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## WHY PARALEGAL CERTIFICATION COUNTS?



Designation as a Certified Legal Assistant (CLA), or Certified Paralegal (CP) is more than the pinnacle of professional achievement for individual paralegals. It is also a sound indication of proficiency to the attorneys, firms, and organizations that hire them. Since the CLA program was launched by the National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) in 1976, it has become widely recognized as the definitive credential for paralegals. More than 25,000 individuals have participated in the program, and some 12,500 paralegals are on the certification rolls today.

### How Certification Helps:

Voluntary certification programs are an esteemed tradition in most professions, and have been described as the single most important movement in the area of human resources.

Usually established and administered by a profession's association, certification programs help individuals proceed from

*Reality is...success rarely 'shows up'...it is lured and attracted day by day by the right actions, thinking, and heart. -- Doug Firebaugh*

education and training into the real-world challenges of paralegal work. Certification programs influence career preparation as continuing career development.

These programs affirm the knowledge, skills, and expertise to perform at a high professional level. Paralegal certification also speaks volumes about individual dedication and commitment to stay abreast of developments in the legal field.

Certification programs are valuable to employers at all levels, whether large or small businesses, corporations, or sole proprietorships. Three important ways that certification programs help those who hire paralegals are:

1. Assisting hiring decisions - No interview or single assessment tool can predict performance on the job with complete reliability, but certification is a compelling indication of strong commitment to a chosen career and the ability to meet real-world standards.

2. Verifying educational background and experi-

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ence - Certification programs provide the professional education and experience documentation that many employers need, but do not have time to check.

3. Helping develop recognition and incentive programs - As models for employee training plans, certification programs build confidence and competence in all employees, and they help employers provide greater service to clients. Certification programs are easily adaptable for employee training and development programs designed by employers.

### Benefits for Paralegals and Firms

Because of the benefits of certification and the opportunities provided for professional development, creating a paralegal certification program was a top priority of NALA

when the association was founded in 1975. A program was sought which would help employers identify proficient paralegals, would assist paralegal curricula development, and would provide an ongoing professional development program for paralegals. With the ensuing 30 years of research and development, the CLA/CP program has met and exceeded these goals.

In many markets, CLA/CP certification is crucial to securing a paralegal job and to career advancement. Many law firms require professional staff to have the CLA/CP credential, as do large corporations such as Wal-Mart.

For employers, certification means that the employee's educational background has been checked and verified - an increasingly important detail - and that standards developed by

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## A MOMENT WITH THE DIRECTOR

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### Can We Talk??

The number of paralegals, including Faulkner University students, seeking national certification is on the rise! Legal studies students are introduced to the concept and qualifications for national certification in their first legal studies course. Students are also offered a prep course for the Certified Legal Assistant (CLA) Exam offered by the National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) in their final semester of study. While not required to take the exam, many students choose to do so in an effort to exemplify a high level of competency and dedication to the legal profession. We are very proud of all of our students who commit to taking this very difficult exam. Faulkner University's passage rate exceeds the national average for the exam and we fully

intend to continue to support the efforts of the exceptional students who go the extra mile to achieve certification!

The CLA prep course offered by Faulkner University is available to anyone in the community. Qualifications for the exams are available on the NALA website at [www.nala.org](http://www.nala.org). If you are interested in taking the prep course, please feel free to contact me at [mjohns@faulkner.edu](mailto:mjohns@faulkner.edu).



those in the profession have been met. Certification gives employers more options in developing opportunities for growth. For private law firms, certification allows higher billing rates.

Initial certification may take many years to achieve, and keeping it requires continuing effort. To maintain CLA/CP certification, paralegals must participate in at least 50 hours of approved continuing legal education every five years.

Throughout its 30-year history, the CLA/CP certification program has garnered respect and recognition as a sound process of professional development. For example, the program is approved by the U.S. Department of Defense as a GI benefit so that veterans, or those still in uniform, may have their CLA/CP examination costs reimbursed by the government.

There also is widespread use of the CLA/CP credential by paralegals in law firms and corporations to make clear the expertise of a professional staff. This is allowed by bar

associations throughout the nation, provided that the paralegal's nonlawyer status is clearly indicated - the CLA/CP initials alone are not sufficient.

### The Program

The CLA/CP certification program is available to those who have completed formal training in ABA approved paralegal instruction programs, and who have either a bachelor's degree plus paralegal training, or extensive experience. A rigorous eight-hour examination, administered over a two-day period, also must be passed. The exam is offered each March, July, and December at testing centers located throughout the United States.

The test includes objective questions and two written essays that are part of the Written Communications and Judgment and Legal Analysis sections.

Reprinted in part courtesy of Debra Monke, NALA.



## Paralegal Profile: Kayla Wallace



Kayla Wallace grew up in Luverne, Alabama and graduated from Faulkner in December, 2006 with a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and an Associate's degree in Legal Studies. Much to her credit, Kayla sat for the CP exam, which is the national certification program through NALA, in December, 2006 and successfully achieved the designation of Certified Paralegal in February, 2007. Kayla's interests include: writing, politics and sports.

Kayla began employment as a legal assistant with the Montgomery law firm of Webster, Henry, Lyons, and White on March 12, 2007, and she recently became engaged to Faulkner alumnus, Stephen Frisby, who is a

first year law student at Jones School of Law.

Kayla hopes to take the exam for the Advanced Certified Paralegal certification in the future, and also plans to start the Master's program in CJ next year.



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Legal Community***

## THE PARALEGAL PULSE

### ONLINE Master's Program in Criminal Justice

Faulkner University's Master of Science in Criminal Justice degree, (MCJ for short), could be just what you need to advance your career. The MCJ program is 100% online and takes only 14 months to complete. There are 10 courses in the MCJ program. Each course is 5 weeks long and there is a week off between courses. No trips to campus are required. New cycles of the MCJ program begin in February, May and August annually. For more information contact: John Gray, MCJ Director, 1-800-879-9816 ext. 7262 [jgray@faulkner.edu](mailto:jgray@faulkner.edu).



### ABA Model Guidelines for the Utilization of Paralegal Services

**GUIDELINE 7: A lawyer should take reasonable measures to prevent conflicts of interest resulting from a paralegal's other employment or interests.**

*Watch for additional guidelines in upcoming newsletters.*

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