**Sinclair Community College - Continuous Improvement Annual Update 2010-11**

**Program:** Paralegal

**Section I: Trend Data**

1. **Program Trend Data**

SUCCESS RATES

Study of the PAR.AAS program success rates show that they exceed Sinclair averages. Except for introductory-level courses that serve to persuade a few students each term that their interests are better suited to career paths outside the law, PAR courses display a student success rate of 85-90%. These figures have been consistent for AY 05-06 through AY 09-10. In the paralegal internship courses, where students near graduation can demonstrate their employment skills to the legal community, the success rate rises to 95-100%. The BPS division overall success rate is 72%, and the college overall success rate is 71%.

ENROLLMENT RATES

PAR enrollment has grown by about 17% in recent years, from an FTE of 190 in FY 2007-08 to 222 in FY 2009-10. This growth is probably attributable to the growth in FTE at Sinclair College, which tracked at 27% during the same period. Paralegal courses operate at or near the seat capacity in each scheduled classroom.

GRADUATION RATES

PAR.AAS program graduation numbers have remained steady for AY 05-06 through AY 09-10, with 36 paralegal students completing their degrees in AY 09-10.

1. **Interpretation and Analysis of Trend Data** *Suggestions of questions that might be addressed in this section: What trends do you see in the above data? Are there internal or external factors that account for these trends? What are the implications for the program or department? What actions have the department taken that have influenced these trends? What strategies will the department implement as a result of this data?*

ENROLLMENT AND GRADUATION

Enrollment in the PAR Program is about optimal, given the following constraints: (1) The department is small, with only four full-time faculty. (2) One of those four faculty members is also responsible for chair duties for three departments, PAR, LAW, and RES. (3) Some PAR classes are limited in capacity to 16, because they require extensive writing assistance for students, and are heavy in grading demands. (4) Almost all PAR courses require computer-equipped classrooms, which maxes classroom size at 24 for most classes. (5) All PAR students are required to complete two internships prior to graduation. (6) The Dayton area legal market has not shown the ability to absorb more high-quality Sinclair paralegal interns and graduates than are currently entering the job market annually; additionally, the legal marketplace has contracted recently with the rest of the economy.

The PAR Program has added sections at times to meet enrollment demands, and has accepted additional students over course capacity at other times. The latter strategy is especially unsatisfactory, as it results in some students working in the classroom without computer access and increases the grading load of the instructor.

Historically, when applications to the PAR Program have increased significantly, additional introductory courses have been scheduled to accommodate the demand. However, this strategy eventually has negative consequences, as sufficient upper-level courses cannot be scheduled with existing faculty, and as graduating students ultimately find insufficient internships and job placements to meet their numbers.

ENROLLMENT GROWTH

Given the highly structured nature of the PAR Program, with prerequisite courses cascading forward in a logical fashion, and students advancing in cohort groups, and considering the other constraints above, incremental increases in enrollment cannot be successful. The pipeline is full and the output is capped by local employment demand. The only logical blueprint for growing the Paralegal Program would require three phases: (1) a concentrated effort to educate the local business and legal communities about the value-added results of hiring professional paralegals; (2) doubling the size of the PAR department – every individual aspect of the PAR program is interdependent and operating at capacity, so every aspect would have to be duplicated to produce the same successful results; (3) a commitment to a student recruitment program that would compete with commercial paralegal schools for the students who are not choosing Sinclair for their paralegal studies. The second two phases would be costly undertakings. So at this time the PAR department has no plans for significant enrollment growth.

CLASSROOM CAPACITY EXPANSION

During the summer 2010, one of the computer classrooms used by the Paralegal Program, Room 5134, was equipped with additional computers to accommodate 40 students in a classroom instead of 22. While this helped with the space limitations, it brought with it other downsides, starting with the issue of doubling the work for faculty at the same payload.

Technology presents other challenges in Room 5134. The overhead projector is readable to only students who sit in the first two rows of the classroom. This makes it difficult for students in the rest of the classroom to follow along during guided demonstration. The computer monitors sit on the desks and block the student’s view of instructor and projector and block the instructor’s view of the students (they are hidden behind the monitors). The use of the Synchroneyes automated system on the instructor station allows the instructor to project the main screen images onto individual computer screens, which works well except when students are expected to mimic the instructor’s actions by performing work on their own computers.

To be heard in the Room 5134 classroom now requires instructor and students to speak in a very loud voice and this makes sharing and communicating very difficult. During Fall of 2010 and Winter of 2011, Debbie Badonsky worked extensively with Facilities Management and IT Services to reduce the noise of the HVAC system and to add speakers to the back of this room to make the instructor’s voice clear to all students in the room.

PARALEGAL STUDENT PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS

To address the trend of consistently high student success rates, the PAR Program needs to continue high student performance requirements, and perhaps strengthening those requirements. Currently, students are required to have a 2.0 GPA when they enroll in PAR, and to maintain at least a 2.0 GPA. The students who are not successful in completing the program, either dropping out or failing out, appear to be those who enter with a low GPA, and/or maintain that average with the help of their Gen Ed courses. Currently under study by the department are proposals to raise the minimum GPA level for PAR degree seekers to 2.5, and a requirement that students maintain their PAR Program GPA, not just their overall GPA, at the 2.5 level.

INCREASING PAR ENROLLMENT

There are no current plans to increase student enrollment, considering the constraints mentioned above. However, the PAR Program will work with the Sinclair Career Services Office to better educate the local legal community and business community about the advantages of using professionally-trained paralegals to deliver legal services at lower cost. If the local demand for paralegals can be increased, the needs of the marketplace could justify addressing the other constraints discussed above, primarily the number of full-time faculty in the department.

**Section II: Progress Since the Most Recent Review**

1. What was the fiscal year of the most recent Program Review for this program?

2005-06
2. Briefly summarize the goals that were listed in Section IV part E of the most recent Program Review Self-Study (this section of the Self-Study asks “What are the department’s/program’s goals and rationale for expanding and improving student learning, including new courses, programs, delivery formats and locations”)?

Expanding short-term (1.5 quarter-hour) PAR electives, when appropriate

1. Have these goals changed since your last Program Review Self-Study? If so, please describe the changes.

No, the PAR Program remains committed to adding electives that will serve current market demands. In addition, it is recognized that some electives may need to be eliminated or combined with others, when it appears that the legal community’s needs have changed. The consolidation process began during the curriculum review undertaken during the semester conversion process. For example, courses in Social Security and Workers Compensation were eliminated, due to lack of specialized jobs in these fields. With the guidance of the PAR Advisory Committee, certain other elective courses may be added for subjects where market demands appear to be developing, such as elder law and health care law.

1. What progress has been made toward meeting any of the goals listed above in the past year?

In response to the rapid recent adoption of electronic filing procedures for documents in local courts to replace paper filings, the PAR Program developed a new 1.5 quarter-hour Electronic Court Filing course, taught by the program’s technology instructor.

1. What Recommendations for Action were made by the review team to the most recent Program Review? What progress has been made towards meeting these recommendations in the past year?

After the 6/2/06 review, the review team made the following Recommendations for Action. Progress is noted after each numbered recommendation:

1. *Incorporate quantitative data, as well as qualitative, to supply evidence of student attainment at course and program outcomes level*See Section III below*.*
2. *Provide evidence of how the department applies information from student learning outcomes to improve the courses and program*Student learning outcomes are reviewed at quarterly department meetings, semi-annual adjunct faculty meetings, and the annual department retreat held for a full day each summer. The learning outcomes were reviewed and revised in 2010 by the PAR Advisory Committee, and the revised outcomes were incorporated into the Q2S conversion process during the past year.
3. *Identify and implement revisions to the research and report writing course relevant to the departmentally identified concern about written communication skills*Additional writing assignments were added to the following required paralegal courses: Criminal Law, Real Estate Transactions I, Business Organizations I, Legal Research & Writing I, Legal Research & Writing II, Litigation I, and Litigation II. Students were *referred* to the Writing Center or Tutoring Services when their performance required. Beginning in the AY 2010-11, every student in the introductory Legal Research & Writing course were *required* to take their major writing assignments to the Writing Center for review and advice; this process was coordinated with the Writing Center staff.
4. *Identify and develop, based on a prioritized needs analysis, continuing education courses for returning students and/or graduates*Despite faculty interest in this objective, the paralegal program has lacked the faculty resources to expand into the continuing education business. Additionally, the pool of practicing paralegals in the region is small, presenting a limited target audience. PAR graduates are already entitled to audit any PAR course. Realistically, this means graduates might take PAR elective courses that they did not take as part of their degree program. Few do. Offering additional continuing education opportunities would require curriculum development, a time-consuming assignment, for a limited audience. The combination of high time investment, limited faculty resources, and small prospects for return has kept this a low departmental priority.
5. *Revise mission statement to be more specific to the PAR program*The Paralegal Program Advisory Committee reviewed the prior statement and on February 16, 2007 adopted a new mission statement: *The Paralegal Program provides a practical and interactive learning environment that prepares ethical, competent paralegals with analytical, communication, and technical skills necessary to excel in a diverse legal community.*
6. *Continue to pursue additional transfer opportunities and/or agreements for PAR students*

This recommendation has not been pursued due to the time devoted to the department’s chair turnover, twice, and the demands of the semester conversion process. Negotiations were initiated with Edison State and Clark Tech, but not concluded. New articulation agreements can be negotiated after all schools have announced their semester programs.
7. *Engage IPR to assist with additional research on curricular experiences of students in the “preprogram” to analyze areas of improvement before students begin the PAR program*Students who wish to enter the Paralegal Program must successful complete (with a grade of “C” or better) two courses, Paralegal Principles (PAR 105) and Paralegal Principles: Technology (PAR 106). Students are not classified as paralegal majors until that is accomplished. These courses constitute the “preprogram.” No research has been done on their “curricular experiences.”
8. *Cross train technical support workers across the division to reduce reliance on a single provider and pursue a sustainable solution to tech support challenges*Most of the technical support needs of the PAR Program are met by specific service contracts with Marina Dodaro, a PAR graduate who also serves as an adjunct instructor for paralegal courses in legal technology. Ms. Dodaro maintains certification in two of the specialized legal programs taught to the paralegal students. Other departments in the division do not need the specialized legal technology programs used in the Paralegal Program, and it is unlikely that other technical support workers in the division could acquire the expertise and certification needed to maintain those specialized legal technology programs; nor would they have the paralegal degree or other legal education required to teach the application of those specialized programs in the legal environment.

**Section III: Assessment of Outcomes**

The Program Outcomes for this program are listed below. **At least one-third of your program outcomes must be assessed as part of this Annual Update, and across the next three years all of these program outcomes must be assessed at least once**.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Paralegal** Program Outcomes | In which courses are these program outcomes addressed? | Which of these program outcomes were assessed during the last fiscal year?  | Assessment MethodsUsed |
| **1)** Competently prepare and interpret legal documents.\* (See note below.) | PAR 121PAR 122PAR 131PAR 201PAR 211PAR 215 |  | * Simulations
* Performance appraisals
 |
| **2)** Exemplify a high standard of ethical and professional behavior as a member of a legal team. | PAR 220PAR 291PAR 292 |  | * Simulations
* Performance appraisals
 |
| **3)** Competently conduct factual and legal research and communicate the results clearly and concisely. | PAR 111PAR 112PAR 115PAR 205 |  | * Simulations
* Performance appraisals
 |
| **4)** Demonstrate competency in current technology.\* (See note below.) | PAR 106PAR 211PAR 215 |  | * Simulations
* Performance appraisals
 |

\* Note: The language of these two program outcomes was revised to this current version in Fall, 2010, after consultation with the PAR Advisory Committee. The purpose was to make the language easier to understand, and to make the outcomes more measurable.

a) For the assessment methods listed in the table above, what were the results? What changes are planned as a result of the data? How will you determine whether those changes had an impact?

**PAR Program Outcome #1.** Competently analyze substantive and procedural issues which arise in the law to prepare and interpret documents. Data collected in PAR 291-292 in 2006-07. Analysis done in 2007-08.

**Improvements made in 2008-09:** The following was reported in the PAR 2008-09 Annual Update: *Given the successful response from supervising attorneys of paralegal students (0% reported poor skills and a very small portion reported fair skills), significant improvements were not required. However, written communication problems continue to be addressed and activities have been added to strengthen students’ skills.*

**Assessment of Improvements in 2009-10:** PAR students are required to complete two internships during the final quarters of their paralegal program degree work. Internships are performed in a legal setting in local law firms, courts, public agencies, and businesses. All internships are performed under the supervision of an attorney. Upon completion of each internship, the supervisors of those interns are required to evaluate the performance of the students’ skills and behavior. When asked to evaluate the quality of student performance, the supervising attorneys in 2009 rated the students at 4.38/5.00 for “Understanding legal concepts.” The attorneys rated the students at 4.46/5.00 for “Ability to apply legal concepts.” The ratings and the supervisor comments concerning quality of work in a legal setting indicates the paralegal students were able to competently analyze substantive and procedural issues which arise in the law.

Although changes are constantly made to improve teaching strategies and learning outcomes, no changes are planned as a result of the data.

**PAR Program Outcome #2.** *(Exemplify a high standard of ethical and professional behavior as a member of a legal team.)* Data collected in PAR 220 in 2007-08. Analysis done in 2008-09.

**Improvements made in 2009-10:** The following was reported in the PAR 2009-10 Annual Update: *As a result of the assessments* (conducted at the end of the Fall, 2008 Lethal Ethics course)*, instructions were revised including more clear guidance on team deadlines. Gradebook* (in the Angel Course Management System) *was used to make comments to students on meeting deadlines and being professional, where it was lacking. Students complete a letter writing, interview paper and professional behavior in law office assignment. The assignments were separated to make it clearer and directions were revised. . . . An additional assignment was added using case scenarios from the new text to quiz students on the unauthorized practice of law and confidentiality. Paralegal graduates did visit the class and discussed working in a law office, ethical issues and professionalism. The interview assignment will be revised to include a question on what kind of teamwork skills a paralegal has to use in a law office to show students the importance of teamwork.*

**Assessment of Improvements in 2010-11:** PAR students are required to complete two internships during the final quarters of their paralegal program degree work. Internships are performed in a legal setting in local law firms, courts, public agencies, and businesses. All internships are performed under the supervision of an attorney. Upon completion of each internship, the supervisors of those interns are required to evaluate the performance of the students’ skills and behavior. When asked to evaluate the quality of student personal characteristics in the areas of personal appearance, punctuality, professional demeanor, and dependability, the supervising attorneys in 2009 rated the students overall at 4.66/5.00. The ratings and the supervisor comments indicates the paralegal students exemplified ethical and professional behavior in a legal setting.

Although changes are constantly made to improve teaching strategies and learning outcomes, no changes are planned as a result of the data.

b) What other changes have been made in past years as a result of assessment of program outcomes? What evidence is there that these changes have had an impact?

**PAR Program Outcome #1.** (*Competently prepare and interpret legal documents*.) During the semester conversion process, the PAR Program is considering an increase in the number of required English courses from two to three, to better prepare paralegal students for the demands of the legal profession for quality communication skills. Some students were referred to Tutoring Services to addressing English language deficiencies during AY 10-11.

As discussed in Section II, additional writing assignments were added to the following required paralegal courses: Criminal Law, Real Estate Transactions I, Business Organizations I, Legal Research & Writing I, Legal Research & Writing II, Litigation I, and Litigation II. Students were *referred* to the Writing Center or Tutoring Services when their performance required. Beginning in the AY 2010-11, every student in the introductory Legal Research & Writing course were *required* to take their major writing assignments to the Writing Center for review and advice; this process was coordinated with the Writing Center staff.

Further changes are not indicated by the outcome analysis.

**PAR Program Outcome #2.** *(Exemplify a high standard of ethical and professional behavior as a member of a legal team.)* Further changes are not indicated by the outcome analysis.

c) Describe general education changes/improvements in your program/department during this past academic year (09-10).

All PAR courses have one or more general education outcomes incorporated into their course descriptions. All of those outcomes are under review during the semester conversion process. Therefore, no changes were being made during the past academic year.

**Section IV: Improvement Efforts for the Fiscal Year**

1. **FY 09-10:** What other improvement efforts did the department make in FY 09-10? How successful were these efforts? What further efforts need to be made? If your department didn’t make improvement efforts during the fiscal year, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the department over the last year and how the department plans to address them in the coming year.

SEMESTER CONVERSION

The PAR Department in FY 09-10 initiated a thorough review of the program structure and the curriculum of all required/elective paralegal courses, pursuant to the Q2S conversion process. This process resulted in the combination or elimination of some low-enrollment courses, and others that concern substantive topics with low placement rates in the local job market.

PERSONNEL

As the result of the promotion of the department chair to a position outside the department at the beginning of 2010, a new chair was selected and mentored, and a new full time tenure track faculty member was selected and mentored. In a department of four faculty members, this represented a turnover of 50% of the department. Those developments triggered the need to hire, train, and mentor several new adjunct faculty members.

PLACEMENT

Assistance is always provided to link PAR graduates with interested employers and job openings, and the department maintains a paralegal job posting web page year-round for PAR students and alumni. For the first time in recent memory, not all PAR graduates in 2010 were immediately absorbed into the local economy. To address this In the nine months following the 2010 graduation, these efforts were intensified due to the number of graduates still seeking employment. Those efforts included resume review, letters of reference, personal faculty contact with employers, researching of job leads, cross-posting job notices, and maintaining an active presence on Facebook. Facebook is by far the richest communication mechanism with graduates, who change names, addresses, phone numbers, and email accounts, but who are almost unanimously available on Facebook. The Facebook presence is used to post general paralegal job news, announce specific job leads, and drive traffic to the Paralegal Program website’s page for job posting. It appears these efforts have had a positive impact on employment for paralegal graduates. Generally, it is impossible to “take credit” for a job placement, since these efforts cannot always be directly linked to job-seeking success, but in a few instances the PAR connection did appear to make a positive difference for graduate employment.

LEXISNEXIS

A new contractual arrangement was negotiated with LexisNexis to establish departmental control over the assignment of Lexis account IDs to paralegal students in the program for purposes of education in online legal research. This has required additional administrative work for the department, but allows rapid assignment, reassignment, and cancellation of Lexis IDs as required.

SCHOLARSHIPS

The department invested considerable effort in adopting the Sinclair Foundation’s online STARS system for awarding the department’s annual paralegal scholarships, and in promoting the application process to paralegal students. The positive result was that students could simultaneously select and apply for other Foundation scholarships without additional applications.

TECHNOLOGY-RELATED COURSE ELECTIVES

In partnership with the department’s technology instructor, new elective course offerings were developed in new skill areas of value to modern paralegals, electronic court filing, and electronic discovery in litigation cases.

ANGEL STUDENT COMMUNITY GROUP

Also in partnership with the department’s technology instructor, a community group was developed in Angel that allows communication with all Paralegal Program students simultaneously. Operating this service requires constant technical work for roster maintenance, and persistent editorial attention by faculty. This tool was used during the year to communicate scholarship opportunities, weather-related school closing news, registration reminders, new job postings, internship opportunities, graduation requirements, Paralegal Day activities, Paralegal Student Association activities, student orientation requirements, and other important departmental and school wide announcements.

1. **FY 10-11:** What improvement efforts does the department have planned for FY 10-11? How will you know whether you have been successful?

SEMESTER CONVERSION

The most significant improvement in FY 10-11 will be continuing the Q2S conversion process by creating a new curriculum plan for every paralegal course, including the revision of the teaching syllabus for each course, review and selection of new textbooks as required, creation of new learning modules, revision of assignments, revision of classroom activities, revision of classroom presentations, and the revision of quizzes and exams.

The Q2S conversion process will also demand in FY 10-11 the hiring, training and mentoring of new adjunct faculty for semester courses.

The Q2S conversion process will also demand in FY 10-11 the advising of all PAR students for the planning of program completion in the quarter system, or for the planning the successful transition into a semester system.

The Q2S conversion process will also demand in FY 10-11 the creation of a new semester schedule of sequenced courses that provides students with the opportunity to complete prerequisites and required courses in a successful manner.

PERSONNEL

The retirement of one of the four full time PAR faculty will necessitate a search and hiring process in FY 10-11, and the training and mentoring of a new faculty member.

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION APPROVAL REPORT

In FY 10-11, the Paralegal Program’s approval status with the American Bar Association requires the submission of an extensive interim report.

REGISTRATION PRIORITY

The PAR Department in FY 10-11 will work with the Registration Office to address the problem of required PAR courses being filled by first-year students who happen to be the first to connect to the registration system when it opens, with the result that second-year PAR students are shut out of courses they require to graduate.

PARALEGAL ALUMNI CHAPTER

It is also a goal of the PAR Department in FY 10-11 to revitalize the Paralegal Chapter of the Sinclair Alumni Association. The most active leadership of that organization have become inactive for reasons apparently related to the demands of the economy. It is the objective to increase the alumni role in mentoring the Paralegal Student Association, presenting the annual Paralegal Day celebration, and educating the local legal and business community about the value of paralegals in the workplace.

SCHOLARSHIPS

In FY 10-11 the PAR Department will work with the Sinclair Foundation and the trustees of the designated paralegal scholarships awarded annually, to resolve scheduling, application, and scholarship awarding issues that were evident in the prior year.

Questions regarding completion of the Annual Update? Please contact the Director of Curriculum and Assessment at 512-2789 to schedule a time to review the template and ask any questions.