

State of Oklahoma

MINIMUM QUALIFICATION STANDARDS FOR LEGAL ASSISTANTS/PARALEGALS STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

On September 15, 2000, the Board of Governors approved the report of the Legal Assistant Services Committee and adopted the following Minimum Qualification Standards for Legal Assistants/Paralegals.

It is the intent of the Board of Governors in adopting these standards that they serve as a guide to Oklahoma attorneys, corporations, or other entities who utilize the services of Legal Assistants/Paralegals and bill their clients for such services.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATION STANDARDS FOR LEGAL ASSISTANTS/PARALEGALS

DEFINITIONS

Legal Assistant/Paralegal -- 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 who performs specifically delegated legal work for which a lawyer is responsible, and absent such assistant, the lawyer would perform the task.

Work Experience -- time spent by a person employed or retained full-time by a lawyer, law office, corporation, governmental agency, or other entity while performing specifically delegated substantive legal work for which a lawyer is ultimately responsible, and absent such assistant, the lawyer would perform the task. Time spent performing work of a clerical or non-billable nature is specifically excluded.

Institutionally Accredited -- accreditation awarded to institutions by an accrediting agency recognized by the Secretary of the United States Department of Education.

Legal Specialty Courses -- those courses in a specific area of law, procedure, or the legal process designed to train an individual to perform substantive legal tasks as a legal assistant/paralegal within the ethical confines of the law.

Substantial Compliance -- the curriculum and standards of the program conform, except for minor deviations, with the requirements for American Bar Association ("ABA") approval.

QUALIFICATION STANDARDS

A qualified legal assistant/paralegal is a person who meets one of the standards set out in numbers 1 through 7 below.

1. Any individual who has successfully completed the National Association of Legal Assistants's Certified Legal Assistant Examination ("CLA").
2. Any individual who has successfully completed the National Federation of Paralegal Associations's Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam ("PACE").
3. Any individual who has graduated from an ABA-approved program of study for legal assistants/paralegals.
4. Any individual who has a high school diploma or its equivalent, and who has graduated from any program of study for legal assistants/paralegals that is not approved by the ABA but is institutionally accredited, and which is in substantial compliance with the current ABA approval guidelines.

5. Any individual who has a baccalaureate or associate degree in any field from an institutionally accredited school and either:

a. Two years of work experience as defined above, or

b. The successful completion of the same number of semester hours required by the ABA approval guidelines for legal specialty courses from a program of study set out as numbers 3 and 4 above.

6. Any individual who has a high school diploma or its equivalent, and who has graduated from an institutionally accredited school for legal assistants/paralegals, other than those in 3 and 4 above, that requires at least 60 semester hours of study which includes at least the same number of semester hours required by the ABA approval guidelines for legal specialty courses and either:

a. Two years of work experience as defined above, or

b. The completion of a baccalaureate or associate degree.

7. Any individual who has a high school diploma or its equivalent, and who has 5 or more years of work experience as defined above.

DISQUALIFYING CRITERIA

No person may qualify as a legal assistant/paralegal who:

1. Is under the supervision of the Department of Corrections, or

2. Is disbarred or whose license to practice law is suspended.

CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that beginning one year after an individual qualifies by virtue of these standards, he/she shall obtain 12 continuing legal education (CLE) credits annually in order to maintain professional competence and continued compliance with the ethical obligations and professional responsibilities of a legal assistant/paralegal.

-END-