

**MARION COUNTY  
LEGAL SUPPORT  
ASSOCIATION**



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# The Legal Pad

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## Recipe for Success



### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



**Happy New Year Everyone!**

WOW! MCLSA ended 2012 with a bang! We started December off by having our Holiday Social, which was beautifully decorated and themed "A Winter Wonderland". As usual, the food and the company were exceptional. Tina Blair, Donna DeNicola, and their committee did a fantastic job and a "thank you" to the office of Sims & Stakenborg for letting us use your office.

On December 14, several MCLSA members and family met with our "holiday family" at Golden Corral. It was nice to finally get the opportunity to meet them. There is nothing more gratifying than watching a child's face light up when unwrapping a gift. Make that two children!

What a wonderful way to end this year. Please look for Amy Phillip's report and pictures of the dinner in this issue of The Legal Pad. MCLSA also took to the streets...well, in front of grocery stores to be exact. Some MCLSA members volunteered to ring the bell for the Salvation Army, spread a little holiday cheer, and maybe belt out a holiday carol or two. Even our very own mascot, Alfred O. Sauce, got into the spirit of things. Picture pages are located in the Legal Pad.

But as great as 2012 was, MCLSA is ready to rock into the year 2013! We are going to kick off 2013 with our membership meeting on January 10 at the Elk's Club at 12:00 p.m. If you have not been able to join us before, we would love to see you. On Wednesday, January 16, Danielle Riggins will hold a seminar on "Pink Slipping: The Intricacies of Hiring & Firing." Rounding out January is the FALSS 3<sup>rd</sup> QMM being held in our State Capital, Tallahassee, on January 25 and 26. Registration forms are in this issue. Please also look for all of our upcoming events, such as the Friendship Luncheon, Heart Member of the Year, seminars etc... in The Legal Pad and email blasts - so much more to come for 2013.

On a personal note, after spending time with our "holiday family" and feeling their joy and warmth, to later feeling the sadness of the terrible tragedy in Connecticut and the lives that were so innocently taken away, I wondered what could I do every day to enrich someone's life and try to make my little piece of the world a better place. So I challenge all of you to spread a little joy to one person every day. Comment on the pretty new dress or that great haircut. Just one comment might make all the difference to someone. Maybe if we all work a little harder in trying to make a difference in the world, we will. I hope all of you have a joyous, healthy, prosperous New Year!

~ Jill A. Williams, 2012-2013 President



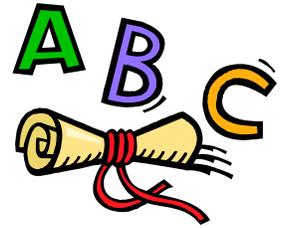
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# The ABC's of Paralegal Designations

By: Linda McGrath-Cruz, ACP FRP

When hiring paralegals for your practice, you need the right mix of education, experience, professionalism and personality. In Florida, no mandatory registration or certification program for paralegals exists, but paralegals can take wide variety of voluntary measures to improve their professional standing. So, how do you know if the paralegal you are interviewing is certified, certificated, registered, or none of the above?



## Certified Legal Assistant (“CLA”) and Certified Paralegal (“CP”)

The National Association of Legal Assistants/Paralegals (NALA) provides one of the most recognized certifications a paralegal can obtain. The CLA/CP program was established in 1976 to offer a nationwide designation for all paralegals. Paralegals who successfully complete the NALA CP exam may choose either the CLA or CP title.

The exam has been described as grueling by many and it is common for an examinee to need to re-take a section. The exam consists of five sections: communications (objective and essay); judgment and legal analysis (essay required); ethics; legal research and substantive law. The substantive law section includes one section on the American legal system plus four sections in practice areas selected from a list by examinees.

To sit for the CP exam, a paralegal must meet a specific combination of education and/or work experience requirements. The CLA/CP designation is awarded for a period of 5 years; to maintain their CP status, paralegals must submit 50 hours of CLE.

## Advanced Certified Paralegal (“ACP”)

Once a paralegal has achieved the CLA/CP designation, they have the option to continue their certification through NALA by obtaining an advanced certification.

The ACP courses focus on education and learning specific subject matter as opposed to testing. Each course is about 20 hours in length and actual completion time will be based on the paralegal's understanding of the material. Currently, a dozen different subjects are available, including discovery, trial practice, ADR, social security disability, trademarks and more.

Upon completion, the paralegal may use the ACP designation and are also awarded CLE credits.

## Florida Certified Paralegal (“FCP”)

A paralegal who has achieved the CLA/CP designation can also obtain the Florida Certified Paralegal designation. The FCP was established in 1980 by the Paralegal Association of Florida, Inc. to compliment NALA's CLA/CP program.

The FCP exam is a three hour in depth exam that covers Florida law. The test has two sections. The first covers ethics, civil procedure and Florida general law that includes Florida's court system as well as basic criminal law, property law, estate/probate law, family law and business law. The second covers the in-depth testing on your choice of real estate, probate law, business law, family law or criminal law.

The FCP designation is awarded for a period of 5 years, to maintain their FCP status, paralegals must submit 30 hours of CLE.

## Registered Paralegal (“RP”)

In 1996, the National Federation of Paralegal Associations, Inc. (NFPA) began offering the RP designation upon successful completion of the Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam (PACE). PACE consists of 200 multiple choice questions which covers tasks that paralegals may frequently perform. It is not restricted to a particular practice area or geographic location. The topics covered are: administration of client legal matters; development of client legal matters; factual and legal research; factual and legal writing and office administration.

To sit for PACE, a paralegal must meet a combination of education and work experience requirements. The RP designation is awarded for a period of 2 years, to maintain their RP status, paralegals must submit 12 hours of CLE.

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### Core Registered Paralegal (“CRP”)

In 2011, NFPA launched the Paralegal CORE Competency (PCC) Exam designed to test the core competencies of early-career and entry-level paralegals.

There are numerous options for eligibility to sit for the PCC exam as it is designed for individuals who may not have the education or work experience necessary to sit for other certification exams. The exam consists of 125 multiple choice questions and examinees are given 2 and ½ hours to complete it. Upon successful completion, the Core Registered Paralegal (CRP) designation is awarded. The CRP designation is awarded for a period of 2 years, to maintain their CRP status, paralegals must submit 8 hours of CLE.

### Florida Registered Paralegal (“FRP”)



In March 2008, the Florida Bar began accepting paralegal registrations. The Florida Registered Paralegal (FRP) program is not a certifying program, it is a voluntarily registration program. When it first began, paralegals could qualify to become an FRP by work experience alone under a grandfathering provision. That provision expired in March 2011 and is no longer an option. Paralegals must now possess either a CP or RP designation or a combination of education and work experience.

Like attorneys, registered paralegals must renew their membership on a yearly basis and submit 30 hours of CLE every reporting cycle.

### Professional Paralegal (“PP”)

In 2004 NALS ... the association for legal professionals created the Professional Paralegal designation.. The PP designation is awarded upon completion of a one day four-part examination which covers written communications; legal knowledge and skills; ethics and judgment skills and substantive law.



The PP designation is awarded for a period of 5 years, to maintain their PP status, paralegals must submit 75 hours of CLE.

### Graduates of Paralegal Education Programs



Paralegals have a variety of educational options; there are traditional associate degrees, bachelor degrees and even graduate level programs in paralegal studies. Paralegals that are looking for a faster option might choose a paralegal certificate program. Some paralegals mistakenly refer to themselves as a “Certified Paralegal” when in fact their “paralegal certificate” is simply proof of the completion of a paralegal training course. Also, fast track “certificate” programs do not qualify under the educational requirements of the Florida Bar for registration as an FRP and may not meet the qualifications of other certifying groups.

### Memberships

It is also important to keep in mind that individuals can be members of all of the organizations listed above – with the exception of The Florida Bar – without taking the certification/registration exam.

### The Bottom Line

As an attorney, you are ultimately responsible for your work product; however, you delegate many of your tasks to paralegals. You are constantly confronted with the challenges of providing quality legal services to your clients and you need to be assured that the paralegals you hire are educated and qualified to assist you. Paralegals who have taken the steps to demonstrate their commitment to the paralegal profession and have met the high professional standards of groups such as The Florida Bar and NALA have significant value. They demonstrate that they met the standards of paralegal competency, and that they know and understand their ethical duties and limitations under the unauthorized practice of law statutes.

Although registration and certification are voluntary, they provide you with a benchmark for hiring practices. I hope that this article will give you a better understanding of the variety of options available when adding new paralegals to your staff; and that you will consider supporting existing staff in gaining certification or registration to further enhance your firms professional profile.

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