

Submission date: February 7, 2020 (revised)

Program/s in this review: Legal Studies BA; Paralegal Studies AAS & PBCT, Legal Nurse Consultant Paralegal UC

Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable): American Bar Association, Standing Committee on Paralegals

Campuses where the program is delivered: Anchorage

Members of the program review committee:

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1. Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role (700 words or less)

The Legal Studies program at UAA exists within the Justice Center. The Justice Center, established by the Alaska Legislature in 1975, has a mandate to provide statewide justice-related education, research, and service. In addition to the Legal Studies program, the Justice Center offers a B.A. in Justice, which is addressed in a separate program review.

This program review combines four degree offerings – the Bachelor of Arts in Legal Studies (BA), the Associate of Applied Science in Paralegal Studies (AAS), the Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Paralegal Studies (PBCT), and the Legal Nurse Consultant Paralegal Certificate (LNC-P). In addition, we offer a Minor in Legal Studies. All degrees have been offered since Spring 2013. Prior to that, the Justice Center offered a Paralegal Studies Certificate, which was suspended in August 2018. In Fall 2019, a request to suspend the LNC-P was submitted to the COH Dean with a recommendation to delete the degree. The LNC-P has never had more than two students enrolled at any time and none currently. Students in all degrees are eligible for Pro Bono Service Honors by completing the number of volunteer hours required for their degree.

The Legal Studies program maintains strong ties to the local legal community. For our specialized accreditation (see below), the American Bar Association (ABA) requires twice yearly meetings of the Legal Studies Paralegal Advisory Committee (LSPAC), consisting of attorneys, paralegals, and members of the public. The Legal Studies program has consistently held these meetings, with invitations extended to the COH Dean, and implemented recommendations of the Committee. Additionally, students in all degrees except the LNC-P are required to complete an internship either through the Legal Studies program or Civic Engagement and Learning. Internships are primarily in government (including both law-related agencies or the Alaska Court System) or public interest placements, though some Legal Studies internships are with private firms. Participating in an internship provides students with both practical job skills and connections in the legal community. Several of our students have received job offers from their internship placement. The internship thus also improves the standing of the Legal Studies program within the local legal community.

The 2019 Employer Survey shows further community support for the Legal Studies program. Both private and public employers place a strong emphasis in their paralegals on writing and editing, with private law firms also emphasizing client interaction. The Legal Studies program requires assignments in multiple courses geared toward developing student writing skills. Students in all degrees are required to take Legal Research and Writing, a course specifically designed to develop applied skills for the legal profession. The results of our efforts are promising. Of those private firms that reported employing our graduates, the majority rated them as “5” (“excellent”) across the range of skills, while two firms gave more 4 than 5 rankings. The ratings from public agencies were lower, but consisted of only two responses. Over half of both private and public employers expressed a preference for graduates of an ABA-approved program.

Legal Studies graduates have a variety of career options. Multiple Legal Studies graduates per year attend law school, with many of them expressing a desire to return to Alaska to practice law. Other graduates pursue careers in the legal field immediately after graduation, with the most popular options being as a paralegal or in the Alaska Court System as a clerk of court or similar position. The COH External Demand Survey, indicated 55 lawyer job openings and 185 non-lawyer job openings in 2018. While growth is stagnant, this is well more than our number of graduates, suggesting room for growth. Moreover, national data from the Department of Labor indicates an expected growth over the next 10 years of 6.1% for lawyers and 12.0% for paralegals and legal assistants.

The Legal Studies program also provides service to the rest of UAA. Legal Studies faculty have served as advisors for Honors Thesis projects. All Legal Studies faculty are Pre-Law Advisors and have provided advising on law school admissions to students from outside our program, including by organizing open panel discussions with law school admissions officers. Students from other programs have taken Legal Studies courses to familiarize themselves with the coursework that can be expected in law school.

2. Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity (7 year trend; 1400 words or less)

Program demand for Legal Studies has been steadily increasing since the degrees first started being offered in Spring 2013. As expected, the transition has been from students receiving an undergraduate Paralegal Studies Certificate to more marketable degrees such as the Bachelors of Arts in Legal Studies (BA) or the Associate of Applied Science in Paralegal Studies (AAS). The Certificate has gradually been phased out, with 9 students being awarded a Certificate in FY 2013, 4 in each of the subsequent two years, and only three over the following four years. The BA degree, on the other hand, has grown from 2 in FY 2014 to 13 in FY 2017 and a high of 17 in FY 2018. This dipped down to only 7 in FY 2019 for reasons that are unknown. However, those numbers are rebounding, with 6 students already receiving their BA in FY 2020. Other degrees have moderate but sustained graduation rates. Four students were awarded AAS degrees in both 2017 and 2019, and 5 students were awarded a Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Paralegal Studies (PBCT) in FY 2018. Again, the trend continues upwards with recent graduation numbers – in Fall 2019, 3 students received an AAS and another 3 students received a PBCT.

Offering multiple degrees allows the Legal Studies program to cater to different student needs. Many of our students are non-traditional students with families and/or making a career transition later in life. The range of degree options provides flexibility to fit student schedule availability. Moreover, the AAS is fully articulated within the BA, meaning that students can easily transition from the former to the latter, regardless of whether they actually obtain their AAS. This provides students with further options, and it is not uncommon for a student to start in the AAS program and then after building confidence decide to continue on instead to obtain the full BA. In this way, maintaining fully articulated programs can generate additional credit hour production for UAA. Our program also appeals to a racially diverse student body. Of our 17 BA graduates in FY 2018, 12 were non-white; 4 of 7 in FY 2019 were non-white.

The non-traditional status of many of our students, along with at times small sample sizes, may in part explain the variations in the semesters per degree for our different degrees. It is not uncommon for our students to take a semester or two off in between completing their degree. This can be particularly true for non-BA students. For our BA students, students took an average of 5.3 years to graduate, which is substantially less than the 6.2 average years to graduate for all UAA bachelor degrees. Indeed, in only one year did the Legal Studies BA exceed that average. For FY 2018, the average was 4.9 years and for 2019 it was 4.0 years. Moreover, the enrollment in our BA program has increased every year since its creation, with 30 students enrolled in FY 2019. And, this number is increasing, with 41 students enrolled in the BA program as of January 31, 2020, an increase of 12 students (48.15%) over the same time last year. And this does not even include our 22 pre-majors as of that date. Enrollment in other degree programs also remains strong, with 8 AAS students and 4 PBCT students in FY 2019. As of today, there are 4 AAS students but 11 AAS pre-majors and 4 PBCT students (including pre-majors).

The passage rates for Legal Studies courses is consistent and solid. Legal Studies only has two lower division courses – Introduction to Law (LEGL 101) and Legal Ethics and the Role of the Legal Professional (LEGL 215). The bulk of

enrollment comes from LEGL 101, which routinely offers both face-to-face and online sections every semester. The combined passage rate for the two courses is 80.4% over seven-year period, with passage rates increasing in more recent years. A slight dip in passage rates occurred in FY 2019, though this can be attributed in part to adjunct professors teaching the course due to a faculty sabbatical. Passage rates for upper division courses over the same seven-year time period are 87.4%. By comparison, lower division course passage rates at UAA as a whole are 69.73% and upper division passage rates 82.48%.

Because of the close relationship within the Justice Center with the Justice program, Legal Studies has a strong out-of-major enrollment of 32.8%. (All LEGL courses are 3.0 credits, so student credit hour production is the same.) Legal Studies continues to benefit from and provide a service to the Justice program due to its location in the Justice Center. Furthermore, Legal Studies faculty over the years have taught courses cross-listed or fully listed as JUST courses. While JUST and LEGL for this academic year went through the process of listing most courses taught by Legal Studies faculty as LEGL-prefix courses, the earlier practice must be taken into account when examining FTE students, faculty, and revenue, because JUST-prefix courses would not be captured in the program numbers for LEGL. For example, Development of Law during the seven-year time period of the Expedited Program Review was taught every semester as a JUST course (JUST 315); the course is required of both Justice and Legal Studies BA majors. From Fall 2015 to Spring 2019, average course enrollment was 28.8 students – all captured as JUST not LEGL students. A similar situation existed for cross-listed courses. For example, Family Law was taught during the review period in Fall semesters as a cross-listed course with sections in both LEGL and JUST. Over the past seven years, enrollment in the JUST section (average of 16.75 students) always equaled or exceeded the enrollment of the LEGL section (average of 12.75 students). The ultimate impact of these listings is unclear from the data provided, but it does underscore both the importance of Legal Studies to the Justice Center and that Legal Studies faculty have a larger impact on enrollments, student credit hour production, and tuition than is reflected in the baseline statistics provided in the Institutional Review data. And even aside from the listing and cross-listing with JUST course, the clear seven-year trend for LEGL courses (though with some fluctuation) is increases across the board in enrollment, student credit hour production, class size, class utilization, and tuition revenue/SCH, along with a decline in cost/SCH.

Legal Studies professor are all bipartite professors, with only teaching and service responsibilities. There is no expectation of extramural funding or funding from other sources. Even with this consideration, full tuition revenue has covered institutional cost for FY 2019 and 2018. Using the more conservative 80% tuition recovery number, institutional costs were still covered for FY 2019. Total student credit hours declined in FY 2019 over the previous year, but this can be attributed to a faculty sabbatical and fewer courses being offered as a result; the FTE faculty number for FY 2019 also declined. Despite this, the cost/SCH remained virtually the same between FY 2019 (188.0) and FY 2018 (188.8), and the tuition revenue/SCH increased from one year to the next (224.1 to 235.9). Furthermore, our tuition revenue/SCH was higher than the UAA average (225.1 in FY 2019 and 215.7 in FY 2018) for these years and our cost/SCH lower (than 217.6 in FY 2019 and 214.1 in FY 2018).

The overwhelming majority of Legal Studies students pursue further education after their initial degree. This is particularly true of our more recent graduates. Out of 17 graduates in FY 2017, all but one have enrolled in another degree program at UAA or elsewhere; 17 out of 19 graduates in FY 2018 have done the same. While some of these are AAS students enrolling in the BA program, many are BA students seeking law degrees. The fact that a law degree typically is a three-year program explains why the post-UAA award rates are low, at least for the more recent graduates.

On the whole, the Institutional Review data reveals the Legal Studies program to be a very strong and increasingly robust program. One would expect a program that greatly expanded its degree offerings in Spring 2013 to show sustain growth over the seven-year time period covered by the data. But the fact that Legal Studies has actually exhibited significant and sustained growth demonstrates not only that the program is living up to its promise but also the continued promise of the program for future growth.

3. Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success (1500 words or less)

All five Legal Studies degrees are externally approved by the Standing Committee on Paralegals of the American Bar Association (ABA). Initial approval of the current degree offerings was obtained in December 2012, with students being admitted into the program in January 2013. The Paralegal Studies Certificate that preceded the current offerings had been approved by the ABA for over a decade. Approval is a rigorous process with stringent guidelines on the types of courses that are offered and other program requirements to ensure the program remains updated on developments within the legal field. As part of maintaining ABA approval, the program must apply for re-approval and undergo a full site review every seven years. In addition, the program must undergo an interim review three years after re-approval. During those reviews, the ABA examines the program's annual data collection and assessment records, recommends action based on these records, and reviews the program's response to the ABA's previous recommendations. The program completed its most recent site review in September 2017, and received approval by the ABA in the Annual Meeting in 2018, with re-approval back dated to 2016. The Legal Studies program submitted its interim report in September 2019.

The ABA requires rigorous self-assessment of program quality and student success. Pursuant to ABA requirements, the Legal Studies program conducts regular surveys both of its graduates and of local employers in the legal community. These surveys help ensure that students are taking courses that meet both their needs and the changing needs of the legal community. In addition, the ABA requires twice yearly meetings of the Legal Studies Paralegal Advisory Committee (LSPAC), consisting of local attorneys, paralegals, and members of the public, to provide an external check on program quality and currency. The Legal Studies program values input from the LSPAC and adjusts its courses accordingly. For example, in response to feedback suggesting a de-emphasis on bankruptcy law in the Anchorage legal community, we revised our Contracts, Debt, and Principles of Ownership (LEGL 362) into Contract, Property, and Debt by reducing the time spent on bankruptcy law and including instead a unit on general property law, an area of law not previously available in our course offerings. The Legal Studies program has also in response to LSPAC feedback re-committed to emphasizing writing/editing skills and experiential learning in our courses.

The Legal Studies program also strives to be responsive to student needs. For the past three years, we have conducted a spring semester survey of all current Legal Studies students inquiring into issues affecting barriers to program completion. While some issues such as cost of tuition, work conflicts, and family responsibilities may be largely beyond our control, we have increased the number of online and evening courses in response to student demand as expressed on the surveys. (Roughly a third of students consistently expressed a desire for more online classes (30.5% in 2017 and 33% in 2019), whereas the desire for evening courses has increased (from 28.8% in 2017 to 42.6% in 2019).) The Legal Studies program also makes efforts to shift around the offering times of our required courses so that students with inflexible work or family schedules will have options to fit their availability.

The ABA mandates that all students take at least 18 credit hours of legal specialty courses, 10 of which must be face-to-face. Legal specialty courses must instruct students in practical legal skills of direct applicability in employment as a paralegal. To meet this requirement, students engage in a number of high impact active learning assignments that mirror what paralegals and attorneys do in everyday practice. For example, students in Legal Ethics and the Role of the Legal Professional (LEGL 215) develop e-portfolios; Civil Procedure (LEGL 367) students draft a sample complaint and answer, draft a subpoena, and serve process on a UAA faculty or staff member; in Evidence, Investigation, and Discovery (LEGL 377), students conduct a mock client interview, draft discovery requests, and draft a letter to an opposing party on preserving electronically stored information; students in Trial and Advanced Litigation Processes (LEGL 487) function as attorneys in a simulated trial and draft legal motion briefing and argue it, often before an actual Alaska judge; and in the Legal Studies Senior Seminar (LEGL 489), students draft a variety of different client letters and legal pleadings, all the way up to an appellate brief. All of these are required courses for the ABA-approved degrees (LEGL 489 is only required of the BA degree). And as discussed in Section 1, all of our degree programs require students to complete an internship. Students thus leave the Legal Studies program at UAA well prepared to join the workforce or with a solid foundation for law school.

Though limited by ABA requirements, the Legal Studies program has routinely offered four of its required courses (LEGL 101, 215, 356, and 352) and one elective (LEGL 394/312) online for the past several years. In addition, Tribal Courts and Alaska Native Rights (LEGL 485) has been offered via a synchronous telephonic section that has allowed Alaska Natives and others from outside Anchorage, including rural communities, to take the course; it is being offered for the first

time via Zoom videoconferencing in Spring 2020. Faculty who teach online courses have received training in distance delivery, including Quality Matters training. Legal Studies faculty participated in the development of an Online Master Course for Introduction to Law (LEGL 101) in summer 2018. We also integrate online resources, such as an online grammar improvement program, into our courses. Even face-to-face courses incorporate digital resources. For example, both Evidence and Trial have been taught for several semesters as flipped classrooms.

To measure student preparedness, the program not only conducts faculty review of student success in relation to Program Student Learning Outcomes but also submits the student artifacts to review by the LSPAC to ensure that faculty standards meet the expectations of the legal community. The Legal Studies program has six PSLOs common to all degrees, with a total of 22 different assessment measures between them. Each degree has additional specific learning outcomes. Faculty and LSPAC members independently review and score student artifacts as either exceeding expectation, meeting expectations, or not meeting expectations. Though results vary by outcome, between two-thirds and three-quarters of students meet or exceed expectations on most measures. There is also reasonable consistency between faculty and LSPAC scoring. For example, for the 2018-2019 Annual Academic Assessment Report, the program evaluated student use of legal sources to support an argument. On one measure, faculty found that 93% of students met or exceeded expectations, whereas 73% of outside evaluators had the same assessment (n=41). On a different assessment measure for the same outcome, 75% of faculty and 68% of outside evaluators scored students as meeting or exceeding expectation. In other years, though, outside evaluators have been more generous than faculty in assessing student success in meeting outcomes. The bottom line, however, is that the Legal Studies program is confident that a solid majority of its students are meeting PSLOs, and identifying stronger and weaker assessments provides faculty with guidance on which areas to enhance and re-emphasize in our teaching.

The program additionally requires all degree students to take an exit exam prior to graduation. This exam is for self-assessment purposes only and does not require a minimum score for passage. Mean scores for the past four administrations of the test have been quite consistent – 73% in 2016, 61% in 2017 (explained in part by substantive law questions not from required courses; 78% mean score when those are removed), 72% in 2018, and 75% in 2019. Considering the lack of grade-based incentive for students to study for the exit exam, the scores are encouraging. We are proud to be ranked by thebestschools.org as the 11th best Bachelor's in Legal Studies program in the nation.

Student success is also enhanced through advising. For the past couple of years, the Legal Studies program has sent out letters to all new program enrollees identifying and encouraging them to meet with their advisor. Faculty frequently meet with students to ensure adequate degree progress. Legal Studies faculty additionally advise on law school and job opportunities post-graduation.

The efforts of the Legal Studies program have yielded several notable student successes. (We are required as best we can to keep track of our graduates for ABA reporting purposes.) Our graduates have obtained jobs as paralegals and clerks of court in Anchorage and around the country. At least two graduates for each year of the reporting period have gone to law school. Indeed, we have had several law students email us to say how well prepared our program made them and that they feel in a better position to start law school than many of their classmates. It is a huge reward to the faculty, and reflects highly on the quality of the Legal Studies program, to know that our students are successful not only while in school but also afterwards.

4. Program Duplication / Distinctiveness (300 words or less)

The Legal Studies program at UAA is the only one in the UA system to offer a full set of degree options – Associate of Applied Science in Paralegal Studies (AAS), Bachelor of Arts in Legal Studies (BA), minor in Legal Studies, and Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Paralegal Studies (PBCT). UAF currently offers an AAS and minor in paralegal studies through its Community & Technical College; there is only one full-time faculty member in the program. The UAF AAS is approved by the American Bar Association, but the minor is not. UAF paralegal course offerings do not encompass the broader historical and theoretical courses that are more appropriate for a bachelor's degree. Not only Legal Studies but also Justice and other students at UAA benefit from our wider selection of courses. Indeed, some Legal Studies courses,

such as Development of Law (LEGL 315), Criminal Law (LEGL 352), and Courts (JUST/LEGL 374), either are or will be required of Justice majors.

Because of ABA approval and the different focuses of the programs, coordination between UAA and UAF is challenging but not impossible. The degree requirements between the two institutions are not consistent and would need to be synthesized. A student who completed the AAS requirements at UAA would not meet the AAS requirement at UAF and vice versa. This creates additional difficulties because the AAS at UAA is designed to lead to acquisition of the BA with the addition of a few courses. Many of our students have chosen this path. Second, the ABA requires that at least ten hours of legal specialty courses be offered through “traditional classroom instruction,” though this can include synchronous interactive video conferencing provided students at the distance location are in a classroom affiliated with the institution. This may be an option if the programs are merged.

5. Summary Analysis (500 words or less)

The Legal Studies program at UAA is a strong program that keeps getting stronger. The program currently offers four different degrees – Bachelor of Arts in Legal Studies (BA), Associate of Applied Science in Paralegal Studies (AAS), Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Paralegal Studies (PBCT), and Legal Studies Minor – that cater to the different skill needs and life situations of our students. All four degrees are approved as paralegal education programs by the Standing Committee on Paralegals of the American Bar Association, which requires a rigorous review process and continuing expectation of high teaching standards. This credential affords UAA Legal Studies students a marketable advantage over students from programs that are not similarly approved. Alaska has a strong legal market with room for growth, both for attorneys and for paralegals. Our graduates are well positioned to take advantage of those opportunities, though students wishing to go to law school must attend a school out of state as there is currently no law school in Alaska. The course offerings in the Legal Studies program and the assignments in many of our courses are specifically tailored to simulate the assignments and projects that paralegals and newer attorneys would experience outside of school. Both employer and student feedback has repeatedly indicated that UAA Legal Studies graduates are well prepared for the job market.

The Legal Studies program at UAA should be recommended for ENHANCEMENT, namely through the appointment of a fifth faculty member. The Legal Studies program started FY 2020 with five faculty, having just hired a new assistant professor for Fall 2019. The intent was to grow the program and offer a wider variety of courses with appeal beyond Justice Center students. The mid-year resignation of one of our faculty members and subsequent reshuffling of courses and responsibilities among remaining faculty limits these possibilities. For example, one of our faculty members was to teach a course in the Honors College in Spring 2020, but that course had to be cancelled so that the faculty member could take on Legal Studies Program Coordinator responsibilities. We have explored the possibility of teaching a law-related course for students in nursing and other health-related fields, but those efforts too have had to be shelved for the time being. We would also like to be able to offer more electives for our own Legal Studies students (many substantive law classes for FY 2021 are not slated to be offered) and courses of more general appeal to the UA student body as a whole (such as courses on law and culture or contemporary policy issues). These are simply not possible with our current number of faculty. Our program cannot grow without the rehiring of a fifth faculty member. The sustained student growth detailed above (not only in student credit hour production but also in the number of students enrolled in our separate degree programs) justifies the hiring of a fifth faculty to replace the one who just resigned and a return to our full faculty level.