West Valley College offers a post-degree 35 semester unit certificate program for those students who already have an associate or higher degree. For those students who do not already have a degree, West Valley offers an Associate of Science degree in Paralegal. Students who earn the degree also qualify for the certificate.

**Benefits**

- A rigorous academic and practical education at affordable community college rates.
- Instruction in practical legal skills and substantive law emphasizing both civil litigation and legal research.
- Training in document preparation and law office management.
- Electives in a variety of legal specialties. Examples include Intellectual Property, Family Law, Elder Law, and Immigration Law.

The Program monitors the needs of the legal community to assure that our graduates have the skills and knowledge to meet those needs. All students get the benefits of a required hands-on internship from an approved employer of their choosing. The internship offers students the opportunity to test their education and training out in the field. To assure compliance with the law, many firms have set up systems to check and record the qualifications of current paralegals and future hires. A certificate from West Valley College is an assurance to employers that the paralegal is well prepared to provide quality legal services to his or her employers and clients.

**Objectives**

The primary goal of the Paralegal Program is to prepare students for positions as paralegals as a means of improving the accessibility, quality and affordability of legal services. West Valley's Paralegal Program is responsive to the needs of the State of California and contributes to the advancement of legal professionals.

**Students who successfully complete the Paralegal Program will be able to**

- Describe the American legal system.
- Describe the practice of law and the paralegal's role in the legal profession.
- Demonstrate the skills and knowledge needed to work in civil litigation.
- Demonstrate the skills and knowledge needed to do legal research.
- Demonstrate strong written and oral communication skills.
- Apply the ethical rules and regulations applicable to paralegals and other legal professionals to given situations.
- Demonstrate knowledge and abilities based on the balanced education they receive from the integration of general education, legal theory, and practical legal course work.
- Demonstrate skills needed to function in those areas of practice offered as electives by the program.

**Length of Program**

If you already have a degree (Associate degree or higher), you need only take the 13 required Paralegal courses and 6 units in Paralegal electives, (35 units)

Those who do not have a degree must take the required courses and the American Bar Association approved general education courses required to earn an A.S. degree. (25 units). Please see these courses in the course catalog (Catalog).

To determine whether your degree from another college or university is acceptable by the College, you should contact the Counseling Department at 408-741-2024.

How long it takes to complete the program is up to you. The program is designed for completion in 3 semesters if a student already has a degree and can attend full-time. Some students take less time by taking courses during summer sessions. However, many of our students take 3 or more years to complete the program because they are also working full-time and/or raising a family.

If you already have a degree and want to know how long it will take to complete the program, just calculate how many of the 15 paralegal courses you can take each semester. If you do not have a degree, you should consult with Counseling to create an education plan for both paralegal and general education courses.

**Cost of Program**

See information about the current cost of classes ([financial aid cost](/admissions/fee-schedule.html)).

Many courses require textbooks, and the costs can vary. For help with financial issues, contact Financial Aid at 408-741-2024.

**ABA Approved Paralegal Program Status**

West Valley's Paralegal Program has earned the approval of the American Bar Association. Approval by the ABA assures students and Bay Area employers that the program meets the requirements for paralegal education under California law (California Business & Professions Code section 6450 et seq.).

**Qualifications**

- A member of the American Association for Paralegal Education (AAPPE).
- A sustaining member of the Paralegal Association of Santa Clara County (PASCCO).
- Accredited through West Valley College by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.
- Approved by the American Bar Association (ABA).

A paralegal may perform the same functions as an attorney except those that only a licensed attorney may perform. Paralegals cannot give legal advice, appear in court, or otherwise engage in the unauthorized practice of law. The practice of law by non-attorneys is strictly prohibited by law. (See California Business and Professions Code Section 6450 et seq.).