

AAPI Update: Moving and Shaking in 2005
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The American Alliance of Paralegals, Inc. (AAPI) is making great progress in its attempts to advance the paralegal profession. Some of the many activities in which AAPI is involved are as follows:

Paralegal Certification

AAPI is moving right along with its American Alliance Certified Paralegal (AACP) program. This voluntary certification program requires applicants to have five years of substantive experience as well as a bachelor's degree in any discipline or an associate's degree or certificate of completion from an American Bar Association-approved paralegal program. Applicants are required to submit a verified application to AAPI's Certification Commission, certified copies of transcripts, and a declaration from his/her employer attesting to his/her substantive work experience. Following validation of an applicant's credentials, the AACP designation is conferred.

All AACP's are required to participate in eighteen hours of continuing legal education (CLE) every two years, with ethics being required for two of those eighteen CLE hours. As part of its certification program, AAPI has established a stringent Code of Ethics¹ by which all AACP's are bound. Violation of the Code of Ethics, conviction of a

¹1. A paralegal shall not engage in the unauthorized practice of law.

2. A paralegal shall keep confidential any and all information, documents and other materials entrusted to him or her or acquired in some other way during the course of the legal representation of a client. The confidentiality shall be maintained before, during and after the legal representation unless the client has given consent or disclosure is required by law or by court order.

3. A paralegal shall avoid conflicts of interest and shall immediately disclose any potential conflicts of interest to his or her employer.

4. A paralegal shall ensure that his or her status as a paralegal is disclosed at the beginning of any professional relationship with the attorney, client, personnel of a court, or the personnel of an administrative agency.

5. A paralegal shall follow all provisions of the rules of professional conduct for a paralegal or legal assistant of the state in which he or she is employed. If no such specific code for paralegals exists, then a paralegal shall follow the attorney's code of ethics as it applies to paralegals within that state.

6. A paralegal shall maintain personal and professional integrity.

7. A paralegal shall attain a high degree of competency through education, training and experience.

felony or crime of moral turpitude, or engaging in the unauthorized practice of law are grounds for revocation of the AACP credential. To date, nine paralegals have achieved AACP certification.

Paralegal Education

AAPI's annual membership meeting, elections and Board meeting were held October 1, 2005. The Annual Seminar offered presentations on ethics, employment law, and immigration law. The program was approved for six hours of CLE by AAPI, the National Association of Legal Assistants, Inc. (NALA), and the National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA). The Annual Seminar and annual meetings are great opportunities for learning and networking with other legal professionals.

Attorney Education

AAPI is also striving to educate attorneys and law students about the paralegal profession and the importance of proper education for paralegals. Carolyn Saenz and Deborah McKinney recently published two articles, *How to Hire a Quality Paralegal* and *Do Paralegals Need to be Certified?* These articles address not only the importance of choosing a properly qualified paralegal based upon educational standards established by the American Bar Association and the American Association for Paralegal Education, but stress the importance of certification in general and voluntary certification in particular. The articles also offer tips for screening prospective paralegal applicants and update readers on current trends and developments on the cutting edge of the paralegal profession.

Taking Stands on Important Issues

8. A paralegal shall maintain a high degree of competency by engaging in continuing paralegal education on an annual basis.

In addition to establishing a Code of Ethics, AAPI has issued formal statements outlining its positions on various issues, including what a paralegal is²; the importance of paralegal education³; paralegal regulation⁴; and AAPI's missions and goals⁵. These bold statements serve not only to underscore the foundations and principles upon which AAPI was founded, but to offer guidance and direction, both for the organization and to general members of the legal profession.

AAPI continues to work hard to educate both paralegals and attorneys as to the role of professional paralegals, stressing the importance of proper training, education, and certification. AAPI strives to keep its members and general members of the legal profession abreast of current developments for paralegals through its website (www.aapipara.org); the publication of thought-provoking articles in various professional journals; and by presenting opportunities for networking and sponsoring CLE programs, such as those slated for its 2005 Annual Seminar and Meetings.

²A paralegal is a person qualified by education, training or work experience who performs specifically delegated substantive legal work for which a lawyer is ultimately responsible or who is authorized by administrative, statutory, or court authority to perform substantive legal work.

³The American Alliance of Paralegals, Inc. advocates a Bachelor's Degree that includes, or is combined with, a paralegal studies program for persons entering the profession. Members are encouraged to continue their education throughout their careers. It is recommended that they participate in no less than 9 hours of continuing education annually, including at least one hour of ethics.

⁴The American Alliance supports the regulation of paralegals and advocates the following components to be a part of any regulatory scheme: formal paralegal education, experience, continuing legal education and a Code of Ethics. Further, its members recognize that any regulatory scheme and its contents (preference for certification, licensure, registration, bar/court rules etc.) will vary in each jurisdiction. The American Alliance will be proactive in advocating the supporting regulation that enhances the growth of the paralegal profession and will assist any local paralegal organization by responding to regulatory activities within that organization's jurisdiction.

⁵The purpose of the American Alliance of Paralegals Inc. is to advance the paralegal profession by focusing on the individual paralegal. The goals and standards are to: · Establish minimum educational criteria; · Adhere to ethical standards; · Provide networking opportunities; · Create a resource center; and · Associate with national and local organizations.

Simply put, anything worth doing is worth doing well, and The American Alliance of Paralegals, Inc. is doing very well at moving and shaking the paralegal profession!