

# GUIDELINES

For the Approval of  
PARALEGAL  
Education Programs



American Bar Association  
Standing Committee on Paralegals

Effective September 1, 2008

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Only the text of the “blue-letter” Guidelines has been formally adopted by the American Bar Association House of Delegates as official policy. The accompanying “black-letter” evaluative criteria and procedures have been adopted by the Standing Committee on Paralegals and provide additional information for implementing the “blue-letter” Guidelines.

Produced by the ABA Standing Committee on Paralegals.

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# FOREWORD

The American Bar Association, through its Standing Committee on Paralegals, has promoted the role of the paralegal as a vital member of the legal services delivery team for over thirty years.

Promulgating guidelines for paralegal education programs and recommending ABA approval for those that meet these guidelines are the means by which the Standing Committee furthers its goal of assisting attorneys in utilizing paralegals to improve the delivery of legal services and the American system of justice.

The House of Delegates of the American Bar Association initially adopted Guidelines for the Approval of Legal Assistant Education Programs in August 1973. Supporting evaluative criteria and procedures for implementing the Guidelines were developed during the next year and the House of Delegates approved the first eight programs in August 1975. Currently, more than 260 programs are approved nationwide. In applying the Guidelines, the ABA adheres to the philosophy of promoting and recognizing quality in many different kinds of educational offerings. The Guidelines fit a wide variety of institutions offering paralegal education programs that serve the needs of lawyers who work in diverse practice areas and settings and that accommodate the differing work, educational and life experiences of those who choose to become paralegals.

The Guidelines describe the requirements a paralegal education program must meet to obtain and retain ABA approval and are implemented through application of interpretative criteria and procedures developed by the Standing Committee and its Approval Commission. The approval process consists of several stages, including the preparation of a self-evaluation report and supporting documents, review by educational consultants, a site visit to the program, and consideration by the Standing Committee on Paralegals Approval Commission. The recommendations of the Approval Commission are thereafter considered by the Standing Committee, which forwards its recommendations on the program's approval to the ABA House of Delegates. Under the Guidelines, only the House of Delegates, the ABA's policy-making body, is vested with the authority to approve programs.

The Guidelines and supporting evaluative criteria are reviewed and revised regularly to ensure that they are current, appropriate, and focused on standards of quality in paralegal education.

The Standing Committee trusts that this manual will provide assistance in working with and interpreting the Guidelines and understanding the approval process to institutions with existing approved programs and those which are considering seeking approval for the first time. Further information on applying for approval and reapproval is available from the Committee staff and on its web site at [www.abaparalegals.org](http://www.abaparalegals.org).

September 2008



# **GENERAL PURPOSES, PROCEDURES, AND DEFINITIONS**

## **G-101**

**The American Bar Association is vitally and actively interested in ways and means of extending legal services in the United States. These Guidelines for the Approval of Paralegal Education Programs by the American Bar Association are promulgated in pursuit of that objective.**

## **G-102**

**The American Bar Association believes that there should be a number of ways in which a person can demonstrate competence as a paralegal, one of which is the completion of an approved program as determined by this document. Although this document is concerned only with formal education programs for the training of paralegals, it is not intended to limit entry into this career field by other means.**

## **G-103**

**As Used In The Guidelines:**

- (a) “Program” means the entity or unit within the institution that provides the paralegal education;**
- (b) “Committee” means the American Bar Association Standing Committee on Paralegals;**
- (c) “Approval Commission” means the Approval Commission of the Standing Committee on Paralegals;**
- (d) A legal assistant or paralegal is a person, qualified by education, training, or work experience who is employed or retained by a lawyer, law office, corporation, governmental agency or other entity and who performs specifically delegated substantive legal work for which a lawyer is responsible. For the purposes of the Guidelines, the terms “legal assistant” and “paralegal” are used interchangeably.**
  - A. “Program option” means a course of study or curriculum for the education of paralegals. A “program option” is differentiated from a “program,” which is the entity or unit within an institution that offers paralegal education.**
  - B. A “paralegal minor” offered by an institution that awards the baccalaureate degree is ordinarily considered to be a program option as defined in A above, and must therefore comply with these Guidelines. However, if the minor is designed for students from other majors who are not taking it for the purpose of preparing to work as paralegals, the minor will not be considered an approved program option. In that event, the program bears the responsibility of demonstrating that the minor is not a program option and is**

not intended to prepare students to work as paralegals. All program literature must clearly indicate the approval status of the minor.

- C. “Notice” includes written communications delivered via electronic mail or facsimile, as well as by private courier or U. S. Postal Service.

#### **G-104**

**In order to obtain or retain approval by the American Bar Association, a program of education of paralegals must demonstrate that its program is consistent with sound educational policies by establishing that it operates in accordance with the Guidelines.**

- A. To the extent possible, the American Bar Association will provide guidance to institutions planning to start programs and to seek approval or reapproval.
- B. The paralegal education program should be planned in cooperation with state or local bar associations, law-related management associations, and paralegal organizations, and with individual paralegals, paralegal managers, and representatives of law firms, corporations, government agencies, and other potential employers of paralegals.
  - 1. Institutions should conduct needs assessment and feasibility studies prior to starting a paralegal program.
  - 2. Approved programs must conduct needs assessment and feasibility studies prior to starting a new program or new program option.
  - 3. Approved programs must consult a broad scope of potential users of paralegal services throughout all stages of program development.
- C. An approved program has an ongoing obligation to assure that it is in compliance with these Guidelines as adopted, including all amendments to these Guidelines as they become effective.
- D. The institution and program must exhibit honesty and candor. (See also G-501.)
  - 1. The institution and program must truthfully represent academic goals, program options, and services.
  - 2. Programs that have applied for but not yet received approval must not state or imply that they have been or will be approved until approval is granted by the House of Delegates.
  - 3. The institution and program must exhibit honesty and candor in communications with the American Bar Association.

- E. Programs that are not approved may not state or imply that they are approved or in compliance with the Guidelines.
- F. Programs are approved for a seven-year period. Approved programs that wish to apply for an additional seven-year period must submit a reapproval application during the sixth year of the current approval period on a date to be determined by the Committee, notice of which date shall be provided at the time of its approval. Programs must submit their self-evaluation reports and exhibits as prescribed by the Committee and pay the application fee no later than the date on which the program submits its reapproval application.
- G. Programs that fail to apply for reapproval or to pay the application fee by the due date are subject to a late fee unless an extension of time for filing has been granted in advance of the due date. If the program has not applied for reapproval or paid its application fee by ninety days after the due date, the program is subject to sanctions including withdrawal of approval under G-105.
- H. If the seven year period of approval for a program ends prior to the adjournment of the meeting of the House of Delegates during which a Report recommending reapproval of that program is officially calendared for consideration, then such approval period shall be extended until the adjournment of the next meeting of the House of Delegates.
- I. Approved programs must submit, on the designated interim report form, an interim report during the third year of a program's approval period, on a date to be determined by the Committee, notice of which date shall be provided to the program at the time of its approval. Programs that fail to submit an interim report or to pay the required annual fee by the due date are subject to a late fee unless an extension of time for filing has been granted in advance of the due date. If the program does not submit an interim report or pay the required annual fee within ninety days, the program is subject to sanctions including withdrawal of approval under G-105.
- J. Programs are required to submit self-evaluation reports, interim reports, exhibits, and such other information as required by the Approval Commission and/or Standing Committee, and to host site visits at their own expense.
- K. Programs are required to timely submit complete and accurate documents in the forms specified. All fees shall be in an amount determined by the Standing Committee and are detailed in the Schedule of Fees.
- L. Any approved program subject to reprocessing or sanction fees must submit such fees within thirty days of notification of the imposition of the fee.
- M. Programs must report major changes in advance of implementation.

1. Any change in the personnel primarily responsible for program direction is a major change and must be reported no later than when the change becomes effective. The program must provide information on the qualifications of these personnel, showing compliance with the requirements of G-401.
2. A major change is one that may significantly affect a program's quality, program objectives, content, or control. Examples of major changes about which the Committee should be notified are institutional ownership, financial support, program objectives, substantial curriculum changes, organizational changes involving the paralegal program, location(s), accreditation, changes in personnel primarily responsible for program direction, new program options, cessation of a program option, and the initial offering of a legal specialty course in an accelerated, compressed, or totally online instructional format as described in G-302.J.
3. Programs must report and obtain approval of major changes in advance of implementation, except for changes in the personnel primarily responsible for program direction, which must be reported no later than when the change becomes effective.
4. After a program has obtained advance approval of two courses in an alternative format, it is permitted to offer additional courses in that same format without obtaining advance approval of these courses with the following conditions.
  - a. The program director must inform the Standing Committee in advance of offering such course or courses that it is planning to offer such courses, including, for each course, the course title, number of hours/credits, format, and planned date of initial offering.
  - b. The program director must certify that these offerings are substantially the same in form and quality as those previously approved; and
  - c. The program must provide detailed information on such courses, which demonstrates compliance with G-302.J, in its next report to the ABA.

When a program has obtained approval of two fully online courses, the program need not submit for advance approval any hybrid courses, as defined in G-302.J.2.a, regardless of the percentage of the hybrid course that is offered online.

5. If a major change appears to cause the program to be out of compliance with the Guidelines, the program may be subject to special reporting requirements and visits.

- N. An institution that offers multiple programs or program options for the education of paralegals at one or more locations will be considered a single program for purposes of approval if:
1. a few legal specialty courses are offered at an alternate location(s) or
  2. the program(s) or program options may be considered a single program based on an analysis of the following factors:
    - a. The program(s) or program options are being operated by the same entity within the same institution;
    - b. A single program director is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the program(s) and program options at all locations;
    - c. A single advisory committee accurately reflects and actively represents the constituents of all the program locations;
    - d. All records for the students in the program(s) or program options are accessible at all locations;
    - e. Each program or program option has the same admission policy and requirements for graduation;
    - f. The same instructional materials, course syllabi, and textbooks are used for each course taught within each program or program option; and
    - g. All locations are in reasonably close proximity of each other.
  3. Programs that offer legal specialty courses at more than one location must arrange for the site visit team to visit each location.

### **G-105**

#### **The authority to grant and to withdraw approval is vested in the American Bar Association.**

- A. The following actions may be taken with regard to paralegal education programs that apply for approval or reapproval.
1. Grant approval or reapproval.
  2. Defer action on applications for approval or reapproval.
  3. Extend a program's approval while its application for reapproval is being considered.

4. Issue a warning to an approved program.
  5. Place an approved program on probation.
  6. Issue an approved program an order to show cause why approval should not be withdrawn.
  7. Withdraw approval.
  8. Deny approval.
- B. All the above listed actions except deferral and warning are made public, that is, information concerning a program's status is provided to members of the public, including a notation on the official list of approved programs on the Committee's website.
- C. When a program is not in compliance with the Guidelines, the nature and gravity of its noncompliance will determine which of the following actions will be taken. These actions are not necessarily applied sequentially.
1. Deferral of approval or reapproval. If a program is not in compliance with the Guidelines, action on its application for approval or reapproval may be deferred. Deferral is not a final decision, but is interlocutory in nature and is designed to provide further guidance and time for the program to achieve and demonstrate compliance with the Guidelines. It is not made public. The deferral is made until a specific date, at which time the program's status will be reconsidered.
  2. Warning. A warning may be issued to an approved program if the program is not in compliance with the Guidelines. The warning may require the program to take corrective action concerning specified areas in which it is not in compliance with the Guidelines, to refrain from certain actions, or to initiate certain actions. The warning is in effect until a specific date, at which time the program's status will be reconsidered. A warning does not affect the approved status of the program and is not made public.
  3. Probation. When a program fails to respond to conditions imposed on it by a deferral or warning, or when it deviates significantly from the Guidelines or policies but not to such an extent as to warrant a show cause order to withdraw approval, the program may be placed on probation. Probation is in effect until a specific date, at which time the program's status will be reconsidered. The approved status of the program continues during the probation period. The probationary status is public.
  4. Show Cause. When a program has not taken satisfactory steps to remove the causes for its having been placed on probation, or when a program

has not responded to a warning or conditions imposed on it, or when a program not under warning or on probation is found to have deviated substantially from the Guidelines, an order to show cause why its approval should not be withdrawn at a specific date will be issued. The approved status of the program continues during the show cause period. This action is public.

5. **Withdrawal of Approval.** If an approved program has not satisfactorily explained or corrected areas in which it has been found out of compliance with the Guidelines and for which it has been given notice by means of the above described show cause procedure or if it ceases operation, its approval will be withdrawn.
  6. **Denial of approval.** If a program applying for approval is not in compliance with the Guidelines, it may be denied approval. In such cases, if the program seeks approval at a later time, it must submit a new self-evaluation report and exhibits and pay another application fee.
- D. If a program is deferred, placed on warning or probation, or issued an order to show cause why approval should not be withdrawn, the program is subject to special scrutiny, which may include periodic prescribed reports and follow-up visits by Committee representatives.
- E. The following entities are authorized to take the above-listed actions.
1. The House of Delegates may
    - a. grant approval;
    - b. deny approval;
    - c. extend approval; and
    - d. withdraw approval.
  2. The Committee may
    - a. place a program on probation; and
    - b. issue an order to show cause why approval should not be withdrawn; and
    - c. remove a program from probation or show cause status.
  3. The Approval Commission may
    - a. defer action on applications for approval;

- b. defer action on applications for reapproval;
  - c. issue warnings; and
  - d. remove a program from warning status.
4. The chair of the Approval Commission may
- a. issue warnings; and
  - b. remove a program from warning status.
- F. Recommendations of the Committee to the House of Delegates may be appealed in accordance with the ABA Constitution and By-Laws, and related policies.
- G. An approved program may have its approval withdrawn if
- 1. the program requests that its approval be withdrawn;
  - 2. the program ceases operations; or
  - 3. the program has been issued an order to show cause why its approval should not be withdrawn pursuant to G-105.C through E above and has failed to show cause why its approval should not be withdrawn.
- H. A program that requests that its approval be withdrawn or that ceases operations must ascertain from the Committee the date that its approval will be withdrawn by the House of Delegates and must take the following actions:
- 1. Inform all currently enrolled students and applicants to the program by means of written communication sent to each such person at his or her current address of record that the program will no longer be approved as of the date of withdrawal of approval and that students who graduate after that will not be graduated from an approved program.
  - 2. Post notices prominently on the institution's campus and all off-site locations where legal specialty courses are or were held in an area frequented by paralegal students that the program is no longer approved as of the date that approval will be withdrawn.
  - 3. Inform all faculty members, advisors, and members of the institution's staff and administration, in writing, that the program is no longer approved as of the date that approval will be withdrawn.
  - 4. Revise all catalogs, brochures, advertisements, websites, and other written and electronic material used to describe or promote the program to make clear that the program will no longer be approved as of the date

that approval will be withdrawn.

5. If the program is being discontinued, exercise best efforts to graduate all students before the program is discontinued and/or to facilitate the transfer of students to other programs.
  6. Copies of all written communications by which persons are notified of the withdrawal of approval must be sent to the Committee at the time they are disseminated.
- I. A program whose approval is withdrawn without the opportunity for advance notice to students as required in G-105.H above must:
1. Inform all currently enrolled students and applicants to the program by means of written communication sent to each such person at his or her current address of record that the program is no longer approved as of the date that approval was withdrawn by the House of Delegates.
  2. Post notices prominently on the institution's campus and on all off-site locations where legal specialty courses are or were held in an area frequented by paralegal students that the program is no longer approved as of the date that approval was withdrawn by the House of Delegates.
  3. Inform all faculty members, advisors, and members of the institution's staff and administration, in writing, that the program is no longer approved as of the date that approval was withdrawn by the House of Delegates.
  4. Revise all catalogs, brochures, advertisements, websites, and other written and electronic material used to describe or promote the program to make clear that the program is no longer approved as of the date that approval was withdrawn by the House of Delegates.
  5. If a program is being discontinued, exercise best efforts to graduate all students before the program is discontinued and/or to facilitate the transfer of students to other programs.
  6. Copies of all written communications by which persons are notified of withdrawal of approval must be sent to the Committee at the time they are disseminated.
- J. When approval of a program is withdrawn for any reason, the program and the institution in which it is situated must:
1. Refrain from any action or communication that would give the appearance that the program is approved after the date that approval is withdrawn.

2. Disclose fully to students that students who graduate from a program after the date on which approval is withdrawn have not been graduated from an approved program.
- K. If a program option is being discontinued, the program must exercise its best efforts to graduate all students before the program option is discontinued and/or facilitate the transfer of students.
- L. A change in institutional ownership is a major change that must be reported under G-104.J.
- M. If an approved program is transferred from one institution to another, approval will be withdrawn. The new institution may apply for approval and request a waiver of the requirements of G-106 that the program be fully operational for two years and have graduated students.

### **G-106**

**A paralegal education program will be considered for approval when it has been fully operational for two years and has graduated students.**

- A. Generally, an institution must not offer approved and unapproved programs or program options simultaneously. Upon written request, the Committee may grant a waiver of the provision prohibiting the simultaneous offering of approved and unapproved programs or program options. (See Appendix A, Criteria for Granting Waivers.)
- B. If an institution already offering an approved program intends to offer a new program or program option, the two-year waiting period and the requirement that the new program or program option has graduated students may be waived if the new program or program option is in compliance with all other Guidelines.
- C. The Committee has determined that educational offerings for nurses to be educated as legal nurse consultants, nurse paralegals, or for similar positions are considered paralegal program options under G-103.A.

### **G-107**

**An approved program should seek to exceed the minimum requirements of the Guidelines.**

## **ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION**

### **G-201**

**The institution must be organized and administered in such a way that the program's goals and objectives can be accomplished.**

- A. The program must have clearly defined, publicly stated and measurable

goals and explicit objectives stated in terms of the educational results to be achieved. These goals must reflect:

1. Consistency with the general principles of ethical legal practice as promulgated by appropriate authorities in the relevant jurisdiction.
  2. Responsiveness to the needs of the constituency that the program seeks to serve, and a recognition that the program should qualify the graduates to contribute to the advancement of the profession.
  3. Sensitivity to emerging concepts of the role of the paralegal in the effective delivery of legal services in both the private and public sectors.
- B. The program director, in conjunction with faculty and staff, must be delegated the authority necessary for developing and implementing the program to meet its stated objectives.
- C. Appropriate administrators within the institution should be knowledgeable about and supportive of the program goals.
- D. The institution must facilitate communication and coordination among faculty members, administrators, and students.
- E. The organizational structure of the program and its place within the institution must be designed to allow the program to achieve its goals.
- F. The program must engage in planning, including long-range planning, and such planning must encompass the matters set forth in the Guidelines.

## **G-202**

**With regard to finances, staffing, appointment to policy-making bodies, program priorities, and other academic affairs, the paralegal education program must be given status within the institution comparable to other units of similar size and function.**

- A. In determining comparability of the program to other units within the institution, consideration will be given to a number of factors including the size of the program, enrollment in the program, and the program's place within the institutional structure.
- B. Among the other factors to be considered in determining comparability are the following:
1. Responsibilities, treatment, and status of the faculty, program director, and staff;
  2. Enrollment;

3. Staff support;
4. Technical and other supporting services;
5. Physical resources including office space, classrooms, laboratories, and library;
6. Support for professional development; and
7. Participation in academic affairs, governance, and decision making.

### **G-203**

**The paralegal education program, including programs offered by law schools, must have an advisory committee that includes practicing lawyers, paralegals from the public and private sector, managers of paralegals when present and available in the community, faculty and school administrators and one or more members of the general public.**

- A. The program must have an advisory committee, whose members are familiar with the objectives of the program.
- B. Members of the advisory committee must be knowledgeable about trends, developments, and issues in the paralegal profession.
  1. Institutions may utilize local, state, and national paralegal organizations, law-related management associations, and state and local bar associations to assist in the recommendation and selection of members of the advisory committee.
  2. A majority of the members of the advisory committee must be appointed from the community that the program serves and may not be currently affiliated with the institution as faculty members or employees.
  3. A general public member is a person who is not affiliated with or a graduate of the institution and is not directly involved in legal services or legal education and who brings a broad public perspective to the advisory committee. A few examples of general public members are local government officials, members of the business community, and civic and community leaders.
- C. Regularly scheduled meetings, at least twice annually, must be held and minutes of these meetings, including a list of those in attendance, must be recorded and maintained.
- D. The advisory committee should:
  1. Advise regarding admissions standards for the selection of qualified students for the program.

2. Assist in securing competent instructors.
3. Inform the program about changes and trends in the field.
4. Assist the program in assessing the job market and in exploring and developing career opportunities for paralegals.
5. Publicize the program and secure community cooperation and interest.
6. Evaluate the adequacy of library resources.
7. Assess the effectiveness of the total program in terms of its curriculum and objectives, the needs of the legal community, and graduate performance.

### **G-204**

**The institution must maintain equality of opportunity in its education program and must adhere to all laws prohibiting discrimination or segregation on the grounds of race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, disability, or sexual orientation.**

- A. The institution must have appropriate policies and procedures to ensure compliance with laws prohibiting discrimination.
- B. The institution and the program must encourage diversity and take proactive steps to encourage recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty, staff, and student body.
- C. The institution and the program must take proactive steps to prevent discrimination in student services including the process for job and internship placements.

### **G-205**

**The present and anticipated financial resources of the institution must be adequate to sustain a sound paralegal education program.**

- A. The program must be provided with resources adequate to accomplish its objectives and to fulfill the obligations imposed by the Guidelines.
- B. Funding must be available for the following:
  1. Employment of the program director, faculty, and staff;
  2. Professional development for program director and faculty members;
  3. Membership in professional associations related to the paralegal profession and paralegal education;
  4. Instructional equipment and supplies;

5. Library materials and resources;
  6. Technical and other support services;
  7. Assessment activities; and
  8. Meetings such as advisory committee and faculty meetings.
- C. If classes are offered at more than one location, the institution must ensure that there is sufficient support at each site, which may include access to student services, support for instructional activities, and library resources.

### **G-206**

**Paralegal education programs will be considered for approval if they are offered by law schools, four-year colleges and universities, two-year colleges, comprehensive technical institutes, or vocational schools.**

## **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS**

### **G-301**

**The institution must maintain a program for the education of paralegals that is designed to qualify its graduates to be employed in law-related occupations.**

- A. The primary concern of a paralegal education program is to develop professional competence, which requires both general education and legal specialty course work as defined in G-302.
- B. The instructional methodology should stress understanding and reasoning rather than rote learning of facts. The instructional methodology must include the following:
  1. Processes to ensure interaction between the faculty member and students and among students;
  2. Opportunities for students to interact with faculty members and to receive meaningful and prompt feedback regarding their assignments and questions; and
  3. Practical assignments that develop paralegal job competencies.
- C. The curriculum should be constructed in such a way as to provide opportunities for students to achieve higher levels of education.
  1. If credit is awarded, a maximum number of credits should be applicable toward further education for higher degrees or certificates with minimum loss of time and duplication of effort.

2. Program graduates without a baccalaureate degree should be encouraged to continue their education and to obtain a baccalaureate degree.
  3. Each institution should make a good faith effort to enter into articulation agreements with other institutions to facilitate the transfer of students from two-year to four-year colleges.
- D. The curriculum must be responsive to changing needs and reflect research and assessment findings related to paralegal education and utilization of paralegal services. The program must engage in continual review and evaluation and incorporate new ideas relating to both curriculum and instructional method.
- E. The program must have an organized plan for evaluation, review, and improvement of the program. There must be regular assessment of the extent to which a program meets its stated goals and objectives.
- F. Assessment and evaluation may be accomplished through assessment tools that best measure the program's goals and objectives. The adequacy of the assessment will be evaluated by:
1. The quality of the assessment instruments and methodology;
  2. The frequency with which assessment is conducted;
  3. The degree of participation, such as the response rate on surveys, so as to ensure the validity and reliability of assessment findings;
  4. The extent to which input is sought from graduates, employers, students, advisory committee, faculty, school administrators and a cross-section of members of the legal community;
  5. The written summary and analysis of the assessment findings;
  6. The extent to which the results are shared with the advisory committee, faculty, administrators, and others; and
  7. The extent to which assessment findings are used to make changes in the program.

### **G-302**

#### **The program of education for paralegals must be:**

- (a) At the postsecondary level of instruction;**
- (b) At least sixty semester hours, or equivalent, which must include general education and legal specialty courses;**

**(c) Offered by an institution accredited by an institutional accrediting agency acceptable to the committee.**

- A. Postsecondary education is defined as education provided through colleges, universities, schools, or other institutions offering credentials primarily to persons who have completed their secondary education, satisfied equivalency requirements, or are beyond the compulsory high school attendance age.
- B. A list of accrediting agencies that are acceptable to the Committee is maintained in the offices of the Committee and are available on the Committee’s website.
- C. Within this section, credit, credit hour, and unit are synonymous. Of the sixty semester credits or equivalent, at least eighteen semester credits or equivalent must consist of general education courses and at least eighteen semester credits or equivalent must consist of legal specialty courses.
  - 1. The content of the remaining twenty-four semester credits or equivalent is at the discretion of the institution.
  - 2. The eighteen semester credits of legal specialty and general education are considered minimums, and programs are encouraged to require additional general education courses and other courses that enhance the students’ professional knowledge and skills, including legal specialty and technology courses.
- D. To determine the semester credit equivalencies for the purpose of complying with G-302(b), a “clock hour” equals sixty minutes of classroom instruction, a “contact hour” equals fifty minutes of classroom instruction, a “semester credit” equals 12.5 clock hours or fifteen contact hours of instruction, and a “quarter credit” or a “continuing education unit” equals 8.33 clock hours or ten contact hours of instruction.

To comply with the provisions of G-302(b), programs must meet the minimum hour requirements for the units of instruction used by the program as indicated in the chart below.

	General Education Course Work	Legal Specialty Course Work	Additional Course Work	Total Course Work
Clock hours	225	225	300	750
Contact hours	270	270	360	900
Semester credits	18	18	24	60
Quarter credits	27	27	36	90
Continuing education units	27	27	36	90

- E. The following requirements apply to general education.
1. A general education course is an academic college-level course designed to give students a broadly based liberal arts education. This definition of general education may differ from the definition adopted by a particular institution or a particular accrediting agency.
    - a. A general education course ordinarily provides the students with critical reasoning and writing skills.
    - b. Such courses are usually in the areas of social and behavioral science, English composition and literature, foreign language, mathematics, humanities, natural science, and the fine arts.
    - c. Courses specifically designed to develop professional, vocational, and technical skills or that are remedial in nature are not classified as general education.
    - d. Examples of courses that are not classified as general education include, but are not limited to, physical education, performing arts, accounting, computers, technical writing, business mathematics, business English, keyboarding, and business law.
  2. Within the requirement for 18 semester credits or the equivalent of general education course work, students must take courses in at least three disciplines, such as social sciences, natural sciences, mathematics, humanities, foreign language, and English.
  3. Students must demonstrate writing proficiency at the college level. Programs may comply with this requirement by whatever means are appropriate for the student constituency they serve, such as requiring the satisfactory completion of a college-level English composition course or the achievement of acceptable scores on recognized tests that measure writing proficiency.
  4. Students must demonstrate competency in oral communication. Programs may comply with this requirement by whatever means are appropriate for the student constituency they serve, such as requiring the satisfactory completion of a college-level course or courses that develop such skills, incorporating instruction into legal specialty courses, or having students demonstrate competency.
  5. The program must have a rational sequencing plan. Ordinarily students take appropriate general education courses prior to taking legal specialty courses, other than an introductory paralegal course.
  6. The program may allow the students to fulfill the general education requirement through appropriate course work completed elsewhere or through nationally recognized equivalency tests.

- F. The writing proficiency, oral communication competency, general education, and total credit requirements are assumed to have been satisfied if a student has earned a baccalaureate degree or an associate of arts or science degree from an accredited postsecondary institution. This assumption does not apply to an associate of applied science degree or equivalent occupational or vocational degree.
- G. Programs must ensure students have appropriate technology skills. Programs may comply with this requirement by whatever means are appropriate for the student constituency they serve, such as requiring the satisfactory completion of an appropriate course, achievement of acceptable scores on a test of technology skills, or through demonstrated competency.
- H. Programs may permit exemptions from the general education requirement of 18 semester credits or equivalent and to the total requirement of 60 semester credits or the equivalent, provided that:
1. The program exempts from these requirements no more than 10 percent of its incoming registered students each academic year.
  2. The exemptions from the general education requirement and total credit requirement are based on valid performance criteria. Such criteria may include equivalency testing, tests which measure general educational development, or other methods that the program deems appropriate so that success in the program may be reasonably predicted.
  3. Exemptions must be approved by appropriate program personnel and be thoroughly documented.
  4. General education credit that is granted on the basis of nationally recognized equivalency tests, accelerated high school courses, or appropriate college-level challenge exams is not considered an exception to the general education requirement.
  5. The overall quality of the program cannot be adversely affected by including students with disparate educational backgrounds.
- I. The following requirements apply to legal specialty courses.
1. A legal specialty course is a course that (1) covers substantive law or legal procedures or process, (2) has been developed for paralegals, and (3) emphasizes practical paralegal skills.
    - a. Courses such as legal research, legal writing, litigation, probate, real estate, and other courses in specific areas of law practice are typically legal specialty courses if they emphasize practical paralegal skills.
    - b. Courses that introduce students to the paralegal profession and

courses that provide an overview of legal principles are encouraged and are classified as legal specialty courses if they meet all three criteria of the definition of a legal specialty course stated in section I.1 above.

- c. Courses such as law office management and law-related computer technology courses are encouraged and are classified as legal specialty courses if they meet all three criteria of the definition of a legal specialty course stated in section I.1 above.
- d. Internships, cooperative education placements and law clinics (hereafter collectively referred to as “field experiences”) are encouraged and are classified as legal specialty courses if they meet all three criteria of the definition of a legal specialty course stated in section I.1 above. Additionally, in order for field experiences to be classified as legal specialty courses:
  - (1) The program must have a systematic plan for developing, assigning, monitoring, and evaluating field experiences.
  - (2) Field experiences must require a sufficient number of hours on the job to justify the amount of credit awarded. Ordinarily students should be required to work at least three times the number of hours on the job as they would spend in a class. (See hour requirements in G-302.D.)
  - (3) There must be a clear understanding of course expectations among students, the program, and field experience supervisors.
  - (4) During the course of the student’s field experience, the program must ensure ongoing communication among the program representative responsible for overseeing the field experience, the student, and the field experience supervisor.
  - (5) The program must ensure that the students’ work emphasizes paralegal skills and competencies.
- e. Courses prepared, developed, and taught in departments or programs other than the paralegal program ordinarily are not classified as legal specialty courses.
- f. Courses that have theoretical law content and that do not emphasize the development of paralegal skills are not classified as legal specialty courses. For example, courses such as business law, constitutional law, and criminal justice are not ordinarily classified as legal specialty courses.
- g. Each program bears the responsibility of proving that a course

classified as a legal specialty course meets the criteria in section I.1 above.

- h. The determination to classify a course as a legal specialty course as defined in section I.1 is based on a careful review of the course content, including the course objectives, description, a detailed outline of the topics covered, text and other materials, and the nature of tests and assignments.
2. The program must have a rational sequencing plan for its legal specialty courses and a process to ensure that students follow it.
  3. The curriculum must cover the full range of ethical and professional responsibility concerns applicable to paralegals.
  4. The curriculum must provide for instruction in legal research, including electronic resources. (See also G-601.I and J.)
  5. A program may not permit exemptions from the legal specialty requirement of 18 semester credits or equivalent.
  6. Programs must have written policies on the transfer of legal specialty course work and the award of legal specialty credit by examination or portfolio to ensure that the quality and integrity of the program are maintained if such credit is granted.
    - a. The program must have limits on the number of legal specialty credits that can be earned through transfer, examination or portfolio.
    - b. The program must have procedures that require the award of credit through transfer, examination or portfolio to be approved by the program director or a qualified faculty member to ensure that the credit can be classified as legal specialty, meets the course objectives and practical skills to be developed for the course for which credit is being awarded, and is comparable to course work offered within the program.
- J. Programs may offer legal specialty courses with a combination of traditional classroom and alternative delivery formats, such as a compressed or accelerated format and online instruction, as long as the courses meet the stated hour requirements of G-302.D and other requirements that apply to the alternative format used as set forth in this section J.
1. Programs must provide and students must be required to take at least ten semester credits or the equivalent of legal specialty courses through traditional classroom instruction. This requirement may be satisfied through synchronous interactive video systems, as they are considered equivalent to traditional classroom instruction.

2. Programs bear the responsibility of proving that alternative means satisfy the stated hour requirements in G-302.D and that the specialty classes offered through alternative delivery formats meet the following conditions:
  - a. Programs that offer legal specialty courses through a compressed or accelerated format, or through a partial online format by substituting online instruction for some classroom time, must demonstrate that students are engaged in sufficient structured instructional activities and attend class for a total number of hours to warrant the award of credit under G-302.D.

Courses that are offered through a partial online format, sometimes called hybrid or blended courses, are considered to be online for the purposes of these Guidelines if 50 percent or more of the instruction, as defined in G-302.D, is offered online. For example, a three-semester credit course, which must have 45 contact hours of instruction under G-302.D, is considered to be an online course if it does not have at least 22.5 contact hours of traditional classroom instruction. (See G-302.J.2.b for requirements pertaining to online courses and G-104.M for reporting requirements for online courses.)

- (1) The program director and faculty must design such courses taking into account the constraints imposed by the alternative format.
  - (2) The program must screen the qualifications and background of the students to ensure that they have the potential to succeed in courses offered in an alternative format.
  - (3) The institution must provide the faculty members training and support in developing and teaching courses offered in a compressed, accelerated, or partial online format.
  - (4) In order to meet the requirements of G-301.E, programs must assess the effectiveness of the compressed, accelerated, or partial online format.
  - (5) The determination of whether the classroom hours and the structured instructional activities meet the stated hour requirements is based on a careful review of a detailed outline of the in-class and outside instructional activities including hours allocated.
- b. Programs offering any legal specialty courses through online delivery must comply with the following requirements.
    - (1) The program director and faculty must design such courses taking

into account the characteristics of online delivery and the nature of the subject matter.

- (2) The program must screen the qualifications and background of the students to ensure that they have the potential to succeed in courses offered in an online format.
- (3) The institution must provide the faculty members training and support in developing and teaching online courses.
- (4) In order to meet the requirements of G-301.E, programs must assess the effectiveness of the online format.
- (5) Course objectives and outcomes cannot be diluted for the purpose of allowing delivery by online means.
- (6) In order to fulfill the requirements of G- 301.B.1, each course must include synchronous or asynchronous components that ensure interaction between the faculty member and students and among students.
- (7) In order to meet the requirements of G-301.B.2, faculty members must be accessible to students and must provide feedback promptly to students regarding their assignments and questions.
- (8) The institution must provide technical support and equipment to ensure the proper functioning of the system and the availability of a back-up system in the event of technical difficulties.
- (9) The program must have a system to verify the identity of the student submitting work or taking an examination.
- (10) The determination of whether the online instruction meets the stated hour requirements is based on a careful review of a detailed outline of the online activities, including hours allocated to each activity. Such online activities may include lectures, both synchronous and asynchronous discussions, quizzes, diagnostic exercises, assignments, and tests.

## **FACULTY**

### **G-401**

**The program director and instructors must possess appropriate education, knowledge, and experience.**

- A. The program director, faculty, and staff must be knowledgeable about the paralegal profession.

- B. The program director must be knowledgeable about developments in paralegal education.
- C. The program director and faculty must be committed to the education and utilization of paralegal services.
- D. The program director and faculty members should have experience working with or as paralegals.
- E. Faculty members must be knowledgeable in the areas in which they are providing instruction and must demonstrate teaching effectiveness.
- F. The program director and the faculty members must demonstrate commitment to their continued professional growth as teachers and as professionals.
- G. The program must provide opportunities for all faculty members to develop their effectiveness as teachers.
- H. The program must hold meetings of the paralegal faculty, including full-time and adjuncts.
  - 1. Regularly scheduled meetings, at least twice annually, must be held and minutes of these meetings, including a list of those in attendance, must be recorded and maintained.
  - 2. Meetings should be held for the purpose of discussing program goals, course content, overall curriculum planning, instructional methodology, and assessment.

#### **G-402**

**A full-time member of the faculty or the administration of the institution must be responsible for the direction of the program.**

- A. The institution must ensure that the total time and effort devoted to program leadership are adequate to accomplish the following functions that relate to Guideline requirements:
  - 1. Defining major program objectives;
  - 2. Representing the program throughout the administrative and academic structure of the institution;
  - 3. Determining the financial needs and formulating the program budget;
  - 4. Attracting, selecting, and retaining qualified faculty and encouraging faculty professional development;
  - 5. Advising program students;

6. Assuring the proper organization and operation of the advisory committee;
  7. Maintaining liaison with the legal, paralegal, and paralegal education communities;
  8. Identifying and responding to the occupational and educational needs of the community;
  9. Arranging and monitoring internships, if offered;
  10. Handling placement or coordination with the central placement office;
  11. Evaluating the adequacy of the library/information resources;
  12. Coordinating the educational program; and
  13. Evaluating the overall program, including regular assessment of the extent to which a program is meeting its stated goals and objectives as required in G-301.E.
- B. These functions may be divided among two or more persons as appropriate to the institutional setting and the program enrollment.

### **G-403**

**In the program of education for paralegals, the institution must establish and maintain conditions adequate to attract and retain a competent faculty.**

- A. The size of the faculty must be commensurate with the number and type of courses offered and the number and needs of students served.
- B. The faculty must be provided with adequate clerical, technical, and other supporting services necessary to carry on an effective instructional program.

## **ADMISSIONS AND STUDENT SERVICES**

### **G-501**

**The admission policies of the program of education for paralegals must be designed to enroll students qualified for and interested in careers as paralegals.**

- (a) **Students admitted to the program must have a high school diploma or have passed an examination that demonstrates equivalency to a high school education, or must otherwise demonstrate that they have the capability of performing work at the college level.**

- (b) Students must be selected on a basis consistent with the philosophy and objectives of the program.**
  - (c) A number of admission criteria, both objective and subjective, should be used to reflect a rational process for selecting students so that success as paralegals can be reasonably predicted.**
  - (d) Students may be admitted with advanced standing when their performance in parallel courses at other institutions or on special qualifying examinations meets established achievement standards.**
- A. All program literature and promotional material used in the admissions process, whether in written, oral, or electronic form, must comply with the following standards. The program and institution must:
1. State clearly and accurately the objectives of the program;
  2. Identify that it is offered for paralegal education;
  3. Include a clear statement that paralegals may not provide legal services directly to the public, except as permitted by law;
  4. Refrain from using language from the site team report in its advertising and promotional materials;
  5. Not use the ABA logo and identifying mark without the express written permission of the American Bar Association;
  6. Advertise in accordance with applicable consumer protection laws; and
  7. Be accurate, truthful, and not misleading.
- B. Programs may not use the term “accreditation” to refer to approval by the American Bar Association.
- C. When the Committee has granted permission to an institution to offer approved and unapproved programs or program options under G-106.A, the institution may not advertise approved and unapproved programs or program options in a manner that might be confusing or misleading to the public.

## **G-502**

### **Student services of the program must provide for:**

- (a) An effective plan for counseling and advising students and assisting graduates in securing suitable employment; and**
- (b) Student participation in areas of curriculum review and development, in course and faculty evaluation, and in all other matters relating to**

## **conduct and improvement of the program.**

- A. A program must provide orientation to new students to the paralegal profession, including a realistic description of job requirements, job opportunities, legal restrictions on the practice of law by nonlawyers, and paralegal professional associations.
- B. Qualified counselors and advisors must be available to assist students in assessing their strengths and weaknesses and in planning their studies.
- C. The program must make conscientious efforts to assist students with placement.
  - 1. Placement efforts must include assisting students in developing resume writing, interviewing, and job search skills.
  - 2. The program must provide information and resources concerning current paralegal employment opportunities.
- D. The program or institution must maintain accurate and substantially complete placement records.
  - 1. Within six months after students graduate, the program must gather information on employment and/or educational status.
    - a. For those who are employed, the job title, name of employer, city, and state.
    - b. For those who are continuing their education, the degree or certificate being pursued and the name of the educational institution.
  - 2. Programs must keep these records for a minimum of seven years.
- E. Students must be given opportunities to express their views and make suggestions, with the assurance that their proposals and opinions will be given fair consideration. Student participation in these matters can be encouraged through student organizations and membership on appropriate committees, including the program's advisory committee.
- F. Programs may provide for continuing legal and paralegal education.

### **G-503**

**Pursuant to an established policy, the institution, without requiring compliance with its admission standards and procedures, may permit the enrollment in a particular course or limited number of courses as auditors, non-degree candidates or candidates pursuing degrees in other areas.**

If students not pursuing paralegal studies for a paralegal degree or certificate are

permitted to enroll in legal specialty courses, the program must ensure that the progress, content, level, and quality of legal specialty courses are not adversely affected.

## **LIBRARY**

### **G-601**

**The institution must have available a library adequate for its program of education of paralegals.**

- A. A library must be available containing resources that are relevant to and adequate for the courses being taught.
- B. The program director and advisory committee must evaluate the adequacy of the library/information resources.
- C. The library and library support must be available to students during hours that makes its use convenient and practical.
- D. The library administration must permit instruction in legal research inside the library, subject to reasonable restrictions.
- E. The program can satisfy this Guideline by the availability of an external law library, such as a law school library or a city, county, or bar library, by an internal library maintained on its premises by the institution, or by combining elements of both an external library and an internal library.
- F. If the program relies on an external library to fulfill these requirements, the following conditions must be met:
  - 1. The library must be located within a reasonable distance of the institution.
  - 2. There must be an understanding between the library administration and the institution with respect to student accessibility and onsite instruction.
- G. Except as provided under G-601.H, at a minimum the library must contain the following print resources, which must be up-to-date, with appropriate supplements:
  - 1. The code of the state in which the institution is located;
  - 2. The reporter for the state in which the institution is located, or the regional reporter that includes such state, covering at least the preceding 25 years;

3. The current digest for the state in which the institution is located, or the current regional digest that includes such state;
  4. A resource to check on the currency and validity of primary source material for the state in which the institution is located, e.g., Shepard's Citations;
  5. A current legal encyclopedia, e.g., American Jurisprudence, Corpus Juris Secundum, or a comparable state encyclopedia;
  6. Texts, practice manuals and form books, in all areas of legal specialty instruction;
  7. Local and state bar journals, newspapers, and periodicals devoted to the paralegal profession;
  8. Texts and other resources about the paralegal profession; and
  9. Law dictionaries.
- H. Some of the collection requirements listed under G-601.G may be otherwise met pursuant to interpretations adopted by the Committee. The official record of those interpretations are maintained in the offices of the Committee and are available on the Committee's website.
- I. Students must be instructed in the proper use of legal resources prior to being given research assignments.
- J. Programs must provide adequate electronic access to research materials.
1. Electronic research instruction should complement, not replace traditional research instruction.
  2. Instruction in electronic legal research must be provided to students as required by G-302.I.4.

## **PHYSICAL PLANT**

### **G-701**

**The physical facilities of the institution must permit the accommodation of varying teaching methods and learning activities.**

- A. Classrooms must be appropriate in design and size for the classes offered.
- B. Study areas must be adequate for the number of students enrolled in the program.

### **G-702**

**Space, equipment and other instructional aids must be sufficient for the**

### **number of students enrolled in the program.**

- A. Equipment and other instructional materials must be available for specialized activities.
- B. Adequate technology resources must be available to meet the instructional needs of the program.
- C. The institution must provide support services, such as equipment maintenance and repair, technical assistance, and backup systems.
- D. Other facilities and services such as storage and locker space, food service, and student and faculty lounges should be provided as deemed necessary or practical.

### **G-703**

#### **Faculty, administrative and other staff should have office and work areas suitable for performing their duties.**

- A. The program director must be provided with adequate office space.
- B. The program director, faculty, and staff must be provided with space to meet privately with students and others for advising and counseling.

## **AUTHORITY**

### **G-801**

#### **Consistent with the Guidelines, the Standing Committee on Paralegals is authorized to:**

- (a) **Interpret the Guidelines;**
- (b) **Adopt rules implementing the Guidelines;**
- (c) **Adopt procedural rules for the initial application by institutions and approval of programs of education for paralegals and for the review and reinspection of approved programs; and**
- (d) **Amend any rules from time to time. All interpretations and rules will be published and made available to all interested persons.**

### **G-802**

**The Committee is authorized to consider any request for approval of a program of education for paralegals. If the Committee decision is that approval should be granted, it will so recommend to the ABA House of Delegates.**

# **ADOPTION AND AMENDMENT**

## **G-901**

**These Guidelines become effective upon their adoption by the House of Delegates.**

## **G-902**

**The power to approve an amendment of the Guidelines is vested in the House of Delegates, but the House of Delegates will not act on any amendment until it has first received the advice and recommendations of the Standing Committee on Paralegals.**

## **Appendix A**

### **Criteria for Granting Waivers**

The provision prohibiting the simultaneous offering of approved and unapproved programs and program options by an institution is based on the following principles:

1. Approval by the American Bar Association is a voluntary process under which institutions choose to adhere to stated standards. Institutions should not readily request to opt out of meeting those standards.
2. Permitting an institution with an approved program to offer an unapproved program creates an inherent likelihood of confusion among the constituencies being served by the institution with the result that the unapproved program will likely be perceived by the public to be approved. This result not only misleads the public but also devalues the meaning and credibility of ABA approval.

Therefore, when an institution requests a waiver of the prohibition against offering approved and unapproved programs, the Standing Committee will examine all of the surrounding circumstances to ascertain the justification for not adhering to stated standards and the degree to which the public is likely to be misled by the proposed offering.

In making this analysis, the Standing Committee will consider the following information and material, as appropriate, and any other information and material that may be relevant to the specific circumstances of the institution and its request.

1. The program's stated rationale for requesting the waiver.
2. Information on whether the program for which the institution is requesting a waiver is located within the institution. Is this the same division in which the paralegal program is situated? Are any of the classes sponsored by the paralegal program? What are the organizational, budgeting, and reporting relationship between the programs? An organization chart should be attached.
3. Information on the administration and faculty of both the approved program and the program for which a waiver is being requested. Who are the program directors or coordinators? Who is teaching in the program? Are any of the same persons involved in teaching and administration of both programs? The names and resumes of the faculty of both programs should be provided.
4. Curriculum for the approved program and the program for which a waiver is being requested. Are any of the courses the same? Are the courses in the proposed program paralegal courses? Do they lead to the award of a credential that is likely to be perceived as a paralegal credential, i.e., diploma, certificate, degree? What texts are used for the courses in the proposed program? Will students from the approved program be permitted to enroll in the courses offered by the unapproved program, and vice versa?

5. Information and material relating to the development of the program for which a waiver is being requested, such as minutes of meetings, community needs surveys, job descriptions, and the like. Is the proposed program a paralegal program that is likely to be confused with the existing program?
6. Membership of the advisory committees of both the paralegal program and the program for which a waiver is being requested and minutes of their meetings for the past year. Is the proposed program under the existing advisory committee for the approved program?
7. Information on the employment of graduates from the program for which a waiver is being requested and plans to promote the placement of the graduates of this program. Will there be joint efforts to place graduates of both programs? What personnel are responsible for placing the graduates of each program? Will graduates of both programs be placed in the same kinds of portions? Will graduates of the proposed program be working under the supervision of lawyers?
8. Information on the career plans or expectations of the graduates of the program for which a waiver is being requested, such as surveys and questionnaires. Do the graduates expect to be placed as “paralegals” or “legal assistants” under the ABA definition?
9. Information about the library collection that will serve and support the program for which a waiver is being requested. Is the library collection the same?
10. Information about the physical facilities in which the classes will be held for the program for which a waiver is being requested and on their proximity to the paralegal classes. Are the students of the two programs likely to be attending classes in the same part of the campus?
11. Literature or proposed literature used to promote enrollment in the program for which a waiver is being requested, including the college catalog, print advertisements, program flyers and brochures, and the like. Does the literature make clear that this program is not ABA approved? Are students and others likely to see this literature and read the pertinent language?
12. Literature or proposed literature used to promote the hiring of graduates of the program for which a waiver is being requested. Is an employer likely to believe that the graduate of the proposed program is a paralegal or a graduate of an ABA-approved program?
13. Information on whether and to what extent the program is in compliance with the Guidelines for the Approval of Paralegal Education Programs.
14. Any other information that the institution believes to be relevant to the analysis.



