



The National Federation of Paralegal Associations

Position Statement Regarding Short-Term Paralegal Programs

Recently, there have been many short-term paralegal programs offered for entry-level paralegals. Many of these programs require less than nine semester credit hours. And charge fees that average more per credit hour than non-short-term programs. These programs not only provide a disservice to students who desire a paralegal certificate. They are also a disservice to the employer who expects someone with a paralegal education to have certain knowledge and skills upon graduation.

Most paralegal education programs have minimal standards recognized by paralegal educators, lawyers and other paralegals. Some short-term programs are affiliated and/or rent space from well-known colleges and universities which may lead students and employers to associate the reputation of that facility with the program.

Short-term programs provide a disservice to students and prospective employers because:

1. Tuition fees often are often billed at a higher rate and students expect these short-term programs will provide a complete paralegal education thereby ensuring that they will be able to secure a paralegal position upon graduation from the program.
2. Fewer legal courses are taught in short-term programs, some of which do not cover major areas of law.
3. Short-term programs do not provide enough semester credit hours to teach sufficient legal theory and practical skills that are necessary in the workplace.
4. Reputations of colleges and universities offering these programs may also be harmed if programs offered make misleading advertisements to paralegal students.
5. Consumers are aware of the value of paralegals and expect a certain level of service from paralegals including the ability to perform complex assignments. Paralegal education from a traditional paralegal program provides graduates with an ability to perform those types of assignments.
6. The reputation of paralegals as cost-effective and valued members of the legal team may be minimized if short-term programs lower education standards.

Employers who currently employ paralegals require them to have certain knowledge of legal theory and skills. Many employers have worked with paralegals who have earned a paralegal degree or certificate and are aware of the skills learned by such paralegals. Short-term programs have the potential of harming the reputation of paralegals who have attended traditional paralegal programs.

CONCLUSION

NFPA, as the leader of the paralegal profession™, has an obligation to its members and to the legal community to provide reliable, current and comprehensive information relating to the paralegal programs so that paralegal students can perform their own due diligence in the selection of a paralegal program. NFPA recommends that those colleges and/or universities offering short-term paralegal programs evaluate the courses offered by them to determine if those courses meet the following standards, which is a minimum of at least 18 semester units of paralegal coursework and appropriate general education.

- ✓ Post-secondary coursework in substantive and procedural law, the American legal system, law offices and related environments, the paralegal profession, legal research and writing, ethics and areas of legal practice such as those described in *AAfPE's Core Competencies for Paralegal Programs*;
- ✓ No fewer than 18 semester credit hours (or the equivalent) of substantive paralegal courses;
- ✓ The completion of a minimum of 60 semester (or the equivalent) of total post-secondary study prior to graduation. A semester hour is equivalent to 15 classroom hours of at least 50 minutes in duration. The course offerings may be for credit or not for credit, but should meet these minimum time periods;
- ✓ The paralegal education program must be offered by an institution that is:
 - An institutional member of the American Association for Paralegal Education (“AAfPE”); or
 - A paralegal educational program approved by the American Bar Association; or
 - A paralegal education program offered by an institution accredited by an agency recognized by the United States Department of Education and offering courses at the post-secondary level.