The Certified Paralegal Program

Section 1 Certification

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The National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) has granted accreditation to the NALA Certified Paralegal program for demonstrating compliance with the NCCA Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs. Accreditation is effective through April 30, 2014. To maintain accreditation, NCCA requires annual reports of all certification programs. Re-accreditation is required every five years.
Description of program

In the working environment, professional certification is a time honored process respected by both employers and those within the career field. The following is a definition used by many to describe professional certification:

Professional certification is a voluntary process by which a nongovernmental entity grants a time-limited recognition to an individual after verifying that the individual has met predetermined, standardized criteria. (Source: Rops, Mickie S., CAE, Understanding the Language of Credentialing, American Society of Association Executives, May 2002.)

The definition hits the high points. Certification is voluntary, not imposed by government. It is time limited, which means that those with the certification must fulfill ongoing educational requirements to keep the certification current, and the criteria for certification is recognized in the community.

Administration

The NALA Certifying Board for Paralegals is responsible for content, standards and administration of the Certified Paralegal Program. It is composed of paralegals who have received the Certified Paralegal certification designation, attorneys and paralegal educators.

Accreditation of Certified Paralegal Program

On April 30, 2014, the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) has granted accreditation to the NALA Certified Paralegal program for demonstrating compliance with the NCCA Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs. NCCA is the accrediting body of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence. The NCCA Standards were created to ensure certification programs adhere to modern standards of practice for the certification industry. The NALA Certified Paralegal program joins an elite group of more than 120 organizations representing over 270 certification programs that have received and maintained NCCA accreditation. More information on the NCCA is available online at www.credentialingexcellence.org/NCCA. To maintain accreditation, NCCA requires annual reports of all certification programs. Re-accreditation is required every five years.

Background and Numbers

Established in 1976, the CLA (Certified Legal Assistant) program has enabled the profession to develop a strong and responsive self-regulatory program offering a nationwide credential for legal assistants. The Certified Paralegal/Certified Legal Assistant program establishes and serves as a:

- National professional standard for legal assistants
- Means of identifying those who have reached this standard.
• Credentialing program responsive to the needs of legal assistants and responsive to the fact that this form of self-regulation is necessary to strengthen and expand development of this career field.
• Positive, ongoing, voluntary program to encourage the growth of the legal assistant profession, attesting to and encouraging a high level of achievement.

As of March 2014 there are over 17,822 (active and inactive) Certified Paralegals and over 3200 Advanced Certified Paralegals in the United States. Over 26,000 paralegals have participated in this program. The appendix to this document includes tables of the numbers of Certified Paralegals and Advanced Certified Paralegals.

The Certified Paralegal Credential

Use of the Certified Paralegal credential signifies that a paralegal is capable of providing superior services to firms and corporations. National surveys consistently show Certified Paralegals are better utilized in a field where attorneys are looking for a credible, dependable way to measure ability. The credential has been recognized by the American Bar Association as a designation which marks a high level of professional achievement. The CLA or CP credential has also been recognized by over 47 legal assistant organizations and numerous bar associations.

Is it CLA or CP?

The terms "legal assistant" and "paralegal" are synonymous terms. This is not a choice or opinion of NALA, but a fact. The terms are defined as such throughout the United States in state supreme court rules, statutes, ethical opinions, bar association guidelines and other similar documents. These are the same documents which provide recognition of the paralegal profession and encourage the use of paralegals in the delivery of legal services.

NALA has become increasingly aware that while the terms are the same as "lawyer" and "attorney", a preference in terms is emerging. Different geographic areas use one term more than another. For this reason, NALA filed for a certification mark "CP" with the US Patent and Trademark Office. The certification mark was successfully registered on July 20, 2004. Most paralegals are now using the CP credential.

CLA is a certification mark duly registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (No. 113199). CP (design) is a certification duly registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (No. 78213275). Any unauthorized use of these credentials is strictly forbidden.

Am I a Certified Paralegal?

Occasionally, paralegals call themselves "certified" by virtue of completing a paralegal training course, or another type of preparatory education. Although a school may award a certificate of completion, this is not the same as earning professional certification by an entity such as NALA. In this instance the school's certificate is designation of completion of a training program.