

How To Choose A Paralegal Program

It can be difficult to choose a paralegal program. How do you know which one is right for you?

Begin to hone your research skills! Use this 10-point checklist to conduct a valid comparison of different paralegal programs.

1

Accreditation.

Make sure the institution is accredited. Why? Accreditation bodies examine the entire institution. They require a school to conduct continual evaluations of its ability to meet the needs of students. Learn the differences between accreditation, approvals, and semester credits vs. CEUs (continuing education units). An example? Some say their programs are ABA “accredited.” Not true. ABA is not authorized to accredit paralegal programs. The same is true of many short-term continuing education classes. They are not accredited.

2

Program Length.

The program should contain at least 18 semester hours (28.8 CEUs) of skills-based paralegal training. Additional hours can give you a competitive edge. As a paralegal, you will work with an attorney who values higher education and has taken a significant amount of time and expense to pursue a legal career. Is the program comprehensive enough to give you the skills, knowledge, and confidence you need to work alongside an attorney?

3

Program Content.

Does the program offer courses that match your interests and goals? If this is a first career or career change, make sure the curriculum is broad yet detailed enough to prepare you in several legal practice areas. This expands your employment opportunities. If you are currently employed in the legal field and want to advance your career, select a program that is thorough. Always make sure the courses are skills-based. It makes a difference.

4

Class Size.

Some colleges have 60 or more students in a class! Is the class small enough for you to get the individual attention you need?

5

Cost of Tuition.

There are so many paralegal programs offered in a variety of different formats, with a wide-range of costs, and measured in diverse ways (quarter hour, semester hour, etc.) that true comparisons can be difficult. Don't take cost at face value without digging deeper. Quicker and cheaper is not always the best option. What you should ask is: *What will I get in return for my investment of time, money, and hard work?*

Here are a few things to consider in your cost comparison:

- What is the program's graduate placement rate? (If they say 100%, you probably need to ask more questions.)
- What is the reputation of the school, programs, and graduates among employers?
- Are there other programs offered at the institution that may share funds provided by your tuition? Or is every dollar you spend dedicated solely to your paralegal education?
- Are there hidden fees, or do you know exactly what you will spend up front? How much will the textbooks cost for the entirety of the program?
- What options are available for tuition financing? Does the school have knowledgeable staff that can answer your questions? Can you defer student loans while attending? What about financial aid? PELL? Is it available?
- Is there a program satisfaction guarantee? What are the parameters? What about a refund policy?
- Most importantly, does the program or institution offer full-time job placement assistance for graduates?

6

Externships or Internships.

As you know, employers usually prefer previous experience. Does the paralegal program offer on-the-job experience opportunities as part of the curriculum, such as internships or externships? How does the program utilize this experience to showcase the graduate to employers?

7

Online or On-Campus.

How are online classes presented – basically self-taught or interactive? Employers are looking for paralegals that work well with others. Does the online and/or on-campus experience allow for real-time student collaboration? What hands-on skills are taught in both online and on-campus classes?

8

Class Schedules.

How often do classes begin? What hours are they taught? How do classes accommodate your schedule? Does the employment rate of graduates make it worth adjusting your schedule so that you can attend?

9

Personal Attention.

How do representatives of the paralegal programs treat you on the phone, online, or in person? Are you important to them? Do they ask about your goals and concerns? Do they answer your questions in a friendly, professional manner? If not, don't expect the classroom experience to be much better. Choose a program where you're not just a number, but where the school cares about your success.

10

Graduate Success.

Most importantly, does the paralegal program have someone dedicated to helping graduates find employment? What is their placement rate? Does the school have an expansive and established database of employers in the legal field? *If not, why are you still talking to them?* How long does it typically take graduates to find employment and earn back their tuition? Don't settle for a program that can't help get you hired!

For additional help locating a paralegal program that fits your needs, please contact us.

www.paralegal.edu

1.800.446.6931

info@paralegal.edu

*Experts in paralegal education.
Committed to your success.*



CENTER FOR ADVANCED LEGAL STUDIES
The Paralegal People®