Proposal Date: 10/31/13

**University College**

**School of Professional Studies**

**Proposal to Create a New Major Program**

**(Action Item)**

Contact Person: Julie Shadoan, julie.shadoan@wku.edu, (270) 780-2539

1. **Identification of program:**
	1. Program Title: Paralegal Studies
	2. Degree type: Bachelor of Arts
	3. Classification of Instructional program Code (CIP): 22.0302
	4. Required hours in proposed major program: 60
	5. Special information: N/A
	6. Program admission requirements: Students must earn a “C” or above in PLS 190C or equivalent course, and must have a minimum overall GPA of 2.0.
	7. Catalog description:

Paralegals, also called Legal Assistants, work with lawyers in a wide range of professional settings and perform tasks that include legal research, legal writing and document preparation, information gathering, litigation support, legal technology support, and office management.

**Paralegals shall not engage in the unauthorized practice of law as proscribed by Kentucky law and the Supreme Court Rules (SCR 3.130 [5.5]) and must be appropriately supervised by a lawyer to ensure the paralegal’s conduct is compatible with the professional and ethical standards of the practice (SCR 3.130 [5.3]).**

The objectives of the Paralegal Studies Program are: (1) to create, implement, and maintain a strong, flexible program directed to the quality education of occupationally-competent paralegals; (2) to provide a paralegal education program that leads to employment of its graduates by a wide range of employers; (3) to provide paralegals with a well-rounded, balanced education founded on a beneficial mix of general education, theory, and practical courses stressing understanding and reasoning rather than rote learning of facts; (4) to support federal, Kentucky and local Rules of Procedure and general principles of ethical legal practice, professional responsibility, the prohibitions against the unauthorized practice of law by non-lawyers, and the use and supervision of paralegals by lawyers; (5) to provide an educational program that is responsive to the varied needs of the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the region and contributes to the overall advancement of the legal profession; (6) to provide a program which instills respect for the legal profession and its foundations, institutions, and quest for justice; and, (7) to maintain equality of opportunity in the educational program without discrimination or segregation on the grounds of race, color, religion,

natural origin, gender, age, disability or economic need.

Credits from other accredited institutions of higher education may be transferred and applied toward the degree. An official transcript from each such college or university attended is required as a part of the admission process. Postsecondary credit will be evaluated on a course-by-course basis for acceptance and applicability to the Program.

General law and legal-specialty course credits will be accepted only from paralegal programs approved by the American Bar Association or programs in substantial compliance with the ABA guidelines.

The Paralegal Major (PLS) is designed to provide students with an interdisciplinary educational experience integrating knowledge and skills from multiple subjects including law, history, sociology, political science, technology and business. The PLS degree requires 120 credit hours and leads to a Bachelor of Arts degree. Degrees will be awarded to those students who complete all requirements with an overall grade point average of 2.0 (out of 4.0) and receive a grade of “C” or better in all legal specialty courses.

Legal Specialty/Political Science Core Requirements to be completed by all PLS majors are:

 PLS 190C: Introduction to Paralegal Profession 3

 PLS 194C: Legal Technology 3

 PLS 200C: Legal Ethics 3

 PLS 250C: Research/Writing I 3

 PLS 283C: Real Estate Law 3

 PLS 291C: Criminal Law and Procedure 3

 PLS 296C: Family Law 3

 PS 326: Constitutional Law 3

 PLS 393C: Civil Procedure 3

 PLS 450C: Research/Writing II 3

 PLS 499C: Internship 3 33 hours

Legal Specialty Electives available to all PLS majors are: (choice of five)

 PLS 280: Contract Law 3

 PLS 282: Tort Law 3

 PLS 294: Admin. Law and Procedure 3

 PLS 350: Evidence 3

 PLS 360: Debtor/Creditor Relations 3

 PLS 381: Mediation 3

 PLS 392: Corporate Law 3

 PLS 395: Estate Planning and Procedure 3 15 hours (12 upper)

Electives available to all PS majors are: (choice of four)

 BUS 201C: Organization and Management 3

 BUS 254C: Office Administration 3

 SOCL 330: Criminology 3

 SOCL 332: Juvenile Delinquency 3

 SOCL 380: Penology 3

 PS 304: State Government 3

 PS 311: Public Policy 3

 PS 316: Legislative Process 3

 PS 412: KY Gov./Politics 3

 HIST 445: Amer. Legal History 3

 HIST 446: Amer. Legal History 3 12 hours (9 upper)

(NOTE: Because a companion associate’s degree in paralegal studies currently exists, the catalog descriptions will be merged to avoid redundancy.)

1. **Rationale:**
	1. Reason for developing the proposed major program: According to data published by the BLS, the job outlook for paralegals and legal assistants is expected to grow more than average, at about 18.3%, which growth is much more than that expected of the lawyer profession.\* U.S News has ranked the paralegal profession in the top twenty-five of best social service jobs.\*\* Forbes magazine has published the rankings by Career Cast for the most underrated jobs in the U.S., and paralegal has been in the top ten for the last three years.\*\*\* An associate’s degree is considered an entry-level educational requirement; however, market demands are proving certification and advance degrees are preferred by many employers. With these rankings and trends in mind, current students and alumni of the PLS program are surveyed bi-annually as to job preparedness and need for continuing education. In addition, the Program Director consults with an external Advisory Board comprised of community leaders and legal practitioners. As a result of data and recommendations garnered from these sources, overwhelming support and demand exists for a four-year degree option.
	2. Projected enrollment in the proposed major program: 10-15 annually based on current student and alumni surveys and market demand.
	3. Relationship of the proposed major program to other programs now offered by the department: The School of Professional Studies (University College) currently offers an associate’s degree in paralegal studies. No other similar program exists within the School.
	4. Relationship of the proposed major program to other university programs: The School of Professional Studies has negotiated a two plus two articulation agreement with the Department of Political Science (Potter College) which seamlessly incorporates the associate’s degree in paralegal studies into a four-year political science major/criminology minor. The criminology minor offered in the Department of Sociology (Potter College) includes various courses relevant to the criminal justice system, some of which are being proposed as electives in this major. The Department of History (Potter College) offers a legal studies minor that focuses on theoretical frameworks and historical perspectives of law and justice; while the proposed paralegal major incorporates elements of theory and history but focuses on knowledge and skills requisite for immediate employment in the legal field.
	5. Relationship of the proposed major program to similar programs offered elsewhere in Kentucky and in other states (including programs at benchmark institutions): Many paralegal programs approved by the American Bar Association across the country offer an associate’s and bachelor’s degree option as this is becoming the market standard as stated above. In Kentucky, Eastern Kentucky University, University of Louisville, Sullivan University and Morehead State University offer a bachelor’s degree option in paralegal/legal studies with similar curricular requirements. Locally, Daymar College offers an associate’s degree in paralegal studies, but the local campus has not been approved by the American Bar Association. Vol State in Hendersonville, Tennessee, offers a traditional associate’s degree in paralegal studies, and Kaplan Career Institute in Nashville, Tennessee, offers a seventy-two week associate’s degree and a 52 week certificate – all of which are approved by the ABA. No competing four-year program exists in the Nashville area.
	6. Relationship of the proposed major program to the university mission and objectives: The proposed major incorporates the University mission by providing students practical knowledge and skills in an efficient and effective manner adequately preparing them for the competitive job market. It will also serve to involve students in the identification of the legal needs of diverse populations and to develop and implement legal service outlets to meet those needs in measurable and meaningful ways.
2. **Objectives of the proposed major program:** The objectives of the proposed major are:

•to create, implement, and maintain a strong, flexible program directed to the quality education of occupationally-competent paralegals;

•to provide a paralegal education program that leads to employment of its graduates by a wide range of employers;

•to provide paralegals with a well-rounded, balanced education founded on a beneficial mix of general education, theory, and practical courses stressing understanding and reasoning rather than rote learning of facts;

•to support federal, Kentucky and local Rules of Procedure and general principles of ethical legal practice, professional responsibility, the prohibitions against the unauthorized practice of law by non-lawyers, and the use and supervision of paralegals by lawyers;

•to provide an educational program that is responsive to the varied needs of the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the region and contributes to the overall advancement of the legal profession;

•to provide a program which instills respect for the legal profession and its foundations, institutions, and quest for justice; and,

•to maintain equality of opportunity in the educational program without discrimination or segregation on the grounds of race, color, religion,

natural origin, gender, age, disability or economic need.

1. **Program Description:**
	1. Curriculum: The proposed curriculum includes:

Legal Specialty/Political Science Core Requirements to be completed by all PLS majors are:

 PLS 190C: Introduction to Paralegal Profession 3

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 PLS 200C: Legal Ethics 3

 PLS 250C: Research/Writing I 3

 PLS 283C: Real Estate Law 3

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 PLS 392: Corporate Law 3

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Electives available to all PS majors are: (choice of four)

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 PS 412: KY Gov./Politics 3

 HIST 445: Amer. Legal History 3

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 4.2 Accreditation, certification, approval and/or licensure: The proposed major is eligible for approval by the American Bar Association, which approval will be pursued upon completion of the WKU and state curriculum/program processes.

 4.3 Program delivery: The proposed major will be delivered via a combination of face-to-face courses, hybrid courses (60% face-to-face, 40% online), IVS courses and online (100% online) courses.

1. **Resources:**
	1. Faculty: Two existing FT faculty, one of which was hired in 2012 for the express purpose of increasing program options, are sufficient to support the new major.
	2. Technological and electronic informational resources (e.g., databases, e-journals): The physical space to be utilized by the major includes one computer lab and one IVS classroom which are sufficient to support the technology needs of the new major. In addition, the existing PLS Program provides access to WestlawNext™, an online database of primary and secondary legal resources at the state and federal level sufficient to support the research needs of students. The University provides free access to a similar database – Lexis® Research System - on a much more limited scale.
	3. Facilities and equipment: As stated in §5.2, current resources are adequate.
2. **Proposed term for implementation:** Fall 2014
3. **Dates of prior committee approvals:**

Department of Professional Studies: May 8, 2013

 University College Curriculum Committee November 11, 2013

 Professional Education Council (if applicable) N/A

 General Education Committee (if applicable) N/A

 Undergraduate Curriculum Committee \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 University Senate \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics ([www.bls.gov/ooh/legal/print/paralegals-and-the-legal-assistants.htm](http://www.bls.gov/ooh/legal/print/paralegals-and-the-legal-assistants.htm))

\*\*U.S. News ([www.money.usnews.com/careers/best-jobs/paralegal](http://www.money.usnews.com/careers/best-jobs/paralegal))

\*\*\*Forbes ([www.forbes.com/pictures/mkl45mehd/7-legal-assistant-5](http://www.forbes.com/pictures/mkl45mehd/7-legal-assistant-5): [www.forbes.com/pictures/mkl45hjje/7-legal-assistant-4](http://www.forbes.com/pictures/mkl45hjje/7-legal-assistant-4); [www.forbes.com/pictures/mkl45efde/1-paralegallegal-assistant](http://www.forbes.com/pictures/mkl45efde/1-paralegallegal-assistant))