

GRADUATING STUDENTS: BRIDGING THE GAP FROM A STUDENT TO A PROFESSIONAL



Congratulations on your upcoming graduation! For many of you, you will be embarking on your first entry-level position. There are many important things that you need to consider to successfully make the transition from being a BCC student to a working professional. Depending on how well you are able to make this transition, it will impact the level of career success you have at a workplace and in general, your career and personal growth. The following information will help you in making your transition a successful one!

Before beginning to write/finalize your resume or scheduling interviews, think critically and evaluate the *meaning of your experiences*. Be prepared to effectively communicate your *out-of-class experiences* to employers such as *internships* and show its significance to you and the organization/company that you served. In order for employers to be impressed with you and be able to see you as part of their team, there are several things that you need to consider:



Acknowledge the fact that your experience counts! Whether you held work-study positions on-campus, volunteered at your local community center, or worked for your family's business, to an employer *experience is experience*. Meaning, if you have worked at a workplace and have learned skills, especially transferable skills, *it is experience that counts*. If you "think yourself as 'just' an intern, 'only' a volunteer and express this attitude in words and writing, employers tend to see you in this light as well." Also, as the old saying goes, believe in yourself. If you do not, no one else will.

Convey what you have learned as well as what you did in your job, internship, or activity. Even if you did not perform all the duties you expected, you most likely learned relevant skills and gained critical information, either directly or indirectly, pertinent to your field. For example, if you observed proceedings that happened in a family court or sat in an office meeting which discussed office budgetary plans and re-organization, important information was discussed which increased your knowledge and skill in these areas. It is important to convey this knowledge, especially if you are applying for a position that involves performing similar functions. Even if you do not have extensive knowledge in a field, having basic knowledge in a career area can help employers see you as a future colleague.

Quantify your numbers whenever appropriate. Do not forget to incorporate numbers in your answers to create a vivid picture of your experiences and let employers know how much you have accomplished. Also, remember to incorporate numbers on your resume. For instance, communicate the ten employees you trained in office procedures and policies or the \$5,000 dollars you helped an organization save by correcting accounting discrepancies. Remember, "larger numbers can suggest intensity or effort, diligence, and a level of accomplishment" to an employer.



Take credit for your contributions. Think what value and/or contribution you brought to your workplace and "how did your actions and tasks contribute to the mission of the organization." Do not hesitate or be shy of explicitly communicating your contributions to a workplace, regardless of how big or small your part was there. Use "the inclusive 'we' when discussing your role in meeting or surpassing organizational goals." Choose your words wisely and try to portray a positive picture of yourself as a vital contributor and team player. Employers usually prefer people who can work well in a team!

For more information, please visit the Career Development Office in Loew Hall room 319/328 or call (718) 289-5908/5912. The office is open Monday-Thursday, 9:00AM-5:00PM, Fridays, 9:00-1:00PM. The office will be open during the summer, but call for a summer hours schedule. **Students are seen on a walk-in basis or by appointment.** The office has a Career Resource Library with printed and visual materials on various career development topics, career and personality assessments, employment positions, and can assist you with the interviewing and job search process, among other services.

CAREERS AS PARALEGALS AND LEGAL ASSISTANTS



Paralegals and legal assistants typically assist lawyers with a *variety of legal responsibilities* such as preparing closings, hearings, trials, and corporate meetings. They also assist lawyers with drafting contracts, mortgages, separation agreements, and trust instruments by researching legal precedent, investigating facts, or preparing legal documents. They investigate the facts of cases and ensure that all relevant information is considered.

After the information is thoroughly organized and analyzed, paralegals may prepare written reports to present to an attorney on how a particular case should be handled. If an attorney decides to file a law suit on behalf of a client, aside from preparing legal documents, paralegals may also prepare draft pleadings and motions to be filed with the court, obtain affidavits, and assist the attorney during trials. Paralegals also organize and track files regarding important case documents and have them available when the attorney needs it. They also may assist with preparing income tax returns, planning estates, and coordinating the work of employees in other law offices/firms, and maintaining financial office records. A paralegal can perform the duties that usually an attorney performs, but can not set-up legal fees, give legal advice, and present cases in court. Duties vary widely depending on the type of organization in which paralegals are employed.

People aspiring to become paralegals usually have interests in the *Enterprising* field, which usually require people to begin and carryout specific projects that can involve leading people and making many decisions. There is a level of risk-taking that can be involved, in order to make decisions, and often deal with business.

Skills that are usually required for this field include reading comprehension, time management, active listening, writing, speaking, and active learning. Being able to understand written sentences and paragraphs related to work documents, managing time effectively, listening and understanding what other people are saying, not interrupting at inappropriate times, and asking questions as needed, and overall, communicating effectively in writing and verbally, and “understanding the implications of new information for both current and future problem-solving and decision-making” are skills that are needed for this field.

People should have *knowledge* of the English language, law and government, clerical procedures, knowledge of computer and electronics, customer and personal services, administrative and management principles, and personnel and human resources.

People looking to enter this field should either have an *associate’s degree*, training in a vocational school or on-the-job experience. Some employers may require candidates to have a bachelor’s degree.

Employment for paralegals and legal assistants is “projected to grow much faster than average for all occupations through 2014.” Private law firms will continue to employ most paralegals, but other organizations such as “corporate legal departments, insurance companies, real estate and title insurance firms, and banks” will also continue to *hire* paralegals.

Salaries of paralegals vary and depend on factors such as education, training, experience, and type and size of employer. For example, the median annual earnings in May 2004 for people employed in Federal Government was \$59,370, Local Government, \$38,260, Legal Services, \$37,870, and State Government, \$34,910.



Please visit the Career Resource Library in the Career Development Office or see a career services professional for more information on this exciting field! Do not forget to visit us at: www.bcc.cuny.edu/CareerDevelopmentOffice/careerdevelopmenthome.htm

CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES TO THE CLASS OF 2006! To the BCC Community, have a happy, healthy, and safe summer! !

Information on pages one and two is derived from the Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2006-2007 Edition, CareerZone, and the article “From Student To Professional,” Marianne E. Green (Job Choices for Business and Liberal Arts Students, 2006)