

Data Interpretation

Part 4 of the Academic Review Procedure contemplates separate discussions of the Core Data Indicators provided in the Academic Review Data Elements, Program Specific Data and Department Specific Data where applicable. In preparing this report, Paralegal Studies faculty noticed that many of the Program Specific Data and Department Specific Data topics were duplicative of extended discussions related to the Core Data Indicators or simply referred to items included in the Appendix. In the combined interests of brevity and clarity, Paralegal Studies faculty have taken the liberty of omitting Program Specific Data and Department Specific Data as separate sections of this report.

A. Core Data Indicators

1. Declared Majors

Table 1 of the Data Elements report for AY12 shows that the number of students declaring Paralegal Studies as their primary major has remained relatively steady since 2007. The average number of students in the program is 57, with a low of 52 students in 2008 and a high of 61 students in 2011. Further investigation disclosed an additional fifteen students who had declared Paralegal Studies as a second or third major. These additional declared majors are consistent with the advising lists for the two main instructors in the program.

Faculty asked for a further breakdown of this data and received that information for the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 semesters. Specifically, faculty were interested in the question of whether the data showed any trends in the enrollment in the various awards offered by the Paralegal Studies program (A.S., A.A.S., and Certificate).

The additional data showed the following breakdown:

Paralegal Studies Award	Fall 2011	Spring 2012
A.S.	24	29
A.A.S.	31	31
Certificate	5	7

2. FTE/FYE

Table 2 of the Data Elements report for AY12 shows that the student FYE has grown steadily since 2007. Faculty FTE has fluctuated around an average of 1.73 for the last three years. It is believed that this is an acceptable average since it depends largely on the number of adjunct faculty required during any given academic year and the variability of those needs in any given semester. For example, the spring 2012 course plan called for three courses to be taught by

adjuncts, but student demand and faculty reassignment reduced that number to one.

The student/faculty ratio within the program has averaged 22.72 over the last five years. This is within expectations based on the standard program class size of 25 students.

3. Course Sections/Seats

Table 3 of the Data Elements report for AY12 shows that the number of courses and seats filled for Paralegal Studies program courses has steadily increased since 2007. Total section offerings ranged from 16 to 25 and the regular section size consistently averaged about 20 students. Overall, approximately 73% of the seats were filled each year.

The regular class size for LGST course offering is 25 students per course. This course size reflects the intense study requirements of Paralegal Studies courses and the need for faculty to provide personalized feedback on practical, hands-on assignments. Two exceptions are LGST 1420: Business Law - An Introduction and LGST 1425: Business Law - Commercial Topics, both of which have a class size of 35 students per section. These courses are the only LGST courses typically taken by students outside the program; both are required or recommended courses for both Accounting and Business Management students and are listed on articulation agreements for both programs.

It is noted that the Data Elements do not provide a breakdown between onground and online courses. Paralegal Studies course offerings are subject to the same financial pressures of other Lake Superior College courses. Several onground course offerings have been cancelled each year for low enrollment. These cancellations have included both required and elective program courses. The result of these cancellations is that Paralegal Studies students typically do not have the option of taking onground LGST courses after the second semester. The Paralegal Studies faculty are increasingly concerned that economics are forcing the program toward solely online course offerings.

The Data Elements Sheet did not indicate the total number of credit hours generated. The current data also does not show a breakdown between online and on-ground sections, which will be requested in the future; historically the online courses fill while the on-campus sections do not, explaining the three-fourths efficiency ratio. Further study will be needed to determine the viability of the very popular but small on-campus contingent, since time of day and specific course topics significantly influence enrollment.

4. Student Retention

Table 4 of the Data Elements report for AY12 raises several questions that may affect the validity of this data. First, Table 4 tracks student retention from first-year fall to second-year fall. The Paralegal Studies program has traditionally

operated on a fall start for onground students and a spring start for online students. The data provided does not account for spring start students.

Second, two of the three awards in the Paralegal Studies program require course work in general education and business. Many program students do not finish within two years, preferring to attend school part-time while being employed full- or part-time. These students often spread out their program out over several semesters and may schedule one or more semesters with no LGST coursework.

Third, the Paralegal Studies faculty believe that a truer measure of student retention is persistence in required LGST courses, beginning with LGST 1410 – Legal Studies II. This data would reflect the intention of students to complete the Paralegal Studies program. This information would account for a certain number of students who divert to related programs at Lake Superior College.

In the future it would be helpful to get full-time vs. part-time, online vs. on-campus numbers for comparison. The persisting students entering from the prior year was consistently between 15-20, but the number retained showed at approximately half that. The 0% retention rate in 2010 remains an unexplained anomaly and is inconsistent with the recollection of program faculty, who recall student advancement and retention in every year the program has been in existence. The Paralegal Studies faculty do not think the approximate 50% retention number is unrealistic, however; typically the number of students starting Legal Studies I, an exploratory, survey-type course, is about twice the number who manage to successfully complete and who appear to be viable program students.

5. Awards Granted

Table 5 of the Data Elements report for AY12 shows the number of graduates in each of the awards granted by the Paralegal Studies program. The data does not reflect, however, the number of students who graduate with a different award from the award the student declared at the time of entry into the program. Paralegal Studies students often self-advise and select an award that is not appropriate for their level of skill or experience. Once students start get a better understanding of what they need to be successful in the paralegal field, there tends to be a significant degree of transfer between the various awards.

The Paralegal Studies program grants three awards, Certificate, A.S., and A.A.S. The differences in the awards are set out in the documents contained in the Appendix. The core required LGST courses are the same for all three awards. The difference in the awards lies in the number and type of electives the students may or may not need, generally chosen based on their particular backgrounds and employment destination.

The 30-credit Certificate has no electives and prepares students for going directly into the workforce; it is designed for those who have a prior degree and/or work experience and therefore no need for business or general education electives. The A.A.S. option includes a business elective focus and is the recommended choice for students seeking immediate employment upon graduation. Area law offices by and large expect students to have all the office skills reflected in those ADSC business courses for any entry-level position.

The A.S. degree is a transfer degree that is intended for students who plan to continue their education at a four-year institution. In reality, the vast majority of A.S. students choose this option because they have significant general education credits and perceive the A.S. as the shortest route to a Paralegal Studies degree. These students often discover that they require one or more ADSC elective courses to develop the office skills required by area employers.

6. Program Costs

Table 6 of the Data Elements report for AY12 is a comparison between Lake Superior College cost per FYE and MnSCU cost per FYE. This comparison is of dubious usefulness for two reasons. First, given the small number of similar Paralegal Studies programs and the large differences in programs across the state, it is impossible to determine the accuracy of the comparison. For example, it was unclear to anyone whether the comparison was with other Paralegal Studies programs or other Administrative Support-Legal programs around the state.

Second, the 2010 numbers indicate an 8% decrease in MnSCU cost per FYE accompanied by a 41.5% increase in the Lake Superior College cost per FYE. This data is reported in the same year that the data reported a 0% student retention rate. Neither anomaly has been satisfactorily explained, making it likely that the data for 2010 is untrustworthy. If the 2010 data is thrown out, the data show that the LSC Paralegal Studies cost per FYE are consistently lower than the MnSCU cost per FYE.

Additional Items

Budget figures, including revenues and costs

This information was not provided to program faculty.

Articulation agreements

Copies of all current articulation agreements are contained in the Appendix. Paralegal Studies program faculty are currently working on the following articulation agreements:

Revision of the articulation agreements with University of Wisconsin-Superior.

An A.S. to B.S. articulation agreement with Chancellor University (Ohio) in the field of Paralegal Studies.

An A.S. to B.S. articulation agreement with Bemidji State University (MnSCU) in the field of Criminal Justice.

Institutional impact (FYE generated by students enrolled in courses outside academic unit requirements)

This information was not provided to program faculty.

B. Program Specific Data

These topics are address in the discussion of Core Data Indicators above or are included in the Appendix to this report.

C. Accreditation, Self-Study, or Annual Review

As mentioned above, the Lake Superior College Paralegal Studies program does not qualify for American Bar Association approval. The main impediment to ABA approval is the significant online component of the LSC Paralegal Studies curriculum. The ABA requires that students complete a minimum of ten semester credit hours of onground coursework. This requirement is inconsistent with the current structure of the LSC Paralegal Studies program and would not meet the needs of our current student constituency.

The American Association for Paralegal Education has recently recognized that the restrictions of the ABA approval process fails to recognize the many quality paralegal education programs operated by AAFPE members. The AAFPE is in the process of developing institutional membership criteria to establish standards for paralegal education programs such as the LSC Paralegal Studies program. The preliminary criteria being considered by the AAFPE are included in the Appendix. Once these standards are finalized, the Paralegal Studies program faculty will evaluate the costs and benefits of seeking institutional membership in the AAFPE.