

DELTA COLLEGE
COUNSELING/ADVISING & CAREER SERVICES
LEGAL SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL

Salary Range: \$27,450-\$67,540 annually

Personal Interests: Logical thinking, organizing & analyzing information, writing reports and communicating with people

Work Environment: Primarily indoors and in multiple locations

Description

Legal assistants, also known as paralegal, paralegal assistants, legal technicians, and legal aides, apply knowledge of law and legal procedures in providing assistance to lawyers, clients, and courts. Legal assistants may perform all tasks formerly performed solely by licensed attorneys, except giving legal advice, accepting clients, setting legal fees, presenting a case in court, and actively participating in the deposition process.

One of a paralegal's most important tasks is helping lawyers prepare for closings, hearings, trials, and corporate meetings. Paralegals investigate the facts of cases and ensure all relevant information is considered. They also identify appropriate laws, judicial decisions, legal articles, and other materials that are relevant to assigned cases. After they analyze and organize the information, paralegals may prepare written reports that attorneys use in determining how cases should be handled. Should attorneys decide to file lawsuits on behalf of clients, paralegals may help prepare the legal arguments, draft pleadings and motions to be filed with the court, obtain affidavits, and assist attorneys during trials. Paralegals also organize and track files of all important case documents and make them available and easily accessible to attorneys.

Paralegals do preparatory work and also perform a number of other vital functions. They help draft contracts, mortgages, separation agreements, and

trust instruments. They may also assist in preparing tax returns and planning estates. Some even coordinate the activities of other law office employees and maintain financial records for the office.

Paralegals are found in all types of organizations, but most are employed by law firms, corporate legal departments, and various levels of government. In these organizations, they may work in all areas of law, including litigation, personal injury, corporate law, criminal law, employee benefits, intellectual property, labor law, and real estate.

Working Conditions

Paralegals employed by corporations and government usually work a standard 40-hour week, unless working to meet a deadline. Although most paralegals work year round, some are temporarily employed during busy times, and released due to diminished workloads.

Paralegals do most of their work at desks in their offices and law libraries. Occasionally they travel to gather information and perform other duties.

Training, Other Qualifications

There are several ways to become a paralegal. Employers usually require formal paralegal training obtained through associate or bachelor degree programs or through a certification program. The Delta College Legal Support Professional program offers an associate degree and a certificate and

prepares graduates to enter employment working directly under the supervision of a lawyer. Programs increasingly include courses introducing students to the legal applications of computers. Those who pass the appropriate examinations can achieve the designation of Certified Legal Assistant (CLA), or Registered Paralegal (RP) for those who complete a bachelor degree.

Job Outlook

Nationally, employment of Legal Assistants is expected to increase much faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2014. An average of 7000 openings is expected annually. Growth is due primarily to increased use of paraprofessionals to reduce costs and increase the availability of legal services. Furthermore, the growth of legal action in such areas as consumer protection, the environment, safety, and an expected increase in prepaid legal service should spur employment opportunities.

Overall, the outlook for this profession is very good. Opportunities will be best for those trained in paralegal technology. Increased use of computerized research methods and improvements in law office technologies may affect the outlook.

Earnings

Earnings vary depending on the employer, educational background and work experience of the assistant, and size and locale of the community where employed. Workers in large firms in heavily populated areas earn more than those in rural areas. Some legal assistants work for attorneys on a fee-for-service basis as independent contractors.

Nationally the average salary for paralegal workers was \$45,460 annually in 2006.

Salaries for legal assistants in selected areas in Michigan as of May 2006 were:

Area	Average	Range
Michigan	\$47,000	\$31,220-\$66,920
Ann Arbor	\$46,220	\$31,060-\$60,460
Battle Creek	\$32,850	\$21,860-\$44,790
Detroit	\$52,080	\$36,750-\$73,280
Grand Rapids	\$53,490	\$33,890-\$89,240
Kalamazoo	\$45,380	\$32,440-\$59,520
Lansing	\$43,570	\$32,350-\$57,460

Related Occupations

Several other occupations call for a specialized understanding of the law and the legal system, but do not require the extensive training of a lawyer. These include abstractors, claim examiners, compliance and enforcement inspectors, occupational safety and health workers, patent agents, and title examiners.

LegalSupportprofile.doc Updated SC 10/07
 Sources: Occupational Outlook Handbook, MI Occupational Information System, Delta College Catalog, and System of Interaction Guidance Information PLUS.

Career Center
 D 132
 Bay City/Saginaw: (989) 686-9072
 Midland/Auburn: (989) 495-4000, Ext. 9072
 Frankenmuth, Birch Run, Reese & Vassar: (989) 758-3400, Ext. 9072
<http://www.delta.edu/careercenter>

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These materials were developed under a grant awarded by the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth. (Project 7021-4)

