

Program Outcomes Guide

Directions: Please complete this form to document your progress toward improving student learning. For each item, indicate your progress and your anticipated next steps. Thank you!

Program Title: Paralegal Studies Certificate

Date: May 23, 2017

Program Team: Andrew B. Kramer (POG author), adjunct faculty and Advisory Committee

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Understanding of administrative practices and procedures (such as billing, time-keeping, etc.)
2. Mastery of substantive areas of the law common to this market (such as contracts, family law, torts, real estate, wills, business organizations and litigation)
3. Production of appropriate legal pleadings, documents and correspondence
4. Development of legal research skills using multiple resources, including both books and databases, with appropriate analysis of the law
5. Effective communication (both oral and written)
6. Sufficient computer literacy to accomplish program outcomes
7. Critical thinking and problem solving
8. Demonstration professional attitudes and behaviors

Assessment (How do or will students demonstrate achievement of each outcome?)

1. Through objective assessments for individual areas of law/terminology/legal principles and concepts
2. Through evaluation of internship placements on the basis of HCC guidelines and criteria.
3. Through a professional portfolio in at least two classes, one of which must be PLS 103 Legal Writing
4. Through successful completion of research assignments and written production generated therefrom in both Legal Research as well as Legal Writing and Documents
5. Through the production of written assignments in all classes, assessed for grammar, spelling, tone, diction and audience type;
6. Through effective oral communication in various classes, evidenced by both individual and group presentations, and mock interviews, as available and practicable, with members of the Hagerstown legal community
7. Through “solving legal problems” in various case studies

Note: All the above are assessed through grading rubrics tailored to individual assignments or categories of written production (developed on course-by-course/assignment-by-assignment basis starting FA/16 for Andrew Kramer)

Validation (What methods have you used or will you use to validate your assessment?)

- The professional portfolio produced in Legal Writing and Documents assesses both the quality and quantity of work the students have produced.

- Overlay of both professional and academic standards employed in the practice of law as determined by current and prior professional activity of Program faculty, 2 of whom are sitting judges and one of whom is an attorney admitted to practice in the state of Maryland.
- Where applicable, external validation through the mock interviews. Interviewers fill out a rubric and the results are shared with the students. Areas considered are the portfolio and professionalism of the student.
- Periodic Program review conducted by the advisory committee**. Skills necessary for the local market are identified as well as necessary subject areas for entry-level paralegals. Course offerings and curricular issues are examined to determine if the appropriate skill and substantive areas were being adequately covered.

****Since my start here in FA/16, the Advisory Committee has not met to review/confirm outcomes and direction for the Paralegal Studies program. This is planned to take place no later than September, 2017.**

- Employment and continuing education would also be external measures of success.

Results (What do your assessment data show? If you have not yet assessed student achievement of your learning outcomes, when is assessment planned?)

I. PLS 101 & 102 have identical SLOs.

A. In PLS 101, SLO mastery ranged from 83% in 2 goals, to 88% in 1 goal, to 100% in 2 goals:

- i) Demonstrate knowledge of terms & facts: 83%
- ii) Apply basic knowledge to new situations: 88%
- iii) Solve problems: 83%
- iv) Communicate solutions: 100%
- v) Demonstrate professional & ethical beh: 100%

B. In PLS 102, SLO, outcomes ii, iii & iv (as above) were each 100%

- i) Outcome (v), as above, was not assessed as a suitable rubric and means of assessment was not identified at time of syllabus creation
- ii) Outcome (i), as above showed that 76% of students were successful in this outcome. This will be discussed in the “follow up” section, below.

II. PLS 103, SLOs (i) and (v), as above, are identical

- i) Outcome (i), as above: 89%
- ii) Be able to communicate in writing the application of legal principles to factual scenarios: 80%
- iii) Develop basic writing skills for a variety of legal documents and audiences: 100%
- iv) Demonstrate professional & ethical beh (Outcome (v) in PLS 101 & PLS 102): not assessed

Follow-up (How have you used or how will you use the data to improve student learning?)

Note: As mentioned in several COG documents, the Student Learning Outcomes across a number of PLS courses are in need of revision and greater specificity. This will allow for

the accommodation of individual course objectives and greater ease in tailoring assessments and in the measurability of student learning outcomes. The use of fixed, generalized SLOs across multiple courses has limited the value of the student learning data gained therefrom this year. However, set forth below are the results gained from data captured during AY 16-17 in courses I taught.

Student Learning Outcomes suggest the following responses to improve student learning:

- Course over course problem solving skills improve as students move into increasing levels of rigor and skills from PLS 101 to PLS 102 and PLS 103.
- Some weakness appears to exist regarding Outcome No. 1, “Demonstrate knowledge and terms of this subject”. This will be remedied in subsequent semesters with targeted learning activities and more focused delivery of relevant material to strengthen terminology building and retention of objective facts in the subject matter.
- Professionalism and ethical behavior, while important, need to be assessed through specific assignments and tailored rubrics and/or mere adoption of a “participation” rubric that measures these outcomes. This will be remedied by FA/17.
- Results in Outcome No. 2 in PLS 103, “Be able to communicate in writing the application of legal principles to factual scenarios”, suggest some deficiency in higher levels of student learning: analysis, evaluation and critical thought. This is among the most important skills to be gained in the PLS program and can be addressed in 2 ways:
 - 1) Incorporate into the curriculum from PLS 101 onwards a focus on analytical writing, with tailored rubrics and progressive rigor, in which students are asked to assess concepts and apply those concepts to divergent fact patterns.
 - 2) Incorporate into the curriculum from PLS 101 onwards a continuous focus on basic persuasive writing skills in which syntax, grammar and diction are stressed.

With these two improvements, students will gain confidence in general writing skills while simultaneously focusing on analytical writing that allows them to apply concepts to facts.

Budget Justification

(What resources are necessary to improve student learning?)

HCC Courtroom: As discussed in Unit Planning and explored thereafter, a mock courtroom will:

- a) Allow students to experience the setting in which much of their professional work will take place
- b) Allow students to apply and combine all anticipated SLOs in a hands-on setting in which students communicate, demonstrate knowledge, act professionally and apply knowledge to diverse factual scenarios