

Indiana University South Bend

Frequently Asked Questions

About Becoming a Paralegal

What skills do I need to be a successful paralegal?

According to the 1998 ABA Utilization of Legal Assistants Among Private Practitioners Survey, the most important skills for paralegals are:

- ▶ Organization
- ▶ Effective in-person and written communication skills including good grammar and a good vocabulary
- ▶ Effective Interpersonal Skills (ability to communicate, empathize, and interact with individuals with diverse backgrounds and education)
- ▶ Computer Skills
- ▶ Analytical skills and interviewing and investigating skills

In addition, the personality traits commonly found among successful paralegals include:

- ▶ common sense and good judgment
 - ▶ assertiveness
 - ▶ diplomacy
 - ▶ patience
 - ▶ perseverance
 - ▶ self-motivation
 - ▶ confidence
 - ▶ strong sense of ethics
-

What Does a Paralegal Do?

Under the supervision of an attorney, the paralegal will apply knowledge of law and legal procedures in the rendering direct assistance to lawyers, clients, and organizations. The paralegal may:

- Prepare, interpret, summarize, and revise a variety of legal documents;
- Design, develop and modify procedures;
- Interview client and prepare interrogatories;
- Perform legal research by assessing, compiling, and using information from the law library and other references;
- Investigate, gather, review, and analyze records;
- Maintain file control and handle other office administration duties and procedural problems that involve independent decisions.

Is there a difference between a legal assistant and a paralegal?

No, those are generally considered to be interchangeable terms to describe someone who has specialized knowledge gained through education and/or several years of experience, who performs substantive legal work that might otherwise be done by an attorney; who works under the supervision of an attorney or within the law through administrative; statutory, or court authority; and who does not practice law.

What opportunities are there for paralegals?

- ▶ Corporate legal departments
 - ▶ Federal, state and local government
 - ▶ Agencies and lobbying groups, such as the ACLU and the Sierra Club
 - ▶ Schools and Universities
 - ▶ Working as a freelance paralegal
 - ▶ Insurance
 - ▶ Real estate and title insurance firms
 - ▶ Banks and financial services companies
 - ▶ Hospitals and Health related organizations
-

What can I expect to earn as a paralegal?

Paralegal salaries and benefits are impacted by location, level of education, previous legal or related experience, type and size of employer, legal specialty area and the geographic location of the job. According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook, median pay for paralegals nationwide was \$46,990 in 2012 (Latest OOH data).

What is the job outlook for paralegals?

According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook, **nationally** employment of paralegals and legal assistants is projected to grow 17 percent between 2012 and 2022, faster than the average for all occupations. They attribute this to an increasing population and growth of prepaid legal plans. They also say that organizations currently employing paralegals will assign them a growing range of tasks. In addition, paralegals are increasingly employed in a variety of small and medium-sized offices. They also project that community legal service programs, government agencies at all levels, consumer organizations and the courts should continue to hire paralegals in increasing numbers. Despite projected rapid employment growth, competition for jobs is expected to continue as many people seek to go into this profession. Those experienced paralegals with strong, computer and database management skills should have the best employment opportunities.

For more information, please contact:

Mike Mancini
Extended Learning Services
(574) 520-4415
mmancini@iusb.edu