The Certified Paralegal Program

Section 3 – Examinees: Application Form, General Policies, Exam Results

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This information appears on the NALA website (www.nala.org) under “Certification.” Please check the web site frequently for updated information.
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.
Examinee Application and Policies

Steps - Application Procedure and Testing Appointments

The application procedure is a two-step process. Examinees must first be admitted to the Certified Paralegal program by filing an application form with NALA Headquarters. Once admitted, examinees must schedule testing times through the PSI Testing Center Network to take an examination during the time the testing window is open. Examinees may also apply to take the test at non-PSI Testing Centers. More information about these options is found in the section entitled “Testing Centers and Policies.”

Most communications to examinees from NALA and PSI are sent via e-mail notifications. PLEASE inform NALA of any changes in your e-mail address. Be sure to check your spam filters to allow all e-mail messages from NALA and PSI. From application to testing appointments, the steps are:

• **Filing the Application Form**

All candidates for the Certified Paralegal credential must meet the examination eligibility requirements and complete and submit an application form for an upcoming Certified Paralegal exam testing window. Application forms may be submitted at any time, but no later than the application deadline date for the upcoming testing window.

• **Application Acknowledgement**

NALA Headquarters will acknowledge receipt of the application form and payment. Examinees will also be advised if additional information is needed to complete the form, such as a school transcript or an additional employer attestation. Examinees must follow deadline dates established by NALA for receipt of additional information.

• **Examinee Test Packet – Notification sent via e-mail**

Approximately 30 days prior to the opening of the testing window, all approved examinees will receive an Authorization to Test form by e-mail. The Authorization to Test form includes the login information required to access the computer-based examination, and the exam sections that need to be completed in the current testing window or before the application expiration date. If any information is incorrectly listed on the Authorization to Test form, examinees should contact NALA Headquarters immediately.

The Authorization to Test form also includes a link to the most current examinee information on NALA’s web site. Examinees are encouraged to review the web site information. Rules and procedures of testing centers including Terms and Conditions of Testing and Policy Statement are discussed in the section entitled “Testing Centers and Policies.”

• **E-mail Notification Regarding Scheduling Appointments Through PSI**
Examinees will receive notification by e-mail advising that PSI is ready to accept appointments from NALA examinees. The e-mail message will provide a web address for examinees to use to schedule the appointment(s), and the examinee ID number, and PIN. These numbers should be identical to the information provided by NALA. If they are not, examinees should contact NALA Headquarters immediately.

This mailing is sent to ALL examinees registered for the testing window. Examinees taking the exam through non-PSI testing centers may disregard the PSI scheduling e-mails.

- Testing Center Appointments Through PSI's Web Site

Upon receipt of the authorization to test, and notification from PSI, all examinees who are attending a PSI testing center are urged to make their appointments as quickly as possible. Depending on the center location, space is limited and if there is a delay in making the appointment, the exact time or date requested may not be available.

Applying for the Exam
Qualifications for the Exam

To be eligible for the Certified Paralegal examination, a paralegal must meet one of the following alternate requirements:

1. Graduation from a paralegal program that is:

   - (a) Approved by the American Bar Association; or
   - (b) An associate degree program; or
   - (c) A post-baccalaureate certificate program in paralegal studies; or
   - (d) A bachelor's degree program in paralegal studies; or
   - (e) A paralegal program which consists of a minimum of 60 semester hours (900 clock hours or 90 quarter hours) of which at least 15 semester hours (225 clock hours or 22.5 quarter hours) are substantive legal courses.

NOTE: Under Category 1(e), an applicant may combine college hours from more than one institution. The applicant must have graduated from a legal assistant/paralegal program consisting of a minimum of 15 semester hours (or 225 clock hours or 22½ quarter hours.) Evidence of the minimum hours required under Category 1(e) must be provided with the application form.
2. A bachelor’s degree in any field plus one year’s experience as a paralegal. Successful completion of at least 15 semester hours (or 22.5 quarter hours or 225 clock hours or equivalent CEU hours) of substantive paralegal courses will be considered equivalent to one year’s experience as a paralegal.

3. A high school diploma or equivalent plus seven (7) years' experience as a paralegal under the supervision of a member of the Bar, plus evidence of a minimum of twenty (20) hours of continuing legal education credit to have been completed within a two (2) year period prior to the examination date.

**Application Form Requirements**

**Deadline Dates - Applications May Be Submitted**

*The deadline date for applications is as follows.*

*Filing deadline dates are strictly enforced.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examination Date</th>
<th>Application Filing Deadline**</th>
<th>Late Application Filing Deadline (With $25 late filing fee)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 1-30</td>
<td>August 1</td>
<td>August 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1-31</td>
<td>December 1</td>
<td>December 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1-31</td>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>April 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional forms will be required of all candidates if filing applications prior to meeting the eligibility requirements. Contact NALA Headquarters for further information.**

**Eligibility of Students Awaiting Graduation**

**Student Waiver:**
Paralegal students who are nearing graduation may take the Certified Paralegal examination under certain conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Testing Window</th>
<th>Graduation Date No Later Than:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>March 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>July 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>November 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This option requires:

- A statement signed by the paralegal program director confirming the student’s pending graduation date.
- A statement signed by the examinee acknowledging that if, for any reason, graduation requirements are not met and the examinee does not complete the program, the examination results will not be released and all fees forfeited.

Additional forms will be required of all candidates if filing applications prior to meeting the eligibility requirements. Contact NALA Headquarters for the required forms and further information about this requirement.

Applications may be submitted:

- By mail, with documentation
- By FAX (918-582-6772)
- On-line using the form on NALA's web site
- E-mail to testing@nala.org

Applications must be received on or before the deadline date. Applications received after the published date for late filing will not be accepted for the upcoming test window, but may be accepted for the next available test window.

Documentation Required to Complete the Application Form

- All pages of the application form must be complete. All documentation required to complete the Certified Paralegal application form must be submitted at the time of filing the application. Documentation includes official school transcripts, attorney attestations and payment. Incomplete applications are subject to rejection.
- Categories 1 and 2 require an official transcript submitted with the application. A transcript is considered “official” if it bears the official seal and authorizing signature of the issuing institution and is sent directly by the school to NALA or sealed by the school and mailed or delivered to NALA by the applicant. The official transcript must indicate all courses taken and date of graduation.
- Category 3 requires a minimum of seven (7) years paralegal experience under the supervision of a member of the bar, along with a minimum of twenty (20) clock hours of continuing education, as verified by one or more attorney attestations. Applicant must also include the requested information verifying high school graduation or equivalent work.
Attorney Employer Attestations

• For those qualifying under Category 1, an attorney/employer attestation is not required
• For those qualifying under Category 2 the attestation section is required only if applying with one year or more of paralegal experience in lieu of the 15 semester hours of paralegal courses.
• The attestation section must be completed by all applicants for Category 3.

Examinee Attestation

All examinees are required to sign the following attestation on the application for the Certified Paralegal examination. This serves a pledge of confidentiality, and states the reasons for suspension of authorization to use the Certified Paralegal credential:

I hereby declare that the above information [on the Certified Paralegal Examination Application Form] is complete and truthful. I further pledge not to divulge the contents of any examinations questions for certification as a legal assistant/paralegal by NALA (the “Examination Questions”) and agree to be bound by the Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility of NALA. Inasmuch as it is and ever will be impracticable and extremely difficult to determine the actual damages resulting to NALA should I divulge the contents of any Examination Questions, I agree to pay NALA as liquidated damages and not as a penalty, the sum of $500 for each breach of my agreement not to divulge the contents of any Examination Questions.

I further understand that the CP designation may be suspended or revoked and that I may be prohibited from taking any further NALA exams, including but not limited to any specialty practice area exams or retaking the general certification exam for the following reasons:

1. Falsification of information on application form.
2. Subsequent conviction of the unauthorized practice of law.
3. Failure to meet continuing legal education requirements as required by the Certifying Board.
4. Divulging the contents of any Examination Questions.
5. Subsequent conviction of a felony.
7. Violation of the “Terms and Conditions of Testing.”

With full knowledge of the above requirements and agreement to be bound by any decisions of the Certifying Board for Paralegals of NALA, Inc., with respect to examinations or designations, I submit this application.

Fees

The fee for the Certified Paralegal examination application is $250 for NALA members and $275 for non-members of NALA. Retake fees are $60 per section. The Certified Paralegal examination program has
been approved by the Veterans Administration under the licensing and certification benefit. The VA will pay the examination fee for qualified veterans. For further information, see www.gibill.va.gov/.

**Personal checks ARE NOT accepted for payment of examination fees.** Payment may be made by cashier’s check, money order, firm check, VISA, Master Card, Discover, or American Express.

**Withdrawal Fee:** If an applicant must withdraw, or the application is incomplete or rejected, payment will be refunded less a $25 processing fee for each year the application is active and on file (a maximum of $50).

**Testing Center Fees:** PSI testing center fees are discussed on the PSI Testing Center Information Details page. Non-PSI centers may also charge a fee. This is included with the information describing the Non-PSI centers. (Non-PSI Testing Center Details).

**General Policies**

**Application Transfers**

Once an application is approved, an examinee will have two years to sit for any section of the examination. If the examinee does not sit for any section within two years, the application will be returned and the examination fee refunded less the $50 processing charge. Any refunds will be issued by check and sent to the individual or company originally paying the examination fee.

**Application for Retake of Examination Sections**

Applicants may attend a maximum of six testing windows (the first testing window + five retake windows) within a two-year period in order to successfully complete the CP examination. Again, an applicant may only attend a retake session five times within the two-year period. The examination must be successfully completed within five retake sessions in two years or credit for all passed sections will be forfeited and the entire examination must be retaken. A new, updated, application form will be required. The two-year period begins on the date any section of the examination is first taken.

Examinees who do not achieve a passing score on any sections(s) may retake the section(s) during any testing window within the two-year period. Retake applications are due on the dates listed above for all applications.

**Americans with Disability Act**

The Certified Paralegal examination is administered in compliance with requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act. All special requests must accompany the application form. Contact NALA Headquarters at nalanet@nala.org or 918-587-6828 to request the special accommodation form. Examinees qualifying for special accommodations under the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act must attend an PSI testing center.

**Confidentiality**

An individual’s application status, exam results, and personal identifying information is confidential and will not be released by NALA to any person without the consent of the individual or as required by law, except to exam proctors as required for administration of the exam.
Non-Discrimination
NALA does not discriminate against applicants on the basis of race, color, creed, gender, age, religion, national origin, ancestry, disability, military status, sexual orientation, marital status, or family status.

Appeal Process for Applicants who Receive an Adverse Eligibility Decision
Applications accepted for the Certified Paralegal examination are accepted on the basis of proof of meeting the eligibility requirements as enumerated on the application form and in the Candidate Handbook and submission of the required fee.

If an applicant is unable to provide proof of meeting any of the requirements, the applicant is encouraged to contact NALA Headquarters. The procedures for approving applications allow the following:

• For those qualifying under the 7 years’ paralegal experience requirement, attestations of employers are required for the entire 7 year period. If it is not possible to reach former employers whose attestation is required, the Certifying Board will accept an affidavit of the current employer attesting to the previous years of work as a paralegal.

• As stated in the application requirements, applicants may combine hours of course work from more than one institution.

• Paralegal students who are nearing graduation may take the CP examination under certain conditions enumerated in the candidate handbook.

If an application is not accepted, the candidate may, within 30 days of the date of denial of application, appeal the decision of the Certifying Board under the following circumstances:

• It is not possible to provide a transcript of completed course work because the school no longer exists.

• If qualifying under categories which require experience, the application may be considered if the experience requirement is not fully met, and the paralegal is able to submit proof of the need for certification for employment or advancement in employment.

• An application for the CP examination was submitted and previously accepted but has expired, provided the candidate meets the current eligibility requirements.

• Financial hardship.

In appealing a decision to deny an application based on the reasons listed above, the candidate must submit documentation to substantiate the claim, and a signed and notarized attestation that the information is true and correct.

The Certifying Board Chair, working with certification staff, within 30 days of receipt of the appeal, shall make a determination regarding the appeal and the candidate’s eligibility to take the examination. In
the case of financial hardship, the Chair may suggest a payment plan for the candidate, but the fee may not be waived. The decision of the Certifying Board Chair is final.

**Cheating and Misconduct in the Certified Paralegal Examination Program**

Cheating and misconduct are not tolerated in the Certified Paralegal Program.

Candidates are expected to conduct themselves with honesty and integrity at all times and during all phases of the certification process - including exam preparation, testing, and re-certification.

**Filing a Complaint**

If a candidate is believed to have acted with dishonesty or with intent to misrepresent at any time during the certification process, the Certifying Board reserves the right to bar that individual from the program immediately while investigating the circumstances.

Evidence of misconduct includes, but is not limited to, violation of the terms and conditions of testing, unfairly gaining exam information by using unauthorized materials or web sites during the examination, or by providing unfair assistance to another candidate at any time during the exam preparation or delivery period. This evidence may include visual observation during the test period or other tangible evidence.

Evidence may be filed in writing to NALA Headquarters by examination proctors, fellow examinees or others with knowledge of possible misconduct. Proctors and examinees may also contact NALA certification staff by telephone on the day of testing if it is believed cheating is observed.

**Procedures for Investigating Complaint**

The Certifying Board’s Procedures for Disciplinary Proceedings are published in their entirety on the NALA web site at: http://www.nala.org/Certification.aspx and are found in the Certifying Board’s Policy Manual in Policy #304.

**Discipline**

If the Board concludes that there has been a violation of the terms and conditions of testing by a Certified Paralegal examinee during any testing session, it will determine which of the following disciplines is appropriate, which may include:

- All examination sections will be voided with no refund of fees and no scores reported; the candidate may be prohibited from taking the Certified Paralegal examination indefinitely.

- The candidate will be prohibited from taking the Certified Paralegal examination (or any section) for a period of not less than two years from the date of the violation;

- All sections must be taken or retaken if the examinee is permitted to re-test and, as a condition for re-testing, the Certifying Board shall require the candidate to complete a specific number of hours of Legal Ethics, approved for CLE credit, to be completed within a specific period of time prior to eligibility for re-testing; documentation of completion of the ethics CLE hours is
required. The program may be approved by a paralegal professional association, bar association, or offered for college credit or continuing education units.

**Examination Results**

**Grade Reports**
Results of the examination are provided via US mail to all examinees. The results will be released during the second week of the second month following the test window, i.e., the second week of March, July, and November. This allows time for essays to be graded, data validated, and scores recorded. Results are not available by e-mail, telephone or fax.

Grade reports provide failing scores only. In addition, examinees will receive a report of the subject areas that appeared to be most difficult. This information is provided to assist examinees in preparation for their retake.

Grade reports do not provide passing scores. Sections of the examination that are successfully completed are designated with “Pass.” The Certifying Board has determined “Pass” is sufficient to designate successful completion of the examinations section and that if a paralegal has met the standard, the paralegal has earned the Certified Paralegal credential.

**How Passing Score is Established**
The passing points, or cut scores, for the exams are established using a criterion-referenced technique. Qualified and trained SMEs participate in determining the passing points working with the psychometric consultant.

The final passing points resulting from this process are approved by the Certifying Board (or SME working group).

**Appeal of examination results**
An examinee may appeal, in writing, to the Certifying Board for review of the Board’s actions concerning examination results.

Such appeal must include the candidate’s basis for the appeal and any and all relevant documentation to be considered, and must be received at NALA Headquarters within thirty (30) days after release of the examination results. The Board Chair and NALA Headquarters staff will promptly investigate to determine whether the documentation submitted meets the Certifying Board’s requirements for review of examination results. If it is determined that the appeal does not meet the requirements, the examinee will be so advised. If the information meets the board’s requirements for an appeal, such appeal shall be reviewed by an Appeal Committee which shall be comprised of a minimum of three (3) members of the Certifying Board, to include a paralegal educator, an attorney, and an Advanced Certified Paralegal. Each member of the Appeal Committee shall have served a minimum of one (1) year on the Certifying Board.
The Appeal Committee of the Certifying Board will determine whether a decision made by the Certifying Board was inappropriate if: (1) the decision was based on material errors of fact, or (2) the NALA Certifying Board failed to follow published criteria, policies, and procedures.

Only facts and conditions up to and including the time of the Certifying Board’s decision are eligible for consideration during the appeal process.

After consideration of the matter under appeal, the Appeal Committee shall submit its recommendation for action to the Certifying Board. A majority vote of Certifying Board members shall be final and binding in the matter under appellate review.

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