

Last April, Sue Sullivan, director of the legal assistant program at the University of San Diego, and I joined eight legal assistants from all over the country at NFPA Headquarters to begin developing the PACE Exam. It was a pleasure to get to know the other participants. The legal assistants came from all types of paralegal positions (corporate, private, and public) and had a wide range of experience. By the end of the three days of being sequestered to work on the exam, I felt as if we'd been through boot camp together.

Our taskmasters, Pat Jones of Professional Examination Service and Diane Gallo, past president of NFPA, explained that our task was to delineate the role of the experienced paralegal through a nominal group process. We were to identify the major and specific work activities that experienced paralegals perform.

First, we were to identify major performance domains. In plain English, that meant we were to identify what experienced paralegals do or what responsibilities they have. We were cautious in our deliberations to make sure our performance domains did not reflect only the tasks of litigation paralegals (or any other specialty area) paralegals but that the domains reflected the activities of paralegals across all work areas. After papering the walls in easel paper, we found all of our contributions boiled down to five performance domains:

1. Administration of the client's legal matter
2. Development of the client's legal matter
3. Factual and legal research
4. Factual and legal writing
5. Office administration

Second, we worked to identify what tasks the experienced paralegal performs within each of the five domains. We had to identify what was done, to whom or for whom it was done, why it was done, and how it was done. Next, we had to analyze each of these tasks to identify what knowledge was needed to perform the task and, finally, what skills were necessary to perform the task. It took us two days to accomplish these three steps. We spent the final day reviewing and polishing our work and rating each experienced paralegal task for its importance and its potential for harm if not done properly.

As a paralegal educator, the experience was very satisfying in that it verified that I really do know what paralegals have to know and be able to do. The process of how one goes about developing such a test was also very interesting.

Even though the food at NFPA Headquarters was great, our final words to each other as we left were, "Let's not do this again." Three days of grueling mental work were exhausting. Of course, when NFPA called this summer and asked if I'd join a team to work on developing actual test questions, I forgot my resolve and spent another weekend of lovely weather sequestered at NFPA Headquarters. But the food was great, and the company was superb.

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