

Course Outcomes Guide

Course/Program Title: PLS 103 Legal Writing and Documents

Date: Spring 2014

Course/Program Team: Loretta Thornhill

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of terms and facts of this subject
2. Apply basic knowledge to new situations
3. Solve problems
4. Communicate solutions
5. Demonstrate professional and ethical behavior

Assessment:

1. Students demonstrate achievement of the outcomes almost entirely on production of work. Students work on seven major units throughout the semester and these units are intended to give practice in drafting letters, documents, and pleadings; in doing legal research on both the computer and in books; in developing professional behaviors and attitudes through independent work and the production of a high volume of work. Mastery of subject matter, practice and procedure is demonstrated by completion of a professional portfolio of work and by successful completion of a mock interview.

2. The Paralegal Studies program has an active advisory committee which meets at least once annually. One of the topics of discussion is always an assessment of our students, the courses and the program. The following are a constant topic for discussion:

- *a deficit in writing skills
- *a deficit in proofreading skills
- *lack of professionalism

3. In the Fall semester 2012 we launched a pilot assessment tool. Each paralegal professor was asked to select at least one major assignment which would demonstrate skills and knowledge offered in the course. The course outcomes assessments consisted of three parts:

- *a common grading rubric
- *a common grading sheet
- *a common data collection sheet

Based on the data we are able to assess whether students have successfully met desired outcomes. The data also indicates where we need to modify course content to improve achievement of learning outcomes.

Validation: The portfolios are included in mock interviews that are a requirement of the class. Students go into the legal community for interviews with attorneys or working paralegals. The portfolio is given a cursory review. The interviewer also provides feedback on the student's professional appearance and demeanor during the mock interview. General remarks on the portfolio are also part of the feedback from the interview.

	outstanding	average	fair		
Professional appearance	8	2			
Professional demeanor	9	1			
Letter	7	3			
Resume	7	2	1		
Portfolio	6	4			

NOTE: there were multiple written comments that were very helpful too. The rubric and comments were forwarded to the students.

Results: Learning outcomes assessments indicate that students are weak in writing skills and proofreading skills.

Assessments indicate that students are not prepared for the workplace through a lack of professional attitudes and behaviors.

Follow up: More writing assignments should be given for additional practice. Also, all instructors in all Paralegal courses should incorporate discussions and exercises to focus on the need to dress professionally, demonstrate good manners, and demonstrate self-motivation and initiative. This course was offered online for the first time this semester. As always, there is much to be learned. For example, students have a very hard time meeting deadlines in online classes. They do not read the syllabus nor do they read e mails. This will have to be considered the next time the course is offered.