writing. Perhaps this course should be required for all students.
9. Adjunct professors need to be encouraged to always teach the forms for each course.
10. This survey should be posted on our website, shared with the advisory committee and the faculty, and with the students.