

Students' On-the-Job-Training Performance of AB Paralegal Studies

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Abstract

Assessment of students' performance in the workplace is an important input to the curriculum developers and educators to strengthen the program of study and to meet the demands of the industries in providing qualified workforce. This study aimed to present the performance of Paralegal students in their practicum sites. Descriptive type of research was utilized in the study. Practicum students for the school years 2010 to 2012 have performed relatively well in their practicum. Though not perfect at the inception, their performance rating signifies that they excelled in terms of Personal Characteristics, Competence, Attitude towards the Job, Job Performance and Adherence to Company Policies.

Keywords: Internship, On-the-Job Training, Paralegal Studies, Student Performance

INTRODUCTION

A changing economic climate, emerging technologies and a global legal market have transformed the legal industry. In response to evolving market demands, paralegal educators and law firm managers are adapting school programs, continuing legal education courses and training policies to better prepare today's paralegals for success in the workforce and in their careers (Kane, 2009). Allowing the graduating students to apply what they have learned from books in a work environment would develop their work values and attitude necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of education to produce efficient and effective leaders and professionals in cross-cultural and multidisciplinary undertakings (Laguador, 2013a).

The paralegal profession has been one of the fastest growing professions in the United States for years. It traditionally offers stable income and good benefits, as well as job satisfaction and professional recognition to individuals who are unable or uninterested in investing the time and financial resources needed to attend law school or pursue other professional careers (Gierke, 2009).

Those interested in paralegal work in law firms and corporate legal departments all face the same challenge in their search for employment: How to get started and obtain the initial legal background and skill set necessary to secure a position in a job market which, despite its comparative abundance of openings and opportunities, is highly competitive. In this context, assessing the value and necessity of a paralegal degree or certificate is important. These

degrees and certificates, whether associate, bachelor's or even master's degrees in paralegal studies, are offered by a number of educational institutions around the country, ranging from 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities to vocational training schools and online service providers. However, not all educational programs are of the same caliber, and not all are suitable options for everyone (Gierke, 2009).

In a speech delivered by former Justice of the Supreme Court, Jose C. Vitug, he stated that "the paralegal will play an important role, and inevitably soon, an indispensable role in the area of law and the justice system. The paralegal practice is indeed a distinct occupation no less than that of the legal profession."

The paralegal system is not a new idea in the Philippines. As far back as can be remembered, the bigger law firms have been hiring paralegals or non-lawyer legal assistants not only to minimize personal expenses but also to afford these law firms the opportunity to lighten the workload of their partners and assistants who are full-fledged lawyers, as well as that of the law firm itself.

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With the institutionalization of paralegal practice in the country brought about by the implementation of Republic Act (R.A.) 9285, otherwise known as the Alternative Dispute Resolution Act of 2004, which requires not only lawyers, but even paralegals to act as conciliator, arbitrator or mediator in appropriate legal issues, the resolution of cases before the judicial, quasi-judicial and administrative offices will be expedited.

This recent development in the paralegal system means that the paralegal or paralegal service is now a new addition to the Philippine dictionary of occupational titles. It is a welcome addition to the justice system and to the practice of law. As a profession, the paralegal can help fill in the gap in public service at a time when many government offices are starving for lawyers. Society will then be served by the experienced and purposeful paralegal, the new professional in the administration of justice.

On the Job Training (OJT) is one of the mechanics of Higher Education industries in developing the needed competencies of its graduates. Its goals and objectives served as a guide in developing the needed competencies for a particular job, and translating the training into a gainful working experience (Ylagan, 2013). Lyceum of the Philippines University educate and train students to be competitive by providing them with applied learning opportunities that require talented workers and rank among the best in the world in terms of productivity, career, attitude and technical skills (Felicen et al., 2014).

Investment in human capital occurs via formal training in a structured training environment or can be informal, on-the-job training. In addition, OJT can also be categorized according to the content as general or company-specific training (Zeytinoglu, 2009). Training of students from Paralegal studies program is necessary to get them informed of their future environment and they will also acquire problem solving skills related to their field.

With the advent of the implementation of R.A. 9285 and the growing need for competent paralegal professionals both in the government and private sectors, the proponent of this

research endeavored to assess the relevance of the practicum activities to the Paralegal course of the Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU) with the ultimate objective of determining whether or not its graduates are equipped with adequate competencies when they join paralegal professionals from other schools, thus ensuring higher rate of employability of its Paralegal graduates.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to present the performance of Paralegal students in their practicum sites; to identify the relevance of practicum tasks vis-à-vis the Paralegal curriculum; and to prepare an action plan to achieve relevance of practicum experiences and activities to said curriculum.

METHOD

Quantitative Method was used in presenting the over-all performance of Paralegal students. The weighted mean of the indicators of over-all performance, such as Personal Characteristics, Attitude toward the Job, Job Performance, Adherence to Company Policies and Competence were measured and ranked according to importance and priority.

Archival Research method was employed in examining the documents of eleven (11) Paralegal students who have completed the required numbers of practicum hours for school years 2010 to 2012. These documents include the (1) Student Over-All Performance Rating Report; and (2) Student's Weekly Practicum Report.

The retrieval of the above-mentioned documents was made with ease and convenience since the proponent of this research has been the Practicum Coordinator for six (6) consecutive school years (2010-2012) and has since then the custodian of practicum-related documents. Additionally, she has been teaching major course subjects of the Paralegal Studies of the LPU. To lend more credence to the reports submitted by practicum students, written interviews made by the proponent, as well as the narrative reports submitted by them at the end of each semester were likewise retrieved from the Department of Paralegal Studies and utilized as supplemental documents for the purpose of this action research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, personal characteristics generated the highest mean of 4.36. This means that practicum students dressed neatly and appropriately for office work, made sure that they exuded pleasing personality, are cheerful and good-humored, possessed above average oral and written communication skills, projected self-confidence and enthusiasm at work and demonstrated leadership potentials.

Table I
Performance of Paralegal Students in their Practicum Sites

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Personal Characteristics	4.36	Very Good	1
Attitude Towards the Job	4.04	Very Good	3
Job Performance	4.01	Very Good	4
Adherence to Company Policies	3.67	Very Good	5
Competence	4.21	Very Good	2
Over-all Performance Rating	4.06	Very Good	

Competence is another indicator which obtained a weighted mean of 4.21 and ranked as the second highest preference of practicum students. The same is a manifestation that they showed mastery of generally accepted management principles as applied to various office situations, that they demonstrated adequate knowledge in performing tasks assigned to them and exhibited ability to perform routine office procedures in the practicum sites.

Attitude towards the job generates a weighted mean of 4.04, this indicator ranked third among the five (5) indicators of the over-all performance score. From this, it can be inferred that practicum students displayed a marked interest and pride in their responsibilities and demonstrated an exceptional sense of duty and can always be depended upon to do a satisfactory job. They also cooperated willingly and adapted easily to other groups in their practicum sites. They recognized authority and responsibilities to their superiors and provided them with the needed support services and assistance required or sought in their tasks.

Another indicator for the over-all performance rating of practicum students is job performance, which yielded a mean score of 4.01. This indicator signified that practicum students were able to promptly deliver assigned tasks and responsibilities with an acceptable level of quality, performed them with minimal supervision and exhibited the ability to function well even under pressure.

Adherence to company policies is another indicator which also obtained a Very Good verbal interpretation as denoted by the weighted mean score of 3.67, it occupied the fifth rank among the five indicators. Competence at the practicum sites signifies that the students were present at work most of the time and comes to work on time. This demonstrates that as neophytes in the working environment, practicum students have not yet imbibed the proper work ethic that a true professional should possess. This is explained by the fact that practicum students' brief stay in the practicum sites did not provide them with adequate time to strictly adhere to the exacting standards and policies implemented therein. Though problems were encountered on the area of specialization where they are placed; still students confirmed that OJT is a meaningful work-related learning exposures (Ylagan, 2013).

Developing positive mental attitude of the students in the early years of college would provide them greater opportunity as they step-up to higher level of studies to broaden the scope of their responsibility and maturity to be more confident and independent (Laguador, 2013b) in their respective workplace after college.

Table 2

Relevance of Practicum Tasks to the Paralegal Studies Curriculum

Practicum Tasks	Relevant	Not Relevant
1. Legal research	✓	
2. Preparing court subpoenas	✓	
3. Attending court proceedings	✓	
4. Sorting of files	✓	
5. Court case docketing	✓	
6. Issuance of lockers		✓
7. Preparing gate passes		✓
8. Issuance of gate passes	✓	
9. Attending Congress committee hearings	✓	
10. Reading bills in Congress	✓	
11. Following up status of bills in Congress	✓	

Table 2 shows the tasks performed by practicum studies and the relevance of such tasks to their course and curriculum. It must be noticed that out of the eleven (11) tasks and responsibilities assigned to them, only the Issuance of Lockers and Preparing Gate Passes are not relevant to the curriculum of Paralegal Studies. These tasks are very routine does not require the skills and knowledge gained by practicum students in the classroom. Thus, routine duties such as these are deemed not relevant.

Legal research which is the most common task assigned to practicum students is commensurate with the curriculum and major subjects taken by them before they were deployed in the sites. The substance of the law, as well as the doctrines enunciated in the Supreme Court decisions assigned to the practicum students for evaluation and assessment are taken up during the last four (4) academic semesters.

Preparing court subpoenas, attending court hearings, case docketing, sorting of files are tasks where practicum students were exposed to actual court proceedings, thus enabling them to distinguish theory from practice. They are therefore relevant and meaningful to the Paralegal

Studies curriculum. Legal Procedures, such as Civil Procedure, Special Proceedings, Evidence and Criminal Procedure are major subjects taken during the fourth (4th) academic year of Paralegal students.

Attendance of congressional committee hearing, reading bills and updating their status in congress are responsibilities which are deemed useful to the Paralegal Studies curriculum, for the reason that practicum students are required to have basic knowledge about the proceedings in the legislative department, specially the lawmaking process. These activities are thus relevant to the Paralegal curriculum.

With the above-stated assessment on practicum tasks, it is deemed important for practicum students to have experiences which will properly equip them with the adequate knowledge and skills which are suitable to their course. The practicum sites are appropriate environments where students can work independently, apply the theories and principles gained inside the classroom and ultimately prepare them to be Paralegal professionals who are also considered as indispensable partners of the justice system in the speedy disposition of cases.

It is the goal of the LPU-Batangas to encourage students to pursue their highest standard of scholarship and help them assume responsibility for developing and achieving their own goals and objectives. Demonstration of the specific professional entry level competencies is thus expected of the students. The curriculum should be designed to prepare the graduates as such (Valdez, 2010).

Table 3. Action Plan

Objectives	Activities	Output
1. To recommend a listing of proposed practicum sites which are suitable to the students' academic background and course.	1. Evaluation of the list of practicum sites submitted by Paralegal Studies professors for the purpose of determining the suitability of said sites to the course of practicum students one (1) month before the commencement of the on-the-job training.	1. Short-listed practicum sites to be submitted to the Dean, upon the recommendation of the Department Chairman of the Paralegal Studies.
2. To orient the students of the company policies of the approved practicum sites and basic work ethic.	2. Orientation seminar of practicum students before the Department Chairman of the Paralegal Studies and Practicum Coordinator a week prior to their deployment to the approved practicum sites.	2. Certification that the practicum students have attended the briefing conference. No student would be allowed to work at the practicum sites without this prior conference.
3. To revise the	3. Curriculum evaluation participated by the Dean, Department Chairman, professors	3. Revised curriculum for Paralegal Studies,

Paralegal Curriculum	Studies	and representatives of each year level of the Paralegal Studies	upon approval of the concerned school administrators.
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Learning takes place in different avenues and forms of human existence. Formal education from academic institutions is basically the proper venue for acquiring appropriate knowledge and skills necessary for future employment (Laguador, 2013a).

The Action Plan laid out in Table 3 shows the immediate need of the Department of Paralegal Studies to meticulously evaluate the recommended practicum sites in order to achieve the ultimate objective of this study to produce graduates who are better equipped with adequate competencies when they join the Paralegal professionals who come from other academic institutions.

The real wealth of the nation is not in its natural resources, but in its youth. A nation makes no greater investment than that made toward the upbringing of its younger age band. The youth constitutes the most vivacious, energetic, and prolific segment of the humanity, they are therefore without any elusiveness, key stakeholders in any nation (Malaluan et al, 2014). Therefore, academic institutions must take good care of the youth and develop them to the best potential that they can.

In order that students would improve in their over-all performance in the practicum sites, seminar on the improvement of attitude during the orientation before deployment (Felicen, Ylagan & Buted) may be conducted. This would be wise and practical, for the reason that they will at least have a background of the sites where they will work in the interim.

To achieve this aim, the Department of Paralegal Studies would require the submission of the Mission-Vision Statement, as well the guiding principles, employee rules and regulations of the approved practicum sites, and furnish the students with such documents, so they will be properly oriented about the company where they will be trained. This is a kind of immersion for the practicum students so that they will improve in their performance, more specially in terms of adherence to company policies, an indicator where the practicum students did not place much preference or priority as can be gleaned from previous records.

The development of an effective curriculum guide is a multi-step, ongoing and cyclical process. The process progresses from evaluating the existing program, to designing an improved program, to implementing a new program and back to evaluating the revised program (Valdez et al, 2012). Another plan which the proponent wishes to undertake is the Evaluation of the Present Paralegal Studies Curriculum. It must be remembered that in the recent years, the

subjects offered for the Foreign Service course were also offered to the Paralegal Studies. Since there are Foreign Service subjects that were carried over, but are not pertinent to the Paralegal Studies, there must be a proper forum where the curriculum of the latter would be properly assessed for the purpose of aligning the subjects deemed relevant, necessary, practical and beneficial to the students of Paralegal subjects. To accomplish this objective, the Department Chairman would have to solicit the suggestions of Paralegal professors and representatives of each academic year level. This activity is in line with the main objective of this study to prepare students for a paralegal profession brought about by the institutionalization of paralegal practice, to give them a mark of superiority and excellence in this area of specialization which has now become one of the occupational titles in this country.

CONCLUSIONS

Practicum students for the school years 2010 to 2012 have performed relatively well in their practicum. Though not perfect at the inception, their performance rating signifies that they excelled in terms of Personal Characteristics, Competence, Attitude towards the Job, Job Performance and Adherence to Company Policies. The tasks performed by practicum students are relevant to their curriculum although room for improvement may be corrected by proper orientation and coordination between and among the Department Chairman, professors and students. Practicum students demonstrated competence and readiness to enter the paralegal profession.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended the implementation of the proposed action plan, which includes evaluation of submitted list of practicum sites from professors of Paralegal Studies, orientation seminar of students prior to their deployment in the practicum sites and alignment of the curriculum for Paralegal Studies after proper evaluation and approval by proper school authorities.

Invitation of representatives from practicum sites during the orientation seminar of practicum students. This can be undertaken in the Law Office Management which an adjunct of the Practicum Training of Paralegal Studies. There should be a separation of Paralegal Students taking up Principles of Management from students of other courses so that the focus and orientation of basic theories would be aligned with the Paralegal curriculum. Subject to the approval of the Department, the deletion of Foreign Service subjects which were carried over to the Paralegal curriculum and which are not useful to the paralegal profession. There should be a formation of committee for the review of the Paralegal curriculum and updating of reading materials, such as books, magazines, journals and other references.

Creation of a brochure made specifically for the Paralegal Studies program in the Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU- Batangas). There should be a massive marketing and enrollment campaign, involving Paralegal students and professors and application of this action research to other programs in the LPU in order to achieve similar objectives.

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