

Effective Legal Office Administration

Lesson 1 – Certification for Paralegals

WORKBOOK



Certification for Paralegals - Overview

- Certification through various organizations:
 - NALA – National Association of Legal Assistants
 - NFPA - National Federation of Paralegal Associations
 - NALS – Association for Legal Professionals

NALA Certification

- Paralegal Certification is voluntary
- 3 Organizations Offer Certification:
- NALA
 - NALA is the nation's leading professional association for paralegals.
 - As a non-profit organization, NALA provides continuing education and professional development programs for paralegals - from novice to experienced professionals.
 - <http://www.nala.org>

NAFP Certification

- National Federation of Paralegal Associations
- The Paralegal CORE Competency Exam™ establishes your education has prepared you for many types of paralegal work and helps you stand out from others whose schooling and experience are otherwise similar. Those who have passed the PCCE may proudly display the CRP™ designation after their name.
- The Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam® (PACE®) is for those with not only a comprehensive education in paralegal studies but also years of practical experience. Earning the RP® designation by passing the PACE Exam shows that you are one of the best in the field!
- www.paralegals.org

NALS Certification

- NALS Offers a Professional Paralegal designation.
- www.nals.org
- To qualify for this designation you must have one of the following;
 - 5 years of experience performing paralegal/legal assistant duties.
 - Be a graduate from an ABA approved Paralegal Program.
 - Hold a Bachelor's degree in paralegal studies.
 - Be a graduate from an accredited paralegal program which consists of a minimum of 60 semester hours of which a minimum of 15 hours is substantive law.
 - Hold a Bachelor's degree in an unrelated field and have one year of experience performing paralegal/legal assistant duties

Paralegal or Legal Assistant?

- The terms "legal assistant" and "paralegal" are synonymous terms.
 - Not to be confused with "legal secretary" or "law clerk"
- According to NALA legal assistants or paralegals have received specialized training through formal education or many years of experience; 2) work under the supervision and direction of an attorney; and 3) perform non-clerical, substantive legal work in assisting an attorney.
- Those who successfully complete the training and examination earn a credential that can be used as a professional identifier.
- As of March 2015, there are 18,289 Certified Paralegals and over 3,400 Advanced Certified Paralegals in the United States.
- The credential has been recognized by the American Bar Association as a designation which marks a high level of professional achievement.

Exam Format

- The Paralegal certification examination question forms:
 - True or false
 - Multiple choice or matching questions requiring knowledge of the subject and reading comprehension skills
 - Essay question on the Judgment and Analytical Ability section
- Any form (true or false, multiple choice, essay) may be used at any time on the examination



Examination for Certification

- The content and structure of the Paralegal examinations will vary depending on which Certification route you choose to pursue, but you should be prepared to be tested on any of the following:
 - Communications
 - Ethics
 - Legal Research
 - Judgment & Analytical Ability
 - Substantive Law
 - American Legal System
 - Civil Litigation
 - Contracts
 - Business Organizations

Preparation for Certification

- Note that Certification is for Paralegals
- The best way to prepare for the exam is to obtain a higher education degree in a Paralegal program
- To qualify for the exam requires:
 - Graduation from a paralegal program that is:
 - (a) Approved by the American Bar Association; or
 - (b) An associate degree program; or
 - (c) A post-baccalaureate certificate program in paralegal studies; or
 - (d) A bachelor's degree program in paralegal studies; or
 - (e) A paralegal program which consists of a minimum of 60 semester hours (900 clock hours or 90 quarter hours) of which at least 15 semester hours (225 clock hours or 22.5 quarter hours) are substantive legal courses.

Certification for Paralegals - Review

- Certification Programs
- Topics of Examination



Questions

and

Answers

Review Questions:

1. True or False: To qualify as a Paralegal, you must always have a college degree.
A. True
B. False
2. True or False: Certification is required to be a Paralegal.
A. True
B. False
3. True or False: Certification is required to be a Legal Secretary.
A. True
B. False
4. True or False: Only lawyers need to be concerned with the rules of professional ethics.
A. True
B. False
5. True or False: Membership in an association for legal assistants is a good idea.
A. True
B. False

Answer Key:

1. B
False. Paralegals often do have a college education, or some specialty training in legal research and writing, and it's true that the highest paid paralegals have college degrees. However, many paralegals started out as legal secretaries who got their training 'on the job' by working alongside their attorneys and learning how to write, research and draft documents over years of experience in a law office.
2. B
False. Certification is not required to be a paralegal. Certification is something you should consider if you want to commit to a legal career because it will set you apart from your peers, but certification is optional.
3. B
False. Certification is not required to be a legal secretary, however, it is much more likely that you will impress a potential employer and earn a spot in a great firm if you have some basic knowledge of legal terms, concepts and processes.
4. B
False. As a legal secretary, a legal assistant or a paralegal, you are subject to the rules of professional conduct as well, and once you start working, you should read the rules for your state and familiarize yourself with the rules under which you will work.
5. A
True. It's always a good idea to spend time in the company of other professionals in your field. While there may be a fee associated with membership in these organizations, your office may be willing to cover the cost for you, if you can show them how networking with other legal assistants will improve your skills, abilities, and make you a better employee.