

Educational Standards

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION

The American Bar Association has been involved in promoting the paralegal career since 1968 and has been approving paralegal education programs since 1975. The approval process is voluntary since it is not required by any governmental agency. To be approved, a program must be offered by an institution that is accredited by an accrediting agency on an approved list and must meet standards relating to administration, resources, curriculum and academic policies, faculty and program direction, admissions standards and practices, student services including placement and counseling, library, and facilities. Programs seeking approval must submit a detailed self-evaluation report with supporting documents and are visited by an evaluation team. Approval is granted for a period of seven years. As of April 2004, the paralegal programs at more than 250 institutions (more than 95% of which are AAFPE members) across the country have been approved. A few new programs are usually approved each year. In some metropolitan areas, employers require potential candidates to possess a credential from an ABA-approved program.

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PARALEGAL EDUCATION

The American Association for Paralegal Education, established in 1981, is an organization that represents paralegal education programs and has approximately 350 institutional members. Its primary mission is to promote high standards in paralegal education. In its Statement of Academic Quality, AAFPE acknowledges that the education of a paralegal requires a unique curriculum that covers both substantive legal knowledge and practical skills. This intellectually demanding course of study should be designed to provide instruction in the competencies that paralegals need as professionals. AAFPE recognizes seven essential components of a quality paralegal education program: curriculum development, facilities, faculty, marketing and promotion, paralegal instruction, student services and related competencies.