

TASK FORCE FINDINGS, FINAL REPORT:
PARALEGAL/LEGAL ASSISTING PROGRAM REVIEW
Spring 2007

HILLSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE,
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY, FLORIDA

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INTRODUCTION

Hillsborough Community College engages in a review of academic, academic support, and administrative areas for the following purposes:

1. To complement the institution's strategic planning process requiring the internal development of unit plans with an external perspective in the review of those plans and the quality of programs and services.
2. To respond to intrinsic motivations for continuous improvement with a focus on the enhancement of institutional effectiveness and efficiency, student learning outcomes, and client satisfaction.
3. To respond to state mandates and accreditation requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools calling for a systematic review of all programs and services.

The review is conducted by a Task Force composed primarily of individuals outside the unit under review. The chair is a full time employee of the unit under review.

The charge to the Task Force is to identify strengths and weaknesses of the unit as guided by empirical evidence. From the list of strengths and weaknesses, the Task Force is to develop recommendations for improvement to capitalize on strengths and redress weaknesses. The work of the Task Force is to be completed within a fall or spring semester culminating in a final report.

For academic areas, a judgment should also be rendered regarding the continued viability of the program in context of service area demand, enrollment, and critical workforce needs.

Subsequently, two brief follow-up reports are to be drafted. The first follow-up report is due in the following semester. The second is due one year later at the conclusion of the semester in which the original review was conducted. Each consists of a listing of the final recommendations with a few statements indicating the status of their achievement.

Recommendations not achieved within a year may become unit planning objectives to ensure a continued focus on their attainment. Objectives that stem from review recommendations should be indicated as such in the Strategic Planning System of the College.

DESCRIPTION OF UNIT

The Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program prepares students for a paraprofessional career as a paralegal/legal assistant in various private and public legal settings. Under the supervision of a licensed attorney, paralegals may conduct research, prepare legal documents and exhibits for trials, analyze information, assist in office management, and a variety of other activities unique to the legal profession. Graduates of the program are prepared to sit for national certification exams offered by various national paralegal/legal assisting organizations.

UNIT PLANNING OBJECTIVES

2005-07 objectives for the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program are as follows:

1. Establish a more competitive position for the paralegal program within the local higher education market.

Status of Objective: As of Summer 2005, two new web-based courses were offered online. By Summer 2007, the program now offers five web-based courses online. Enrollment in the web-based courses averages between 20 and 30 students per course.

2007 – 09 objectives for the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program are as follows:

1. Establish a chapter of Lambda Epsilon Chi, a national honor society for paralegal/legal assisting students sponsored by the American Association for Paralegal Education, which recognizes students who have demonstrated a superior academic performance in seeking their AS/AAS degree in Paralegal/Legal Assisting and for those seeking an Advanced Technical Certificate in Paralegal/Legal Assisting.

Status of Objective: As of January 30, 2007, the American Association for Paralegal Education granted to Hillsborough Community College the right to maintain a Chapter of Lambda Epsilon Chi and to be officially known as the Hillsborough Community College Chapter of Lambda Epsilon Chi. On April 27, 2007, 22 paralegal/legal assisting students were inducted into HCC's Chapter of Lambda Epsilon Chi.

2. Initiate the opportunity for paralegal/legal assisting students to partner with local legal aid offices or other community agencies through volunteer hours in a service learning activity.

Status of Objective: Beginning fall 2007 a new specified elective course in Elder Law will be offered for students. Within this course's objectives, students will be required to commit a specific number of volunteer hours to a community service organization or legal aid office.

STRENGTHS OF THE UNIT

PARALEGAL/LEGAL ASSISTING PROGRAM:

1. The Paralegal/Legal Assistant Program has shown a 12.6% growth in enrollment from 215 students in 2004/2005 to 242 students in 2005/2006. (In fulfillment of College Goal #1 and #6)
Source: HCC Unduplicated Headcount Enrollment; See Appendix D
2. The Paralegal/Legal Assistant Program ranks 5th out of the 40 AS/AAS degree programs offered at HCC in graduates over the last five reporting years, 2001/2002 to 2005/2006. (In fulfillment of College Goal #1 and #6)
Source: HCC Trendline report 2006; See Appendix E
3. The Paralegal/Legal Assistant Program ranks 2nd out of 28 community colleges in Florida in graduates for two year non-health related programs. (In fulfillment of College Goal #1 and #6)
Source: HCC Trendline report 2006; See Appendix F
4. For summer and fall of 2006, 14 students graduated with an AS degree from the program and 12 students completed the Advanced Technical Certificate in Paralegal/Legal Assisting. For 2006-2007, 15 students have applied to graduate with an AS or AAS degree in Paralegal/Legal Assisting. (In fulfillment of College Goal #1 and #6).
Source: The state's report for Student Data Base AA-A1 Verification Report; See Appendix G
5. The Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program has had an active Advisory Board since 2001 comprised of judges, attorneys, paralegals, program instructors and lay persons. The Board has provided valuable input for the program of the needs of the legal community. (In fulfillment of College Goal #2)
Source: Task Force Members' knowledge of the program.
6. The Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program has full-time and adjunct faculty that meet the credentialing requirements of HCC and SACS, which are: a Master's Degree with at least 18 credit hours in substantive law courses or a Juris Doctor degree from an ABA accredited law school. (In fulfillment of College Goal #2)
Source: SACS Faculty Credentialing Report; See Appendix H
7. Having credentialed full-time and part-time faculty has allowed all courses offered in the program to be transferable to four-year institutions that offer Bachelor degrees. (In fulfillment of College Goal #2).
Source: Datatel Query; See Appendix I

8. The Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program has established articulation agreements with Florida Gulf Coast University and St. Petersburg College, that allows students graduating with an AS degree in Paralegal/Legal Assisting from HCC to transfer into their Bachelor's degree programs in Legal Studies. (In fulfillment of College Goal #2).
Source: Copies of Articulation Agreements with FGCU and SPC; See Appendix J
9. In fulfillment of College Goal #5 to foster diversity, the student profile for the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program in 2005-2006 reflected 44% of the students were either African-American or Hispanic and 56% of the students were Caucasian.
Source: Workforce Programs Program Review for 2005-2006; See Appendix K
10. The Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program has actively developed new programs. For 2007-2008, a course in Elder Law will be offered as a Specified Elective. (In fulfillment of College Goal #3 and #6).
Source: HCC WebAdvisor Section Information; See Appendix L
11. In fulfillment of College Goal #3 and #6, as of summer 2007, the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program now offers five courses online via WebCT. Three of the courses are required courses in the program and two of the courses are specified electives.
Source: Datatel Query; See Appendix M
12. The Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program has fostered positive working relationships with the legal community in that local law firms, businesses, and governmental agencies actively seek our students for employment opportunities. (In fulfillment of College Goal #2).
Source: Task Force Members' knowledge of the program
13. In fulfillment of College Goal #2, the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program offers a Legal Internship with local law firms and governmental agencies. Since 2003, the United States Attorneys Office has provided an internship opportunity for at least two paralegal students who meet the required qualifications.
Source: Task Force Members' knowledge of the program.
14. In fulfillment of College Goal #1 and #2, HCC became an Institutional Member of the American Association of Paralegal Education (AAfPE) that supports our Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program in meeting the educational standards and requirements of AAfPE.
Source: AAfPE Certificate of Membership; See Appendix N

15. The Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program developed an Advanced Technical Certificate to be offered to students who possess a Bachelor's degree or higher. This certificate allows them to take 21 credit hours of paralegal courses, and the opportunity to sit for the national Certified Legal Assistant Exam sponsored by the National Association for Legal Assistants. (In fulfillment of College Goal #3 and #5).
Source: HCC catalog; See Appendix O
16. Hillsborough Community College graduate placement rates exceed the state average for Legal Assisting for 2003/2004 (the most recent data available). (In fulfillment of College Goal #3)
Source: FETPIP – Community College Vocational Programs Aggregated Outcome Data for AS and AAS Programs; See Appendix P
17. In fulfillment of College Goal #3, 73% of the students who graduated with an AS or AAS degree in Legal Assisting in 2003-2004 found employment within their chosen career.
Source: HCC catalog; See Appendix Q
18. One of the strengths of the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program is its Professor/Program Manager, the support of the Administration, and a group of dedicated, hardworking adjunct instructors.
Source: Task Force Members' knowledge of the program.

WEAKNESSES OF THE UNIT

PARALEGAL/LEGAL ASSISTING PROGRAM

1. With the growth of the program, it has been determined that there are too many non-essential courses offered in the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program that are not program specific. This impacts class enrollment numbers during various academic terms, causing some courses to be dropped due to low enrollment for that term.
Source: Paralegal Advisory Committee letter; See Appendix R
2. Through various degree audits conducted by the administration, there is an inadequate knowledge level by the College-wide Student Services offices in that many of the paralegal students are often enrolled in the wrong paralegal degree or certificate program. The audits and student discussion groups show that paralegal students are not receiving the proper placement codes which reflects incorrect advising due to lack of communications between advising and faculty, and/or students not understanding or knowing where to go for advice. Out of 187 students registered in PLA sections for Summer 06, Fall 06, and Spring 07, 47 students are not coded correctly.
Source: Datatel Query; See Appendix S.
3. The Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program lacks a program of follow-up placement of graduates.
Source: Task Force Members' knowledge of the program
4. The Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program lacks a more applicable computer course that focuses the student on computer applications used in law firms today, such as, legal document software programs, spreadsheets, databases used for timekeeping, billing and litigation support programs.
Source: HCC Catalog 2006-2007; See Appendix T
5. Although the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program provides a course for a Paralegal Internship, more members of the surrounding legal community should be offered the opportunity to participate in paralegal internships.
Source: Task Force Members' knowledge of the program
6. Presently, there is very little involvement by the HCC Career Placement Services Offices regarding placement of paralegal/legal assisting students.
Source: Task Force Members' knowledge of the program

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

PARALEGAL/LEGAL ASSISTING PROGRAM

1. It is recommended by the Paralegal Advisory Committee that many of the non-essential courses now offered in the program be dropped and the program concentrate on offering the majority of the courses as paralegal/legal assisting (PLA) courses {In response to Weakness #1}
2. It is recommended that the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program continue to provide faculty based advising to their majors and prospective majors so as to facilitate the accurate and expeditious dissemination of information they need as to degree options, course elections and schedules while creating a close training liaison with academic advisors to ensure uniformity in both understanding and advising of students. {In response to Weakness #2}
3. It is recommended that the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program implement and expand the follow-up of program graduates through student surveys. {In response to Weakness #3}
4. It is recommended that the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program develop a computer technology credit course that focuses the student on computer applications used in law firms today. {In response to Weakness #4}
5. It is recommended that the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program contact local law firms and governmental agencies to offer participation in paralegal internship placements for the program's students. {In response to Weakness #5}
6. It is recommended that the Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program seek to establish a closer working relationship with the Ybor Campus Career Placement Office by soliciting their assistance in the placement of the program's students in career opportunities. {In response to Weakness #6}

DISTRIBUTION LIST OF THE FINAL REPORT

The final report and all follow-ups will be distributed by the chair to the President's Cabinet, appropriate deans and/or directors, unit head, unit members, task force members, and all campus libraries. It will be posted to Public Folders and disseminated electronically to the HCC community.

APPENDICES

- **Appendix A:** Hillsborough Community College Mission, Vision, and 2004-2006 College Goals
- **Appendix B:** Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program Strategic Planning Unit Plan for 2005-2007
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APPENDIX: A



Hillsborough Community College Mission, Vision, 2004-2006 College Goals

THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF HILLSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

College Mission

Adopted by the Board of Trustees, August 20, 2003

Hillsborough Community College, a public, comprehensive institution of higher education, empowers students to excel through its superior teaching and service in an innovative learning environment.

College Vision

Adopted by the Board of Trustees, August 20, 2003

Hillsborough Community College will deliver education of the highest standards enabling a diverse community of life-long learners to achieve their maximum potential in a global society.

2004-2006 College Goals

Adopted by the Board of Trustees, April 21, 2004

1. Promote institutional learning through excellence in teaching, support services, and instructional delivery systems.
2. Foster partnerships with the local and global communities to position the College as a premier educational institution for college transfer, career workforce and economic development, lifelong learning, and community initiatives.
3. Enhance access, flexibility, and responsiveness to meet the changing educational needs of the students and the community.
4. Provide the resources and skills necessary to prepare students, faculty, and staff to function effectively in a technologically-driven world.
5. Promote an institutional culture that values the individual; fosters diversity; and encourages professional development, action, creativity, and risk taking.
6. Continuously improve programs and services while aggressively seeking and effectively managing human, financial, physical, and technological resources.

APPENDIX: B



Paralegal/Legal Assisting Program Strategic Planning Unit Plan for 2005-2007

APPENDIX: C

Paralegal/Legal Assisting Strategic Planning Unit Plan for 2007-2009

APPENDIX: D



HCC Unduplicated Headcount Enrollment

APPENDIX: E

HCC Trendline Report 2006

APPENDIX: F

HCC Trendline Report 2006

APPENDIX: G

Florida's state report for Student Data Base AA-A1 Verification Report
And Names of 15 Students Completing their AS or AAS degree for 2007

APPENDIX: H



SACS Faculty Credentialing Report

APPENDIX: I

Datatel Query for Transferable Courses

APPENDIX: J



Articulation Agreements with Florida Gulf Coast University and St. Petersburg College

APPENDIX: K



Workforce Programs Program Review for 2005-2006

APPENDIX: L

HCC WebAdvisor Section Information

APPENDIX: M

Datatel Query for WebCT Courses

APPENDIX: N



American Association for Paralegal Education Certificate of Membership

APPENDIX: O

HCC Catalog 2006-2007 page 158

APPENDIX: P

FETPIP – Community College Vocational Programs Aggregated Outcome Data for AS and AAS Programs

APPENDIX: Q

HCC Catalog 2006-2007, page 177, Program Placement of Students

APPENDIX: R



Paralegal Advisory Committee Letter

APPENDIX: S

Datatel Query for Students Registered in PLA Courses for 06/SU, 06/FA, 07/SP

APPENDIX: T

HCC Catalog 2006-2007, pages 148 and 196