

**Position Statement of the
American Association for Paralegal Education (AAfPE)
Regarding Educational Standards for
Paralegal Regulation Proposals**

AAfPE's membership includes hundreds of universities, colleges, and other institutions of higher learning throughout the United States and in Canada. Since 1981, AAfPE's member schools have trained thousands of paralegal students each year to help increase, improve, and support access to the legal system in their communities. AAfPE acts as the national resource for paralegal education and has set minimum recommended educational standards for paralegal education programs to become institutional members. AAfPE believes that the paralegal profession requires training of sufficient length, sophistication, intensity, and quality to produce a functional entry-level paralegal.

Certain educational components should be required in any paralegal regulatory plan. AAfPE recommends that state legislatures, courts, and/or bar associations considering paralegal regulation should adopt or include the AAfPE educational minimum standards described below:

Formal Paralegal Education

It is the position of AAfPE that some form of formal paralegal education should be present as a meaningful requirement in any paralegal regulation plan. This formal paralegal education should be offered through a program specifically designed to provide paralegal education.

Minimum Length of Study

A person is qualified as a paralegal with (1) an associate or baccalaureate degree or equivalent course work and (2) a credential in paralegal education from a paralegal program associated with an educational institution accredited by a nationally recognized agency completed in any of the following types of educational programs: associate degree, baccalaureate degree (major or minor), certificate, or master's degree.

A paralegal's education shall include, either as separate courses or within the overall course of study, coursework in substantive and procedural law, the American legal system, law offices and related environments, the paralegal profession, legal research and writing, ethics, and areas of legal practice such as those described in AAfPE's Core Competencies for Paralegal Programs.

The paralegal's credential shall include no fewer than 18 semester credit hours of substantive paralegal classes and shall be from a paralegal education program that, at the time the paralegal credential is granted, is:

1. An institutional member of the American Association for Paralegal Education; or
2. A paralegal educational program approved by the American Bar Association; or
3. A paralegal education program at the post-secondary (college) level that requires the student to have completed a minimum of sixty (60) semester hours (or the equivalent) of total study prior to graduation. A semester hour is equivalent to 15 classroom hours of at least 50 minutes in duration. The course offerings may be for credit or not for credit, but they should meet these minimum time periods.

Other Educational Institution Requirements

The educational institution should be accredited by a nationally-recognized accrediting agency. Additionally, the institution should meet the educational standards described in the AAFPE Statement of Academic Quality.

Minimum Educational Requirements Are Essential in Any Paralegal Regulation Plan

Paralegal education is a unique academic curriculum, composed of both substantive legal knowledge and professional skills, which incorporates legal theory with practical application. Any proposal for regulation of paralegals should contain provisions incorporating the level of paralegal education necessary to enable graduates to meet the responsibilities of paralegals as legal professionals.

In recent years there has been a proliferation of short-term entry-level paralegal training programs of very limited duration, some with as few as 125 clock hours (which is less than nine semester credit hours). These programs do a fundamental disservice to the legal profession by creating unrealistic expectations in both employers and students that a quality paralegal education has been delivered, when such is not the case. State regulatory bodies are urged to adopt the educational minimums defined in this document as a requisite element of any paralegal regulation plan.

For further information on the American Association for Paralegal Education, please contact info@aape.org, or call our national headquarters at (856) 423-2829.

*The AAFPE Board of Directors adopted this Position Statement
on February 24, 2001, at San Antonio, Texas.*