

## WHAT IS A PARALEGAL?

A paralegal is a person qualified by education or work experience who is authorized to perform tasks requiring substantive legal knowledge that would otherwise by law, rule or ethics be performed exclusively by an attorney.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, paralegals held about 188,000 jobs in 2000 and the profession is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2010 to an estimated 251,000 jobs. This is almost twice the growth rate for attorney jobs as paralegals increasingly perform many legal tasks formerly carried out by attorneys.

## WHAT DO PARALEGALS DO?

Paralegals work in many different areas of law such as litigation, real estate, corporate, probate and estate planning, intellectual property, family law, labor law and bankruptcy. A small number of paralegals own their own businesses and work as freelance paralegals, contracting their services directly to attorneys or corporate legal departments.

Paralegals serve as a valuable resource and an important member of the legal team. It is important that they possess knowledge and understanding of legal

concepts and the law combined with a practical knowledge of legal forms and procedures.

Typical paralegal responsibilities include:

- performing investigations
- performing factual and legal research
- drafting legal documents
- discovery and trial preparation
- assisting at trials and hearings
- reviewing, organizing and maintaining documents
- interviewing witnesses
- database management

While paralegals continue to assume a growing range of responsibilities including many of the same functions as attorneys, they are still explicitly prohibited from carrying out duties which are considered to be the practice of law, such as setting legal fees, giving legal advice and presenting cases in court.

## WHERE DO PARALEGALS WORK?

Paralegals are employed in many different settings with both private and public employers. Law firms employ the vast majority of paralegals. Employers also include corporations, insurance companies, hospitals, banks and other financial institutions. Paralegals who prefer to work in the

public sector will find employment opportunities in local, state and national government, the courts and non-profit agencies.

## WHAT IS THE EDUCATION CRITERIA TO BE A PARALEGAL?

The Delaware Paralegal Association promotes high standards in paralegal education. DPA advocates a Bachelors degree in Paralegal Studies from an ABA-approved program or a Bachelors degree from an accredited institution and a paralegal certificate from an ABA-approved program for persons entering the profession. Paralegals are encouraged to pursue continuing legal education throughout their careers.

## WHAT SKILLS SHOULD PARALEGALS HAVE?

Key skills to be a successful paralegal include:

- attention to detail
- organization
- ability to write and speak clearly and concisely
- ability to prioritize
- ability to work independently and to function effectively as a team player
- use/knowledge of technology

## HOW CAN I OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BECOMING A PARALEGAL?

If you are interested in learning more about the paralegal profession, log onto the DPA website at [www.deparalegals.org](http://www.deparalegals.org) and click on the Position Statements page.



The Delaware Paralegal Association is a non-profit professional organization comprised of paralegals practicing in the state of Delaware, students enrolled in ABA-approved paralegal education programs and organizations that support DPA's purposes and objectives.

The objectives and purpose of DPA are to promote and maintain high standards and ethics in the paralegal profession, to provide a forum for the exchange of information about the profession, to enhance the role of paralegals in the legal community and to encourage the continuing legal education of paralegals.

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## THE PARALEGAL PROFESSION



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