

Portland Community College Paralegal Program Annual Assessment, June 2011

I.-II.

The Paralegal Program conducts on-going graduate surveys within 6 month of graduation and has done so for the past several years. Surveys were also conducted in the past year of potential employers in Portland. Student surveys were conducted of all students in the program during the Spring, 2011; students in the program's capstone course, PL 204; and course/instructor evaluations. Additionally, the Department commenced use of student portfolios of work that students have produced during their time as students in the program. This was initiated as a PL 204 course requirement during the Winter and Spring, 2011. Outcome assessments focused on critical thinking, writing skills and paralegal program skills, particularly use of technology.

The program is developing students with strong critical thinking and writing skills according to all indices. However, the newly developed portfolio requirement was difficult to manage and assess, in part due to the large number of documents which were included in the portfolios. Also, student reflections on their work were optional, which resulted in uneven understanding of student experiences. Technology skills were uneven, with some students having strong computer skills, but in some instances only minimally adequate skill sets. A basic computer skills requirement exists for students in the program, but because the program's legal software class, PL 130, is an elective, some students lacked exposure to commonly used legal software. Additionally, some on-line techniques for legal research assessed as potentially useful for students were not offered by the program.

III.

The portfolio requirement of PL 204 will be revised to limit the number of documents included and a rubric will be developed for evaluation of the portfolio. A student reflection on their work will also be required commencing the fall term, 2011. The department will also explore ways to include other professionals in the review of portfolios.

Several years ago, the program made CAS 133, a basic computer skills course, a requirement for all Paralegal students. Based on the recent findings regarding computer technology skills, and with input from the program's Advisory Council and faculty, PL 130 has become a required, core course in the program effective Fall, 2011. It will have CAS 133 as a prerequisite. This will ensure that all students develop skills in commonly used legal software and that they receive direction on strengthening any areas where their skills are weak. Additionally, training on legal research software used by the Oregon State Bar and methods of conducting criminal background checks will be promptly explored for inclusion in the program's computer legal research course, PL 202. Further, E Discovery techniques and issues will be developed in an experimental course being offered for the first time during Summer, 2011. On-going input will be sought from the Advisory Council and other sources to ensure other updates on necessary computer skill requirements are made.