

***OAKLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
1996 LEGAL ASSISTING EMPLOYER STUDY***

*Prepared by:*

*Office of Institutional Planning & Analysis  
Oakland Community College  
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**Oakland Community College  
1996 Legal Assisting Employer Study**

**Introduction:**

This study was conducted at the request of the Legal Assisting department of Oakland Community College as part of the American Bar Association accreditation process. This report summarizes data collected from employers of graduates from the OCC Legal Assisting department. It includes information on the perceived level of preparedness of graduates, desired workplace skills and areas of legal expertise. In addition some employers provided suggestions to improve the department's offerings.

**Methodology:**

During the first week of March 1996 personal phone calls were made to individuals and firms identified by the Legal Assisting department as current employers of their graduates. Up to three attempts were made by trained phone interviewers from the Institutional Planning & Analysis department to reach the appropriate individual in each case. We were able to obtain completed surveys from 10 of the 23 employers listed with partial data from another three individuals. This represents a 43% response rate, which we hope to improve in subsequent years. However, we recognize that the busy schedules of many attorneys reduce their ability to spend time on this type of survey.

**Table 1  
Response Rate**

Response	Number
Interviewed	10
Partial interview	3
Unable to contact	3
Not Interviewed	7

Clearly, the small number of individuals in the sample gives us little opportunity for quantitative analysis at this time, and the following analysis should be considered as qualitative evidence of their perceptions of the program.

## ANALYSIS:

### *Background information*

Employers contacted represented a number of different types of law firms, ranging from sole practitioners to large law firms and the legal departments of corporations, public and government agencies. They reported using interchangeably a variety of titles for legal assistants including legal technicians, paralegals and legal secretaries. Legal assistants were most frequently supervised directly by attorneys, although one firm had a legal assistant co-ordinator and another gave the responsibility to the office administrator. Approximately half of the group carried out regular evaluations of their legal assistants, while half did not. Usually evaluations are completed on an annual basis.

### *Level of Preparedness*

Employers contacted were highly satisfied with the level of preparation for employment their employees had received at OCC. Only one respondent judged their employee unprepared. When asked to identify in which areas graduates were least prepared, more than half of the employers responded "none". Areas which were mentioned included drafting pleadings and subpoenas, typing, research and writing skills.

When asked to identify the areas in which graduates were most qualified to work in their organization the most frequent response (more than half of respondents) was "research and writing". Other comments included office organization and legal secretarial skills.

When asked to rate how well employees were prepared in specific skill and knowledge areas respondents ratings were consistent with their earlier general comments. The areas in which they rated the graduates most highly were legal research, word processing skills, file management, preparing documents for trial and other computer skills. Areas for which assistants were judged slightly less well prepared were preparing interrogatories, drafting complaints, and drafting motions. However, only two employers cited any area ( word processing and computer software skills) for which they deemed their employees unprepared. It seems that few of the individuals to whom we spoke used legal assistants in the areas of wills, trusts, probates, bankruptcy personal injury, employment discrimination and litigation.

In a follow-up question on the subject of preparedness, respondents were asked if there were any other areas of law the assistants should have studied or workplace skills they should have gained. The majority of employers had no suggestions but areas which were mentioned included real estate, personal injury, employment discrimination, contractual and environmental law. Desirable workplace skills suggested were computer skills, word processing and internet courses.

### ***Conclusion***

The level of satisfaction with the training and education provided by the OCC legal assisting program is demonstrated by the fact that only one of our employee respondents would not recommend another attorney or legal firm to hire an OCC legal assisting graduate. In addition, there were few recommendations for improvements in curriculum or instruction. One attorney suggested including speciality law, and another recommended placing emphasis on writing skills, grammar and punctuation. An additional respondent hoped that schools would attempt to develop more uniformity between their curriculum offerings.

Legal Assisting Employer Survey

- 23 Employers
- 1 No phone listing
- 2 Tried 3 times- no contact
- 7 No OCC student employed
- 3 No employees, but info on desired assets
- 10 Completed

Adequately prepared 9  
Somewhat 0  
Not prepared 1

● Least prepared

Drafting pleadings,subpenas 2  
Typing skills 1  
Research and writing skills 1  
None 5  
No answer 1

Best prepared

Research and writing 6  
Legal secretary 1  
Organizational/office 1  
All areas 1  
No answer 1

● Areas of law you would like to have studied

None (9)  
Real estate 1  
Personal injury 1  
Employment discrimination 1  
Litigation 1

(contractual/environmental)

● Workplace skills desired

Word processing 2  
Computer skills 3  
(Internet, Lexus,Excel)  
None (8)

● Suggestions

None (6)  
Internships/practical 2 -  
Speciality law 2 -  
Improved grammar skills 1  
More uniformity 1  
(curriculum school to school)  
Referrals for future 1

**OAKLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
1996 LEGAL ASSISTING EMPLOYER SURVEY**

1. Firstly, could you tell me about your firm? Are you the
  - 1----- Office of sole practitioner,
  - 2----- A law firm of 2 to 9 attorneys,
  - 3----- A law firm of 10 to 20 attorneys,
  - 4----- A law firm of 21 to 100 attorneys,
  - 5----- A law firm of more than 100 attorneys,
  - 6----- A legal department of a public/government agency or
  - 7----- A legal department of a corporation
  
2. How many OCC legal assistant graduates are currently employed by your firm or department? \_\_\_\_\_  
*If none, discontinue survey.*
  
3. Do you use other titles for individuals performing paralegal related duties? (*For example, legal secretary, legal clerk*)
  - 1----- Yes, which title? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 0----- No
  
4. Does someone have overall supervision of the paralegals in your firm?
  - 1----- Yes, what is their title? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 0----- No
  
5. Are regular evaluations of paralegals completed?
  - 1----- Yes, how frequently? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 0----- No
  
6. In general, to what extent were OCC graduates prepared for employment in your organization? Were they **adequately prepared, somewhat prepared, or not prepared?**
  - 3----- Adequately prepared
  - 2----- Somewhat prepared
  - 1----- Not prepared
  - 9----- No response
  
7. In which areas were they **least** prepared to work in your organization?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
8. In which areas were OCC graduates **best** prepared to work in your organization?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Please would you rate how well prepared employees were in the following areas. Were they **adequately prepared, somewhat prepared, or not prepared** in each of these areas?

*Adequately Somewhat Not Not  
Prepared Prepared Prepared Applicable*

a) Legal research skills .....	3	2	1	8
b) Word processing skills .....	3	2	1	8
c) Other computer software skills .....	3	2	1	8
d) File management .....	3	2	1	8
e) Preparing documents for trial .....	3	2	1	8
f) Attending trials .....	3	2	1	8
g) Assisting with depositions .....	3	2	1	8
h) Preparing interrogatories .....	3	2	1	8
i) Drafting complaints .....	3	2	1	8
j) Drafting motions .....	3	2	1	8
k) Drafting wills .....	3	2	1	8
l) Preparing commitment papers .....	3	2	1	8
m) Preparing divorce proceedings .....	3	2	1	8
n) Preparing trusts .....	3	2	1	8
o) Preparing bankruptcy documents .....	3	2	1	8
p) Preparing estate probates .....	3	2	1	8

10. Are there any other areas of law you would like your legal assistants to have studied ?

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11. Are there any other **workplace skills** you would like your legal assistants to have learned?

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12. Would you recommend another attorney or firm to hire an OCC legal assisting graduate ?

1----- Yes

0----- No

13. Do you have any specific suggestions for improvements in curriculum or instruction of the legal assisting program at OCC?

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This completes my questions. Thank you for your time and assistance.

**Interviewer signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

OAKLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

*Legal Assisting  
Accreditation*

EMPLOYER SURVEY

*February 1996*

"Hello, this is *insert your name*, and I am calling from Oakland Community College, Department of Planning & Analysis. As part of the accreditation process for our legal assisting program the American Bar Association requires us to contact employers of graduates of the program to ask their opinion of the training and preparation provided by the College. May I please speak to the attorney or other person who supervises legal assistants in your organization?"

Step 1	<i>You reach the person.</i>	<i>You reach someone else and the person you need is available.</i>	<i>Person is not available.</i>
Step 2	Hello, this is <i>insert your name</i> , and I am calling from Oakland Community College. <i>Continue with the following:</i>	Ask to speak with the respondent. When he/she is on the line, continue with the following:  Hello, this is <i>insert your name</i> , and I am calling from Oakland Community College. <i>Continue with the following:</i>	Try to find out when the person may be reached. If asked why you are calling, explain the following:
Step 3	I am glad I was able to reach you. As part of the accreditation process for the American Bar Association, OCC is contacting employers of legal assisting graduates. Your knowledge and expertise is invaluable to us in helping to evaluate the preparation provided by this program. Could you spare a few moments of your time to answer some questions?  <i>If yes, begin the survey. If no, see if there is a better time to call them back, note the call-back time on the phone list, and indicate that someone will attempt to call them then.</i>  <i>If they are unwilling to complete the survey, simply thank them for their time and indicate that on the phone list.</i>		We would like to ask ( <i>name of appropriate person</i> ) his/her opinions regarding the preparation provided by the OCC legal assisting program, as part of the American Bar Association accreditation process.  <i>Record the callback time on the phone list.</i>

**NOTES TO INTERVIEWER:**

1. Please record call back times on the employer list.
2. Please record name of business, name of the respondent and title, phone number on the top of the survey.