

FAQ

Paralegal Studies Certificate

1. What is a “Paralegal” in the legal profession?

Historically, secretarial, clerical, and research assistants in a law office who did work under direction and supervision of an attorney were the predecessors to the paralegal of today. However, as the need for more sophisticated skills for assisting lawyers evolved over time, the demand for additional training resulted in a more structured educational process to become qualified for this line of work. The paralegal of today is a distinct occupational category. The *Business & Professions Code Section 6450 (a)* defines a paralegal in California.

2. What does a “Paralegal” do?

Generally a paralegal may do case planning, development, and management; legal research; interviewing clients; fact gathering and retrieving information; drafting and analyzing legal documents; collecting, compiling, and utilizing technical information to make an independent decision and recommendation to the supervising attorney. A paralegal may under certain circumstances, if permitted by statute or regulation, represent clients before a state or federal administrative agency. However, there are limitations as well. Primary among those is that a paralegal may not provide legal advice nor represent a client in court. The *Business & Professions Code Section 6450 (b)* details the occupational limitations more fully.

3. Do I qualify for admission to the Paralegal Studies Certificate program?

An applicant must have a minimum of a High School Diploma (or GED) to be considered for admission. Most applicants will have completed additional college level courses while some may have earned an undergraduate degree. The admissions determination takes a holistic approach in weighing a variety of individual factors such as work experience and maturity of purpose to pursue the studies program in addition to formal educational qualifications. An interview may be required for some applicants.

4. How long does it take to complete the study program?

Most students may complete the course of paralegal studies in one year. Classes are offered during weekends and evenings allowing for a balance to the student's existing employment or family commitments.

5. How much does the study program cost?

Tuition of \$2,000 for the achieving the core courses with another \$1,000 for taking four additional specialized courses. This means that it will take a total of \$3,000 in tuition to complete 24 units comprising of both core and specialized course work. If taken separately specialized courses are \$125.00 per unit. Students utilize VA benefits, employer reimbursement programs, grants, or self-finance their education. The University has an incremental payment plan available as well. Application, Registration, ID Card, Lexis-Nexis subscription, and course texts are additional costs.

6. Who are the instructors?

Instructors are attorneys or specialized paralegals that teach the courses.

7. Is there employment support upon graduation?

Students are encouraged from the beginning of their studies program to consider where they want to work upon completion. Information on law firms, governmental agencies, and corporate legal offices is provided. The *Los Angeles Daily Journal* is available in the library for current information on the paralegal job market openings. Law firms are invited to interview paralegal graduates on campus.

8. When do classes start?

Paralegal classes commence whenever at least four newly admitted students register. Class size is between four to ten students permitting close interaction with instructors in the learning process.

9. Are there continuing education requirements for paralegals?

Yes, in California all paralegals must certify completion of four hours of continuing education in legal ethics every three years. Every two years, paralegals are required to complete four hours of general law or in a specialized area of the law.

10. Is the IU Paralegal Certificate Studies Program State-approved?

Yes, the State of California Bureau of Private Post Secondary and Vocational Education (BPPVE) has approved the Irvine University Paralegal Studies Program. This meets the *Business and Professions Code Section 6450 (c)(2)* requirement that a paralegal possess a certificate of completion from a postsecondary institution that has been approved by the BPPVE.