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What was your college major?

I majored in history with a double minor in Education and English. I graduated from Loyola University in Chicago, Illinois. I earned my Doctorate of Jurisprudence (Law Degree) at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas.

Did this major lead you to your current career?

Yes, I taught high school English and History and Government for 18 years before going to law school.

What are the characteristics that your most successful students possess?

Students in the Paralegal Program should be critical thinkers, have good communication skills (both oral and written), strong interpersonal skills and be organized. Having technical skills with computers is becoming increasingly important.

Name three things a student should know when exploring this career.

Students should know that the above skills are necessary. They are not expected to enter the program and be an expert in all the above areas, and these skills will be stressed during the program. A love and interest in the law is very helpful to students. If a person knows someone in the legal field, that can be helpful too.

What skills will a student learn when pursuing this career?

They will learn the "what" and "how" of law and the substance and procedural aspects of law. Students will learn how to draft documents, do legal research and interview clients. This is the "how" of law, but they also learn the reasons (the what) for doing these tasks. Students graduate from the paralegal program ready "to hit

the ground running.” Law school does not stress the practical aspects of law. The attorney’s best friend is the paralegal, and they work together in a team approach. Paralegals are prepared to do many important tasks and *must always work under the direct supervision of an attorney.*

For a student needing part-time employment while in college, what types of jobs provide the best experiential learning opportunities?

The Paralegal program has a list serve of positions for current students and graduates of the program. Most students work in law firms during their coursework. The JCCC paralegal program has hundreds of graduates and they are very loyal to the program. It is a huge network. Students have volunteered in the Victim Assistance Program through the DA’s office in Olathe or at the Federal Court House in Kansas City, Kansas. There are three active paralegal associations in the area, which is very helpful in networking. If students do not have experience in the legal field, the time to gain that experience is while they are students. Students are not forced to work in the legal field, but it is *strongly* encouraged that they obtain some exposure to the field.

If a college student is unable to find related work experience in this career field, how do you suggest he/she prepare for the workplace?

From the beginning of the program, students hear that they need to have experience working in the legal area. Internships are not part of the degree requirements of the program, but students can receive credit for doing one or two internships as part of their coursework. Applying for internships helps students in finding jobs. The paralegal network is a huge help for students in locating employment.

Is there a selection process for entering this program?

Yes, the paralegal program is a selective admission program. Students are required to initially take two classes: LAW 123-Paralegal Studies (1 credit hour) and LAW 121-Intro to Law (3 credit hours). Students who have not taken Composition I must also complete that course before entering the program. Students also need a 2.00 GPA and a score of 25 or higher on the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Test. Following the completion of the two classes, a review of their GPA and the Watson-Glaser results, students applying for the program complete an informational interview with me as Chair of the Department. The classes help students understand the program coursework so they can determine if the program is a good choice for them. Ninety-five percent of the students who start the program finish it, which is a very high completion rate. The program has been approved by the American Bar Association (ABA) since 1980. Nationally only 25% of paralegal programs are approved by the ABA, and Missouri Western University is the closest other paralegal program approved by the ABA. Eighty-five percent of the alumni report that they are “pleased” with their jobs. Individuals wishing to enter the Paralegal program who already have a bachelor’s degree, or higher can take the two prerequisite classes during their first semester in the program.

The admission process is not designed to keep anyone out of the program; students who want into the program can get in, but there are some hoops they need to jump through. It is structured in a way that allows a student to determine his/her interest level and ability to be successful in the program prior to being formally admitted. Students can take the Watson-Glaser test several times if necessary, as the score of 25 is non-negotiable. The percent of those who have completed the program and have worked in the field is between the high 80’s and 90’s, which is a very high rate.