

Teaching Introduction to Paralegal Studies

Engaging the next generation of paralegals

Applied Learning in Intro to Paralegal Studies

Presented by Crystal Dowdell, Program Director & Instructor



Crystal Dowdell, Program Director & Instructor Criminal Justice & Legal Studies Missouri Western State University



- Alumni of Missouri Western State University
- Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice
- Associate of Science in Legal Studies
- Paralegal Certificate
- Currently pursuing a Master of Social Work with a Practicum, which involved the development of Healing Stream, a community-offered wellness program.
- 32 years of experience as a paralegal in multiple legal practice areas.
- Certifications include: Westlaw Legal Research; Office for Human Research Protections; Microsoft Office; U.S Courts Filing Agent; Western District of Missouri Paralegal Training; Trained and Registered with Pacer; Notary Public
- Professional Organizations: ABA; NFPA; NALA; AAFPE
- Board Member of Samaritan Counseling; Secretary of Board South Park Christian Academy; Member of the Committee for Strategic Planning - MWSU
- *Wife, Mother of 8, Grandmother of 10 – Daughter, Sister, Aunt, Friend*
- *New Professor with a passion for Applied Learning*

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Development of a Paralegal Panel within the Classroom and its Prelude: Applied Learning

Why does Applied Learning matter?

- The Role of the Paralegal is dynamic
- Career Readiness: Students need real-world exposure
- Applied Learning enhances engagement
- Skill Development: Enhanced writing. Legal research and critical thinking
- Hands-on experience while in school offers the possibility of higher pay grade upon graduation *(rather than entry level)*
- Students and Alumni evaluation of Applied Learning
- Employer evaluations of students
- Teaches the student professionalism *(dress, attitude, job performance, collaboration and communication with peers and employers)*



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Development of a Paralegal Panel within the Classroom and its Prelude: Applied Learning

Why does Applied Learning matter?

Feedback from graduates

Hands-on
multi-tasking
when
conducting
legal
research

I wish I had
more time
during school
to meet local
paralegals
and attorneys

I had a hard
time finding a
job because
even though I
had a degree, I
had no
experience.

*Think back to when you started
as a _____
(fill in the blank – teacher, professor,
paralegal, attorney).
What do you wish you had
known?*

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Development of a Paralegal Panel within the Classroom

Paralegal Panel

- Opportunity for students to collaborate with local paralegals;
- Offers students greater insight into varied types of law as a paralegal;
- Contact opportunities for internships and future careers;
- Develops and continues university relationships with paralegals and attorneys to assist in fostering community needs leading to possible need for curriculum changes;
- It creates excitement about the future for the students, causing them to desire to become more involved in the Legal Studies Association and future applied learning events offered by the department.



"Being able to interact with multiple paralegals who specialize in different areas made me excited about my future career".

"I learn better by doing rather than hearing or reading. The panel was a very helpful and eye-opening discussion for me. I am glad we could ask questions face to face and learn about how much you can do as a paralegal in the courtroom and outside the courtroom".

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Development of a Paralegal Panel within the Classroom


Panel Development

- Contacted several law offices and other companies that employ paralegals locally looking for diversity in practice– searched for some that are alumni;
- Scheduled a luncheon;
- Communicated my ideas and asked for their ideas; Encouraged panelists to share real-life cases and challenges
- Offered multiple dates and narrowed down the most convenient date for the paralegal;
- Post the date for students;
- Advise students on what types of law the paralegal's work involves;
- Assign pre-panel research on the practice areas
- Students pre-prepare structure questions and submit, them to avoid the same or similar questions


Paralegal Panel

Criminal Justice & Legal Studies Dept


OCTOBER 28TH @ 06:00 PM
POPPELWELL 304




DEBBIE WELLS



ALEAHA KNIGHTON



JOELLE MODLIN





TERESA WRIGHT



KELLY SUTTON



TIM SULLIVAN



SHANEN MIDDENDORF

Panel Event

- The event is held on an evening to offer other courses to join;
- The department provides light snacks and drinks
- 6:00 pm - Social – 15 minutes
- 6:15 pm - Introduction of Panelists (*by Director or Dean of the College of Business & Professional Studies*)
- 6:20 pm Begin Organized Q & A
- 7:20 pm – Short Break
- 7:30 pm - Continue Q & A
- 7:45 pm - Spontaneous Q & A
- 8:00 pm - End Q & A
- Students present paralegals with thank-you gifts
- 8:15 pm - Students and paralegals to talk and meet one-on-one or in small groups
- 8:30 pm – Wrap up

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After the Panel Event

**Students will write
a 500 word
reflective paper in
APA format**

**Students choose a
field of one of the
panelists and must
list at least 2 State
Statutes related to
the field**



**Paper will also
consist of their
experience and
evaluation of
whether the
panelists
contributed to the
development of
their goals or
future careers**



**Students will reflect on a
specific paralegal they
enjoyed or felt a
connection with. Students
answer the questions
What surprised you?
What practice area
interested you most.**

What do you like most about your job?

Is it challenging to remain unbiased?

Questions from a few of our students

What questions would you ask of paralegals if you were a student? *(Keep in mind the students receive the Bios of each paralegal before the event)*

With the length of time you have worked as a paralegal, have you questioned your career choice or had any interest in becoming a lawyer?

What is your advise for someone who would like to work for a Prosecutor?

How do you cope with seeing child abuse on a daily basis?

What is one class you wish you would have taken that you didn't get to take?

Can you explain why you say Probate law is your Jam?

What motivated you To choose Family Law as a Career?

What is one class that really helped you in your opinion?

Bankruptcy seems like it would bring a lot of disgruntled clients. How do you manage to stay calm?

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More Reasons for Diving Beyond the Textbook



**Traditional
Teaching Methods
do not fully
prepare students
for the workforce**

Bernardo, Landicho &
Laguador, (2014)



**Applied Learning
Bridges the Gap
between theory
and practice**

Farmer, Allen, Khader,
Zimmerman & Johnstone
(2021)



**Paralegals work in
diverse legal
environments and
need hands-on
training before
graduation**

Allen, Parker &
DeLorenzo, 2012)



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My Experience with Paralegal Panel



Feedback from students verbally, written and in my semester reviews



Saw students come out of their shells and gain confidence



Students have gained employment due to relationships made at the Panel



Increase in program retention rates

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APPLIED LEARNING EVENTS

BUDGET FRIENDLY STRATEGIES

Students attended Wrongful Conviction Day sponsored by the Midwest Innocence Project, in Kansas City, Missouri, and utilized the time and funds to also tour the World War I Museum where the event occurred.



Collaborating with the Midwest Innocence Project has gained MWSU a relationship in which the MIP offers a case to our Advanced Legal Research class to analyze for actual innocence. Students work hands-on with a team of attorneys and their instructor on an incarcerated individual's case. Students sign a Confidentiality Waiver and are lectured on the importance of attorney/client privilege.

Activities



- Meeting with Exonerees
- Networking with Attorneys and MIP Staff
- Opportunity to ask questions in a public forum
- Visit the WWI Museum
- Experience a social mixer with professionals



Utilizing Funding



By attending an event within a 50-mile radius, 14 students had the invaluable opportunity to explore the rich history of World War I and engage with the exhibits at a renowned museum.

This experience not only deepened their understanding of historical events but also provided a powerful, first-hand encounter with individuals who were wrongfully incarcerated.

Through strategic planning and resource allocation, we maximized the available funds to ensure that students benefited from both an educational and impactful experience.

Student Takeaways



- Awareness of wrongful convictions
- Legal research insights
- Career & internship connections
- Relationship development with MIP for case assignment to Legal Research Class
- Collaborate with MIP in class and groups outside of class on actual case assignment
- Applying legal research and analysis to an actual case
- Greater knowledge of WWI, its impact, and its legacies



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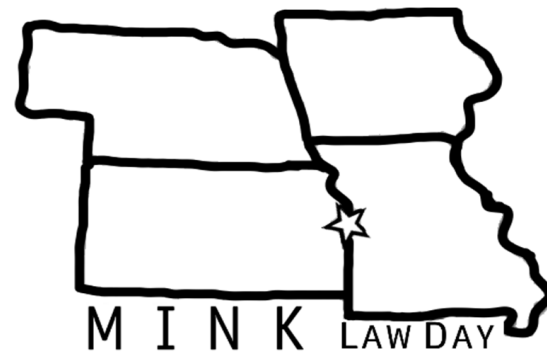
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APPLIED LEARNING EVENTS

MINK LAW DAY & CAREER FAIRS

MINK Law Day is an annual event sponsored by the 10 law schools in Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas.

Students attend this event with the Program Director and visit law schools that come from all across the United States for this event.

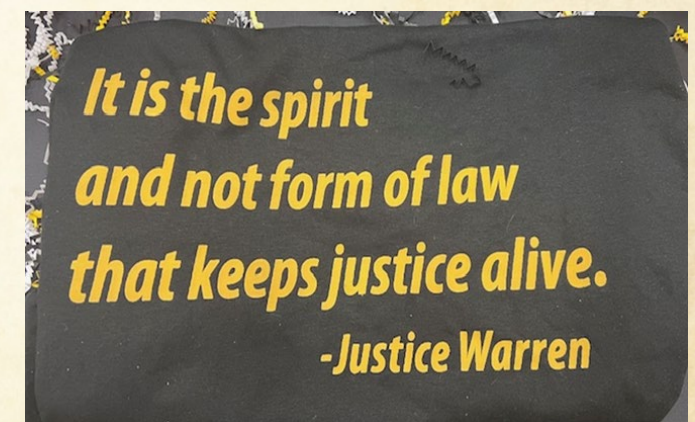


Students have the opportunity to Attend a Career Fair held for Criminal Justice & Legal Studies students specifically, to offer the opportunity to meet law enforcement agencies; law school admission teams; law firms; and agencies that employ paralegals and law-related professionals



MOCK TRIAL – COURT HEARING VISITS

Students enrolled in Litigation Class end the semester with a Mock Trial. Last Fall, the Students in Intro to Law and Paralegal Studies came together to develop a Mock Trial. They not only gave it 100% but also had so much fun. Students attend hearings at the local courthouse each semester to give them insight into actual court proceedings.



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Final thoughts – Bringing it all together



Applied Learning makes legal education more dynamic and practical- Where there is a will there is a way



Try a well-structured paralegal panel to help develop networking and career insight



Encouraging students to continue relationships with collaborators.



See excitement to thrive increase in your students, creating greater retention rates.

References

- Allen, M. D., Parker, S. A., & DeLorenzo, T. C. (2012). Civic Engagement in the Community: Undergraduate Clinical Legal Education. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 8(1), 35–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2012.641393>
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- Farmer, K., Allen, J., Khader, M., Zimmerman, T., & Johnstone, P. (2021). Paralegal students' and paralegal instructors' perceptions of synchronous and asynchronous online paralegal course effectiveness: A comparative study. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Studies*, 3(1), 1-12.
- Ramson, A. J. (2014). Service-learning: A tool to develop employment competencies for college students. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 25(1), 159-187

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Questions?