



North Carolina Paralegal Association, Inc. Winter 2007

# Forum



*noun* [C]; *fôr-əm*  
an occasion or a place for talking about a matter of public interest

# NCPA

## Strengthen Our Association: *Volunteer*



The NCPA is an  
Affiliate Member  
of the  
National Association  
of Legal Assistants, Inc.

### IN THIS ISSUE

- The Benefits of Volunteering with NCPA*
- Call to Action: Nominations and Elections*
- Master Plan*



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submitted.



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*Moving?* Be sure to let us know!

Send both your old and new address information to:

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## President's Message

**Kaye H. Summers, CLA, NCCP**



Wow! It is hard to believe that it is already November and my year as President is more than half over. Our Mid-Year Seminar and CLA Review Course were held at the Broyhill Inn and Conference Center in Boone on September 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>. The Review Course went smoothly and we had a lot of good comments from the paralegals attending the class. The seminar was well attended again this year. I would like to thank Michele Tuttle, CLA, NCCP; Patti Clapper, ACP, NCCP; Regina Newsome, CLA, NCCP; Melissa Stockley-Jones, CP, NCCP; and Mary Haggerty, CLA for all of their hard work in putting together successful programs for the weekend.

Belinda Thomas, ACP, NCCP, our Long Range Planning Chair, sent us all through a time machine 20 years into the future to get a glimpse of where NCPA might be. Belinda, in her usually humorous way, brought to the board meeting some great ideas for NCPA. We are working to implement several of her ideas in time for our annual meeting in March of 2008.

Fall brings about a busy time for the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors. We are working hard on plans for an informative and fun Annual Seminar to be held in Concord. Please mark your calendars for March 28-30, 2008, and watch for information concerning registration.

Fall is also the time of year when our Nominations and Elections Committee, chaired this year by Catrina Mitchell, will be putting out a call for nominations and declarations for candidacy for the 2008-2009 year. Serving on the NCPA board offers a great opportunity to really understand the goals of the Association, and how it continues to strive to further improve our profession. It is a great way to meet and work closely with paralegals from all over the state, and to build meaningful and lasting friendships. I encourage all of you who are not already serving on the board to consider doing so. If you have any questions regarding a position that you are interested in, please contact the current officer or chair of that position. They will be happy to give you details of the requirements for that particular position.

As fall arrives, it also brings in the beginnings of the holiday season. I wish all of you safe, healthful and happy holidays.

See you in Concord! ♦

## Chairman's Message

**Beverly G. King, NCCP**



*"Teamwork is working together — even when apart."*  
- Unknown

*"TEAM = Together Everyone Achieves More"*  
- Unknown

Where has the time gone? 2007 has been a fast and exciting year for the NCPA and its members. This year has also been personally fulfilling for me as a marching band coordinator.

As I write this message, I am in the midst of another busy yet exciting marching band season (my 17th season to be exact). It has been a trying year for us all. We have new staff members and a much harder show to teach. In addition, the turbulent weather has made our regular practices much more difficult to handle. Despite these obstacles, we have managed to get the show on the field, keep the students and ourselves relatively healthy during those hot days, and accomplish our goal of entertaining football and marching band competition crowds (and hopefully win a few trophies) across North Carolina and in Maryland.

The staff members and I stress the importance of teamwork to our students. We tell them that no one section or individual is more important than the rest and we must all work together to accomplish our goals. This is also true for NCPA.

The Executive Committee and Board of Directors are composed of paralegals from across the state that give their time to further the profession. We are all hard-working individuals, with families, friends, and many responsibilities. Despite these pressures on our time, we have volunteered to take an active role in promoting the profession and educating the paralegals within it. I cannot even begin to explain how much I have learned personally and professionally from being actively involved with the NCPA and the Board for the past years.

The most valuable thing that I have learned through this experience is that we must all work together. The NCPA, like my marching band team, must work as a collective unit toward a common goal. There is no "I" in team whether you are on the football field or in the NCPA.

As the NCPA Annual Seminar quickly approaches, please take time to think about joining the NCPA team. We would love to have you by our side on the "field"! ♦





## Editor's Court

Laura C. Braswell, NCCP



Where did 2007 go? Did I manage my time wisely? Did I achieve all of my goals for the year? Have I spent enough time with the people I love? Have I stepped out of my comfort zone at least once? We all ask ourselves these questions when the end of the year rolls around. My father told me many times to cherish my childhood because becoming an adult was a completely different and challenging stage of life. He was right. However, being an adult isn't always bad. I've learned that there are many ways to reach a level of true satisfaction and happiness in one's life. One of the ways I have challenged myself is by becoming an active member of NCPA. Since 2005, I have had the pleasure of being the Senior Editor for the FORUM. Yes, there were some moments when I wanted to pull out my hair, but they were largely outnumbered by the moments of happiness and self-satisfaction. It is surprising how much I have grown as a person and a paralegal while being Senior Editor. There are many aspects of this position that forced me to become more outgoing and less shy. Shyness is definitely not a problem for me now. I was a fairly new paralegal when I joined NCPA and it can be intimidating working closely with so many experienced paralegals. However, it was an honor working with paralegals that truly care about the direction of our profession. I believe that you learn something from every person that you meet and being an active member of NCPA was a true learning experience.

Since this is my last letter as Senior Editor, I would like to take a moment to thank all of you. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. It is through member contribution and support that the FORUM has continued to flourish. Just like the FORUM, the NCPA can only continue to grow with the active support of its members. Will you answer the call to action? Consider volunteering some of your time to supporting our great association. There are many ways to volunteer with NCPA. As scary as volunteering may sound, the benefits you will reap are invaluable. Trust me!

There is a very long list of NCPA members that deserve a big thank you, but there is not enough room to list all of you and I am afraid to leave somebody out of that list. Please know that I appreciate everything you have taught me and that I cherish the friendships I have made along the way.

Sincerely,  
Laura C. Braswell, NCCP ♦

# WANTED VOLUNTEERS

## Membership Chair

The Second Vice President is the Membership Chair, responsible to increase the membership of NCPA. The Membership Chair reviews and approves all new applications, assists members with application questions, and runs the Annual Membership Renewal campaign each January. The Membership Chair answers emails from prospective and current members, assists with issues related to online member profiles, and works closely with the other Executive Committee and Board members in handling the day-to-day business of NCPA. The Membership Chair writes a report four times annually for the NCPA FORUM publication. This position requires approximately 4-6 hours of your time per month. In addition, there are five Board/Executive Committee meetings each year - held in various areas of the state - which the Membership Chair is expected to attend. Most Board and Executive Committee members who must travel to meetings do so in carpool fashion - and have a Great Time! If you have any other questions about this position, please email [membership@ncparalegal.org](mailto:membership@ncparalegal.org).

## Secretary

The Secretary is responsible for keeping minutes of each Board/Executive Committee Meeting, sending a notice of each meeting to all Board and Executive Committee Members, assisting with the Annual Meeting, and keeping the correspondence of the Association. This position requires an average of 3-4 hours of your time per month. In addition, there are five Board/Executive Committee meetings each year - held in various areas of the state - which the Secretary is expected to attend. This job has become easier now that reports can be posted online and notices and correspondence can be sent out via the MemberClicks website contact center. For more information, email [elizabethvance@infonline.net](mailto:elizabethvance@infonline.net).



# Second Vice President's Report Membership

Brenda Mareski, CP



The current membership breakdown as of October 8, 2007 is as follows:

General members:	366
Associate members:	34
Student members:	81
Sustaining Members:	2
Affiliate members:	4
Educational Program members:	2
Total	489

Dear NCPA Members:

As we do in each edition, NCPA would like to acknowledge our newest (G)eneral, (A)ssociate, and (S)tudent members joining from July 24 – October 8, 2007:

Deah F. Black, Lexington (S)	Lynda S. Outen, Indian Trail (G)
Margaret E. Gabriel, NCCP, Greensboro (G)	Erica L. Overcash, Charlotte (A)
Heather W. Helms, NCCP, Newton (G)	Paula R. Shacklock, Reidsville (S)
Shirley M. Lester, Ramseur (S)	Joanne Spataro, Matthews (G)
Jeannie C. Logan, Pfafftown (S)	Pennie H. Starnes, Matthews (S)
John D. Martin, Hayesville (S)	Kathryn W. Webb, Mount Airy (G)
Alyssa J. Mozingo, Raleigh (G)	Courtney N. Whitaker, Wilmington (G)
Melinda Y. Mulford, Stokesdale (A)	Debra E. White, NCCP, Hickory (G)
	Nancy C. Yaffe, Charlotte (S)

Of course, we also acknowledge our Sustaining, Affiliate and Educational Program members, with whose support NCPA is able to provide our members with the quality services that you enjoy. We thank these members and ask that you show your support whenever possible.

## **Sustaining Members**

Document Technologies, Inc.  
([www.dtiglobal.com](http://www.dtiglobal.com))  
4NCRrecords.com  
([www.4ncRecords.com](http://www.4ncRecords.com))

## **Affiliate Members**

Alamance County Paralegal Association  
Cumberland County Paralegal Association  
(<http://www.ccpa.com/>)  
Guilford Paralegal Association  
([www.guilfordparalegalassociation.org/](http://www.guilfordparalegalassociation.org/))  
Research Triangle Paralegal Association  
([www.rtpanc.org/](http://www.rtpanc.org/))

## **Educational Program Members**

Caldwell Community College  
and Technical Institute  
(<http://www.ccti.edu>)  
Guilford Technical Community College  
(<http://www.gtcc.edu>)

Brenda Mareski, CP  
Second Vice President, Membership  
704.387.7605  
[bmareski@carolina.rr.com](mailto:bmareski@carolina.rr.com)

# The Benefits of Volunteering with NCPA

**Why should you volunteer with NCPA? Our Members of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors share their experience with you:**

There comes a time in every paralegal's career in which he or she needs to step "out of the box" to grow professionally. One of the best ways a paralegal can do that is to become an active volunteer in the NCPA. There are many ways to volunteer within NCPA. If you serve on the Board, you will discover how a board functions, learn more about the NCPA, meet many members you did not know before, and have opportunities to offer your opinions and ideas. Growing professionally is a process and volunteering for NCPA is one big step in the right direction.

– *Cindy Frye, ACP, NCCP, NALA Liaison*

The best benefit of volunteering with NCPA is becoming a more intimate part of a statewide professional organization and establishing relationships with peers across the state. Before I took an internal position with NCPA, I was merely attending events without really knowing the people within the organization. Now, I can say I have friends, as well as acquaintances in places in North Carolina that I never knew existed. Just a little bit of time commitment brings so much benefit!

– *Blanche S. Berkowitz, NCCP, District IV Director (Interim)*

Why do I volunteer for NCPA? I appreciate all the paralegals that came before me who volunteered and gave their time so that when I was a brand new paralegal there was an association available that I could turn to for support and guidance. I have met many great people and made new friends that I would not have come in contact with otherwise. I have developed leadership skills that I never knew I had and learned that it is something that can also be enjoyable. It affords me more opportunities to work on things like teamwork, communication, diplomacy, and patience. It also keeps me in touch with what is happening in the profession. It's fun!

– *Beth A. Stallings, CLA, NCCP, District VII Director*

Some people around me wonder why I volunteer for so many different things. I like to keep busy. I like to be involved. Being a part of NCPA satisfies both of these desires. I like challenges and occasionally I get up the nerve to step out of my comfort zone and try something new (although sometimes it takes a little persuading). Taking on Chairman of the Board was certainly a bigger role than I thought I was ready for. However, NCPA has a great support system and I have made lasting friendships that continually help me with my NCPA duties. Why do I give so much of my time to volunteer work? I love it! I cannot explain the feeling I get when I see something that I have worked on or had a part in come together in its final form. It is a wonderful feeling and I look forward to enjoying many more.

– *Beverly G. King, NCCP, Chairman of the Board and District IX Director*

When you volunteer for NCPA, you gain insight into the daily workings of the association all the while building a support network that can come in handy in your job. Sharing with others in your career field and becoming a link in the team gives you experience for future organization involvement, whether personal or professional, and it improves your self-esteem.

– *Trudy Rutherford, NCCP, District III Director*

I have been a member of the North Carolina Paralegal Association since 2000. I served on NCPA's Executive Committee and Board

of Directors as the Student/School Relations Chair, District II Director, President, and currently as At-Large-Director. Through these positions, I have learned the importance of having NCPA's support system in my professional and personal life. As part of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors, I have had a front seat view into North Carolina paralegals' wants and concerns. NCPA continues to give me the opportunity to learn through its educational programs. Through email, phone conversations, and through a variety of speaking opportunities & seminars, I have been given the opportunity to share my experiences and learn about others experiences in the paralegal field. I now have a very large network and many new friends.

– *Erin Galloway, CP, NCCP, At-Large Director*

As for volunteering with NCPA, I believe the benefits are being able to meet peers in different practice areas and different geographical areas. Getting to meeting people, even just in my district, is always exciting and you never know where or when you'll be able to use the knowledge you gained through networking. Also, by volunteering with the NCPA, I feel that I'm a recognized professional, with recognized credentials, and I like being able to put forward those opportunities to other people.

– *Morag A. Polaski, CP, NCCP, District I Director (Interim)*

Volunteering for NCPA has been a truly delightful experience. After graduating from the paralegal program at Johnston Community College, I was a fresh, new paralegal working for a small firm. As a new paralegal, the access to information, advice, continuing education and the wonderful camaraderie was invaluable. I entered the paralegal profession at the brink of the North Carolina Paralegal Certification Program. It was exciting to be able to have a front row seat to the NCPA's push for voluntary certification. Most importantly, I am sure that I would not be a North Carolina Certified Paralegal were it not for NCPA's endorsement and support of the voluntary paralegal certification program. NCPA, through the arduous work of many paralegals, has accomplished so many things for our profession. The best way for us to return the favor is by becoming actively involved with NCPA. Always remember that a little help can go a long way. There are many hats to be worn. Are you willing to wear one?

– *Laura C. Braswell, NCCP, Senior Editor and Public Relations Committee Chair*

I enjoyed NCPA seminars and membership for several years as a General Member, and really wanted an opportunity to "give back" and contribute to the organization that had given me such good learning and networking experiences. Volunteering as secretary of NCPA has given me a chance to make a small contribution to the Association. I have also had the opportunity to learn from organized, dedicated volunteers who make NCPA run smoothly, and who work very hard to make the Annual and Mid-Year Seminars look really easy to put together!

– *Elizabeth R. Vance, CP, NCCP, Secretary*

Membership in NCPA has benefited me both professionally and personally. NCPA offers a vast, statewide network of paralegals you can call on if you need help in an area of law you are not familiar with or in an area of the state you do not practice in.

I have also made so many friends over the last twelve years!

– *Patti F. Clapper, ACP, NCCP, First Vice President - Education*



## CALL TO ACTION: NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS

### The Value of Service

You have heard the old expression “What goes around, comes around.” If you value NCPA for the service it provides you, here is your chance to make the same meaningful contribution to the lives and careers of other paralegals. Consider serving as an officer or director in the 2008 - 2009 membership year. Not only will it give you insight into the workings of NCPA, but it will improve your leadership skills, broaden your network of important contacts and you might just have a lot of fun, too!

Following this article, you will find a “Declaration of Candidacy for Office” form and a “Recommendation for District Director” form for some districts. If you are interested in becoming more involved in NCPA, or know of someone who you believe would be good for the organization, please complete the appropriate form and return it to the address listed on the form. The deadline for returning the “Declaration of Candidacy for Office” form is **December 19, 2007**. The deadline for returning the “Recommendation for District Director” form is **January 4, 2008**.

Do you think you may be interested, but are not sure what these duties entail? Briefly, these are the duties of the Officers. Please refer to your Membership Directory to find references to the Bylaws and Standing Rules.

- President: Represents the needs and concerns of the membership before the Board of Directors, supervises the work of other Officers and Committee Chairmen, and keeps the membership advised. [See Bylaws Article VIII.1. and Standing Rule VIII.A.1.]
- First Vice President: Responsible for planning seminars, workshops and other educational events and is the Chairman of the Education Committee. [See Bylaws Article VIII.2. and Standing Rule VIII.A.2.]
- Second Vice President: Is the Chairman of the Membership Committee and is responsible for the compilation of the Membership Directory. [See Bylaws Article VIII.3. and Standing Rule VIII.A.3.]
- Secretary: Responsible for keeping a permanent record of all meetings of the membership. [See Bylaws Article VIII.4. and Standing Rule VIII.A.4.]
- Treasurer: Responsible for the deposit of funds and makes disbursements as provided for in the budget; is the Chairman of the Finance Committee and prepares the budget for the ensuing fiscal year to be approved by the Board of Directors. [See Bylaws Article VIII.5. and Standing Rule VIII.A.5.]
- NALA Liaison: Is a NALA member who is familiar with the NALA Bylaws and Standing Rules, represents NCPA at the NALA Annual Meeting of Affiliated Associations and makes quarterly reports to NALA concerning NCPA’s activities; coordinates with the CLA Review Course Subcommittee Chair on planning and presentation of CLA Review Course. [See Bylaws Article VIII.6. and Standing Rule VIII.A.7.]
- Parliamentarian: Attends all membership meetings and gives opinions on parliamentary procedure and interprets NCPA’s Bylaws and Standing Rules; is the Chairman of the Bylaws and Standing Rules Committee. [See Bylaws Article VIII.7. and Standing Rule VIII.A.6.]

For those district members who are electing new District Directors, a “Recommendation for District Director” form follows this article. Your Director, as a member of the NCPA Board of Directors, is responsible for the promotion of NCPA within his or her own district. This includes the recruitment of new members and assisting with the development of educational events within your district. [See Standing Rule IX.C.5.] This position gives you a great chance to network with other paralegals in your own geographic district and it gives you the opportunity to find out how other areas in North Carolina are educating and promoting paralegals in their districts. Please return the “Recommendation for District Director” form by **January 4, 2008**.

If you have any questions about any position, Officer or Director, please do not hesitate to contact Nominations & Elections Committee Chair Catrina Mitchell at 919- 560-4570 or [catrina.mitchell@durhamnc.gov](mailto:catrina.mitchell@durhamnc.gov) or contact one of the current NCPA Officers or Directors. Their names can be found on the NCPA website. Go to [www.ncparalegal.org](http://www.ncparalegal.org). Rest your pointer on “About NCPA” on the left to see a drop-down menu for “Board of Directors” or “Officers and Executive Committee.” The last page of this issue of the NCPA Forum also provides contact information.

DECLARATION OF CANDIDACY FOR THE OFFICE OF:  
-----  
OF  
THE NORTH CAROLINA PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION, INC.  
  
2008 - 2009

The undersigned hereby declares that he/she is actively employed as a Paralegal or Legal Assistant; is legally competent to enter into contracts; and is currently a General Member in good standing of the North Carolina Paralegal Association, Inc., and has been so for at least one (1) year.

Qualifications for Office:

Having read and understood Articles VII and VIII of the Bylaws of the North Carolina Paralegal Association, Inc. pertaining to officers, I hereby declare myself a candidate for the office of \_\_\_\_\_, subject to election at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Corporation.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Print/Type Your Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Sign Your Name)

My Address and Telephone Number:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: Catrina Mitchell, NCCP  
NCPA Nominations and Elections Chair  
North Carolina Paralegal Association  
City of Durham  
101 City Hall Plaza  
C/O Neighborhood Improvement Services  
Durham, NC 27701  
919-560-4570 (phone)  
919-560-4090 (fax)  
catrina.mitchell@durhamnc.gov

RECOMMENDATION FOR DISTRICT DIRECTOR  
FOR DISTRICT \_\_\_\_\_ OF  
THE NORTH CAROLINA PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

Pursuant to the provisions of ARTICLE IX.3 and .5 of the Bylaws of the North Carolina Paralegal Association, Inc. and Section IX.C of the Standing Rules, the position of District Director for Districts I, III, V, VII, and XI (two-year term position) and interim District Director VI (one-year term), will be elected by the members of their respective regions and announced at the Annual Meeting in Concord, North Carolina on March 28, 2008.

If you are a member of District I, III, V, VI, VII, or XI and wish to nominate a candidate for the Directorship of your District, please complete the following form and mail it, together with a letter from your nominee expressing his/her interest in the position and a copy of the nominee's resume, in accordance with the following instructions.

**DEADLINE FOR RECEIPT BY ELECTIONS CHAIR IS JANUARY 4, 2008**

Mail to: Catrina Mitchell, NCCP  
NCPA Nominations and Elections Chair  
North Carolina Paralegal Association  
City of Durham  
101 City Hall Plaza  
C/O Neighborhood Improvement Services  
Durham, NC 27701  
919-560-4570 (phone)  
919-560-4090 (fax)  
catrina.mitchell@durhamnc.gov

FROM: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Print/Type Your Name)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

With his/her permission, I hereby recommend for election to the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Paralegal Association, Inc. as Director of District \_\_\_\_\_, subject to the provisions of Article IX of the Bylaws:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Print/Type Name of NOMINEE)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Employment: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No.: \_\_\_\_\_

This will certify that I am a member in good standing and that my nominee is a General Member in good standing of the North Carolina Paralegal Association, Inc., and has been so for at least one year as of this day, is employed as a paralegal, and is a permanent resident of the State of North Carolina.

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Nominator)



*NCPA would like to extend its sincere thanks to the following companies, without whose support our Mid-Year Seminar would not have been possible:*

<b>Company/Name</b>	<b>Contribution</b>
<b>Document Technologies, Inc.</b> Contact: David Kellogg 201 South Tryon St., Suite LL175 Charlotte, NC 28202 (704) 248-6230 dkellogg@dtiglobal.com	<i>Sustaining Member</i> Exhibitor Door Prize Hospitality Bag Items
<b>4NCRECORDS.COM</b> Contact: Lee Lloyd P.O. Box 1589 Fuquay Varina, NC 27526 (800) 792-4339; Fax: (800) 792-2945 lee@4ncrecords.com	<i>Sustaining Member</i> Saturday Morning Break Sponsor Exhibitor Door Prize Hospitality Bag Items
<b>Huseby, Inc. Litigation Support</b> Contact: Scott Huseby 1230 West Morehead Street #408 Charlotte, NC 28208 (704) 333-9889; Fax: (704) 372-4593 scotthuseby@huseby.com	<i>Friday Night Welcome Reception Sponsor</i> Exhibitor Hospitality Bag Items
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# Master Plan

## Will your next move be a graduate-level education?

By Rod Hughes

If ever there has been a profession in which educational standards vary, it's the legal assistant field. Depending on your region or locality, the criteria for experience and education — not to mention the title variations for paralegal positions — run the gamut. Despite more than 30 years of growth and development, access to the profession remains largely at the discretion of hiring managers.

In a profession lacking solid enforcement of educational standards, those who have taken it upon themselves to pursue graduate-level education are, understandably, unique. Some paralegals decide to pursue a master's degree in legal studies to give them an edge in the marketplace, to increase their marketability and to specialize in specific practice areas. But does having a master's degree increase the chances of getting a better job and better pay, or can it actually have the opposite effect? *Legal Assistant Today* talked with educators, placement agency representatives and master's degree graduates to get their perspectives on these issues.

### Setting the Standard

While there isn't an educational standard in the paralegal field, more and more paralegals are seeing the need for advanced paralegal education. In some areas of the country, it's becoming common for employers to expect new paralegal hires to have a bachelor's degree or a paralegal certificate.

"Ultimately, it's the employment market that determines what the educational requirements are for paralegals who want to enter the profession," said Terry Hull, director of legal studies at Texas State University, San Marcos. Her program has offered an American Bar Association-approved master's program in legal studies since 1999.

Ronald Goldfarb, immediate past president of the American Association for Paralegal Education, agreed.

"Thirty years ago, you had high school graduates being hired and trained in-house," said Goldfarb, vice president of legal and external affairs at Middlesex County College in Edison, N.J. "As the function of the legal assistant has expanded, and as they are utilized in more hands-on roles in complex fields, employers are requiring more, and so education is playing a big part in what these employment candidates are capable of as they enter the marketplace."

Goldfarb said he encourages students who don't already have a bachelor's degree to get one. "Now whether you go on for a master's degree [as a paralegal] is something that requires a definite career strategy and takes some careful consideration," he added.

Overall, the paralegal job market still is quite a long way from requiring graduate-level training. "In very niche areas of the law — very technical positions — perhaps there is a need [for

graduate-level education]. For most other areas, at this time, no, there isn't a demand for a master's degree," said Alice Rowley, placement director for Kelly Law Registry in Philadelphia.

Gerry Grandzol, placement director for Special Counsel in Philadelphia, agreed, adding that he didn't see a master's degree in legal studies, or any other graduate-level area of study as a sure-fire way to career advancement in the legal assistant field. "One thing I have come to learn in this industry is that résumés and education levels are not indicative of a person's true performance," Grandzol said, noting experience and quantified work performance often outweigh education credentials in the paralegal employment marketplace.

In a profession lacking an enforceable education standard, why do some paralegals choose to undertake a graduate-level education when there doesn't seem to be a demand?

### Masterminds

LAT spoke with three recent graduates from Texas State who earned their master's degrees in legal studies in December 2004.

"It's what separates you from the rest of the crowd," Toyline Spencer said about earning a master's degree. She chose to pursue her graduate education to stand out from other paralegals in the employment market. Spencer was trained in-house and worked as a legal assistant for several years before starting her master's program more than 10 years ago. She took time off to start a family, then was completing her undergraduate degree in criminal justice when she decided a master's degree would give her an advantage in the employment market after having been gone for several years. In June 2005, Spencer was hired by *Jenkins & Gilchrist* in Austin, Texas.

Melissa Pruitt, one of Spencer's classmates, said she chose to earn her master's in legal studies as a potential precursor to law school. After receiving her undergraduate degree in government from the University of Texas, she initially thought law school would be in her future, but said she had mixed feelings about it. "I knew I wanted to do something at the graduate level, and I thought I could do this as a transition," she said.

However, Pruitt's thoughts of law school now are nearly a faded memory. In February 2005, she was hired by *Andrews Kurth*, an eight-office international law firm that was looking for a corporate and securities paralegal. Pruitt said after she was hired, she discovered she had competed for the position against legal assistants with bachelor's degrees and some level of experience, while her main qualifications were an undergraduate degree in government and her master's in legal studies. "So far, I am fairly happy doing what I am doing, and it's something I think could be

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a long-term career," she said.

While pursuing her bachelor's degree in political science at Texas State, Sharon Murray became interested in the legal field. Some of the law classes she took as an undergraduate piqued her interest, and she decided to pursue her master's degree in legal studies. It was growing competition, now and in the future, that prompted Murray to enroll in the graduate program.

"I decided to pursue a master's degree primarily because of the changing job market. Just as there has been a shift away from high school diploma-only job requirements to increased requests for bachelor's degrees, I anticipate the current job market [will] move away from associate's and bachelor's degrees to requiring a higher level of education," Murray said. "I anticipate being in the workforce for another 25 years, and I believe it's only to my advantage to have as much of an educational head-start as possible to remain competitive later," she said.

### **What is Out There?**

Currently, there are five ABA-approved master's programs in legal studies in the United States. In addition, AAFPE's online database of member institutions ([www.aafpe.org](http://www.aafpe.org)) reveals approximately 10 master's programs throughout the country offering graduate-level legal education to paralegals.

Beyond AAFPE membership and ABA-approved programs, there also is a variety of graduate schools that offer law-related type programs. Although these are not paralegal-specific academic programs, they might be beneficial to paralegals seeking advanced education. A good resource to discover cursory information on such programs is [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com), although it should be used to learn what programs exist and not as a validation of the quality of any particular program.

One reason Goldfarb said there isn't a wealth of master's programs specifically for paralegals is because it's a profession in which a bachelor's degree coupled with a paralegal certificate and experience as a working legal assistant can take you where you need to go, career wise.

"Now, for someone looking for a career as an academic in the paralegal field or who wants to work in some highly specialized area, such as alternative dispute resolution, pursuing a master's degree probably makes a good deal of sense," Goldfarb said. However, he noted that for paralegals looking for a career in small- to mid-sized litigation or transactional law practices, or for many in-house paralegal positions, a master's degree might not be a career asset. "You have got to have a very specific goal in mind if you are considering a master's degree as a paralegal rather than just looking at it as the next logical step," he said.

The legal studies program at Montclair State University in Montclair, N.J., which is an institutional member of AAFPE and an ABA-approved program, offers a broad education in legal studies for graduate-level students and isn't specifically designed for paralegals. However, Norma Connolly, chair of the legal studies program at Montclair, estimated approximately 60 percent of the program's current students are legal assistants, with about 60 students to 80 students enrolled.

The program began in 1995, and through 2004, 57 students have completed the program, with 32 of those graduates having

paralegal backgrounds. Connolly said paralegal graduates of Montclair's master's program in legal studies, through surveys, reported they sought their degrees for the purposes of career advancement, such as management positions or supervisory roles.

"Most paralegals who want an advanced degree look for a master's in legal studies. One education track we offer in the program is legal management in information technology, which is an ideal match for those who wish to use their education in the paralegal profession," Connolly said.

Students have gone on to work for companies such as Chase Manhattan Bank, Aspen Systems, Liberty Mutual Insurance, Verizon and various law firms, Connolly added.

The master's in legal studies program at Texas State offers three concentrations in addition to a generalized legal studies program: environmental, legal administration and alternative dispute resolution. The enrollment numbers per year are about 100 students, with between 30 and 40 graduates of the program per year. Hull said while master's graduates go on to work in traditional law firms, state and federal agencies, and corporations, the difference most often is in their responsibilities in those jobs.

Connolly noted that some paralegals interested in obtaining a master's degree see it as a stepping stone to law school, particularly those who didn't do well as undergraduates and see a master's program as an opportunity to enhance their educational credentials.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages**

When deciding if you should pursue a master's degree, consider not just your goals, but also those of potential employers for whom you would like to work. Rowley said many of Kelly Law Registry's clients seeking paralegals to fill temporary and permanent openings require a certain level of experience, a bachelor's degree and a paralegal certificate, or some combination thereof. "I have yet to get a specific request from a client requiring [paralegal employment candidates to have master's degrees]," Rowley said. She said she has placed fewer than 10 paralegals who have master's degrees in legal assistant positions. None had legal-specific graduate degrees. Those placements primarily were in intellectual property, with a few in real estate and financial services.

Grandzol agreed that paralegals with master's degrees can find success in highly targeted fields such as intellectual property, certain types of corporate practices and in particular, the life sciences field. "I have seen paralegals with master's degrees in a variety of academic areas working in the area of pharmaceuticals or in technology-based industries," Grandzol said. However, like Rowley, he has never had an employer specifically request a paralegal candidate with a graduate degree.

Another potential disadvantage: Rowley said a master's degree can become a hurdle when you start to discuss salary. "Specifically, it becomes a problem if paralegals with master's degrees are demanding higher levels of pay than what employers are offering for positions that don't require that level of education," Rowley said.

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Master Plan continued...

Pruitt said while she believes her advanced education is a tremendous resource, it did present obstacles to her job search. "I do believe it can be a blessing and a curse. On one hand, it demonstrates hard work, competence and commitment. However, when [potential] employers look at your résumé and see a lot of education, they automatically begin thinking you are out of their price range," she said. This even applies at her current firm, where she said, "They were impressed enough to hire me and also not sure how to fully compensate me as a result."

Spencer said while her education was an asset to some employers, her master's degree might also have been a liability. "Believe me, I applied for a lot of paralegal positions after graduation. I think a lot of employers took one look at my master's degree and thought I was probably out of their pay range," she said. "I love my job, and I am fortunate enough to work for an employer that pays paralegals higher than average wages."

Spencer said she felt the application of her academic achievements in the job market was overall a positive experience. "I would not think pursuing a master's degree in just anything for the sake of having a master's would be helpful. However, if you are pursuing a master's in a certain area of study you enjoy and want to work in, I think it can only be helpful," she explained, having sought work as an environmental and administrative law paralegal. She did note, however, that because legal assistants holding master's degrees are the exception rather than the rule, approaching salary issues in the interview process might be complicated, unless you are targeting a particular employer or field of law.

Focusing on the current job market, Spencer said she still believes a master's degree in any discipline moves you to the top of a potential employer's "to-hire" list. And, beyond standing out from her peers in the employment market, Spencer felt it was a good fit to pursue a master's degree in something she enjoyed while also being able to apply that education to her work. "For me, having a master's [degree] is what got me this job. I replaced a paralegal who had a master's degree" she said. Although she noted she is the only paralegal of six in her Austin office who has a master's degree, she said the other paralegals have either an undergraduate degree in the field or more than 20 years of legal experience.

Almost none of the educators and placement professionals interviewed said that a master's degree can or should act as a stepping stone to management-type positions. The advantages of a master's degree, according to Rowley, are client-specific. "Some will see it as an advantage, and some will see it as having more dollar signs attached to it than they can reasonably pay," she said. It all comes back to the employer's needs and requirements.

Murray took six months off from her job search after she obtained her master's degree, and now is seeking her first paralegal position. However, she has run into a few stumbling blocks. In the course of her job search in Austin, Murray said a number of employers have required legal assistant candidates to have completed their training through a law school program, rather than a legal studies program.

"I am not sure why that particular requirement is necessary or what possible advantage an employer believes is obtained by

going to a law school as opposed to any other school," Murray said. "The school where I obtained my training is becoming quite well known within the state for the students [it graduates], and yet employers are still asking for students from accredited law schools." In her case, the advanced education helps, but employers independently set the bar for what they are looking for in paralegal hires.

Murray's situation is one reason paralegals such as Pruitt advocate moving the profession toward some type of licensure or national regulatory scheme. "There needs to be a set of standards that is universal, especially since we are income producers and the profession continues to take on more advanced legal tasks than our predecessors did maybe 25 years ago," Pruitt said. Murray said a universal standard would eliminate barriers such as arbitrary educational standards and geographic differences that persist in defining the role of paralegals.

### Your Move

Is graduate school the solution to many paralegals' career issues? Again, it comes back to the profession itself and what employers are seeking in job candidates.

While some paralegals think master's degrees will become the norm in five to 10 years, others say the days when a paralegal will need the graduate degree are much further in the future. "Master's degrees will not be the standard in our lifetime. First of all, there are not that many paralegal graduate programs out there," Spencer said.

Rowley said more and more in firms and even many corporations, paralegals are being used with increasing levels of responsibility in areas where maybe once associates or junior attorneys were handling things. "As paralegal roles continue to expand, [having a master's degree] would only be more helpful down the road — maybe five to 10 years," Rowley said.

The decision for a paralegal to pursue a master's degree is one that, in Hull's estimation, is and will remain varied, nuanced and particular to the individual. For those willing to accept that they will need to navigate skepticism regarding salary and who are willing to work within the offered salary ranges of the employers they seek out, a master's degree in any discipline can be an asset if you carefully match your needs with a potential employer's.



## Mid-Year Seminar Review

Belinda A. Thomas, ACP, NCCP

*Were you present at NCPA's Mid-Year Seminar held in Boone? Belinda A. Thomas, ACP, NCCP shares a few moments from the seminar.*

Prior to the Board and Executive Committee, which was held in Boone, along with NCPA's Mid-Year Seminar, I presented my Long Range Planning report. I built a "Time Machine" and wrote a skit in which every member took part. They moved through the time machine to show what NCPA would be doing 20 years from now. Everyone seemed to enjoy the silliness, but they were still able to come up with great ideas to see that NCPA stays alive and well.

The Board and Executive Committee meeting started at 1:30 pm and various members of the Board and Executive Committee presented their reports. After a little sight seeing in beautiful Boon, I returned to the hotel by 8:00 pm to attend the hospitality event. There were some great vendors present and we were given lots of goodies to use at the office and at home.

On Saturday morning, after enjoying a free continental

breakfast sponsored by one of NCPA's vendors, I attended Emily Wills' presentation. Ms. Wills is a handwriting expert. One of her recent situations was an analysis of the letters that had to do with President Bush's National Guard records for the CBS network. She had told CBS she believed the letters had been "doctored." Up until the Tuesday evening before the network aired the information on Wednesday, Ms. Wills told them it would be a mistake to use the letters. They did so in spite of what she told them. She was right and now wonders if she will be brought in on the Dan Rather lawsuit against CBS. Her presentation was tremendous. As a side note, my firm has used Ms. Wills in its domestic practice when we needed a handwriting expert.

After her presentation we attended a nurse's presentation on medical records. We broke for a delicious lunch, which was included in our registration fee. My boss, Mr. Wiley P. Wooten, and I presented a session after lunch on "The Attorney/Paralegal Team" which seemed to be received well by the attendees. ♦

### STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

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The North Carolina Paralegal Association, Inc. ("NCPA") is sponsoring its annual Student Scholarship Program. Any paralegal student enrolled in a school in North Carolina that meets the Paralegal Educational Program membership requirements as written in NCPA's bylaws\* is eligible for the scholarship program. An essay competition will be the basis of the scholarship.

**Essay Topic:** *"I have chosen to be a paralegal..."*

#### **Essay Requirements:**

The essay must be typed, double spaced, and on letter sized paper. The essay may not exceed two pages in length. Please be aware that spelling, grammar and punctuation will be taken into consideration. The essays will be judged anonymously, so do not reference your name or your paralegal program within the body of the essay.

**Essay Deadline:** *January 31, 2008*

#### **Essay Submission:**

Submit your essay with a cover sheet containing your name, address, telephone number and the paralegal program you attend by January 31, 2008 to:

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First Place: \$400.00    Second Place: \$300.00    Third Place: \$200.00    Fourth Place: \$100.00

In addition to the scholarship, all awards include a one year, free student membership in NCPA and one free student registration to NCPA's 28th Annual Seminar and Meeting to be held March 28 - 30, 2008 in Concord, NC.

#### **Notification:**

All award recipients will be notified by March 1, 2008.

\*NCPA's bylaws can be found at [www.ncparalegal.org](http://www.ncparalegal.org)

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Please consider contributing to the next edition of the *NCPA Forum*. Not only do we want our association’s publication to be informative and innovative for each and every member, we also want it to include helpful hints and sound advice from our main resources, our members. We are looking for all types of articles that relate to the paralegal community. Anything of interest to you will most likely be of interest to other paralegals across the state. Let your voice be heard in the *NCPA Forum*. Please submit all articles in Word format to [selliott-park@gastonlegal.com](mailto:selliott-park@gastonlegal.com). You may also e-mail your comments, suggestions and possible article contributors to us as well.

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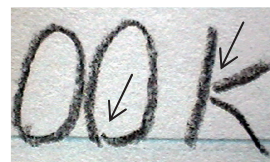


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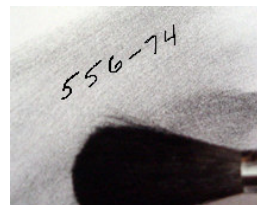
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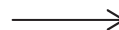
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**January 15, 2008**

Deadline for submitting application to take March CLA/CP Exam

**March 27-29, 2008**

NCPA's 28th Annual Meeting and Seminar in Concord

**May 15, 2008**

Deadline for submitting application to take July CLA/CP Exam

**July 30-August 2, 2008**

NALA's 33rd Annual Convention in Oklahoma City, OK

**September 11-13, 2008**

NCPA's Mid-Year Seminar and CLA Review Course in Greensboro



***NCPA Wishes the Following Members  
A Very Happy Birthday!***

***December***

Laura C. Braswell, NCCP  
Virginia M. Burrows, CLAS, NCCP  
Debra K. Cranford  
Ann W. Dandison, NCSB/CP  
Hope Dodson  
Michael S. Gordon  
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Janeene C. Humphrey  
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***January***

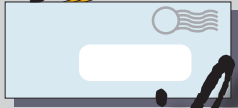
***Happy birthday to our members  
with January birthdays!***

(There were too many of you to list! Please check your NCPA online profile to make sure that the birth month listed for you is correct.)

***February***

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Kathy I. Barley, NCCP  
Susan Black, NCCP  
Teresa H. Blackburn, NCCP  
Staci L. Brogan  
Lonnie E. Christopher, NCCP  
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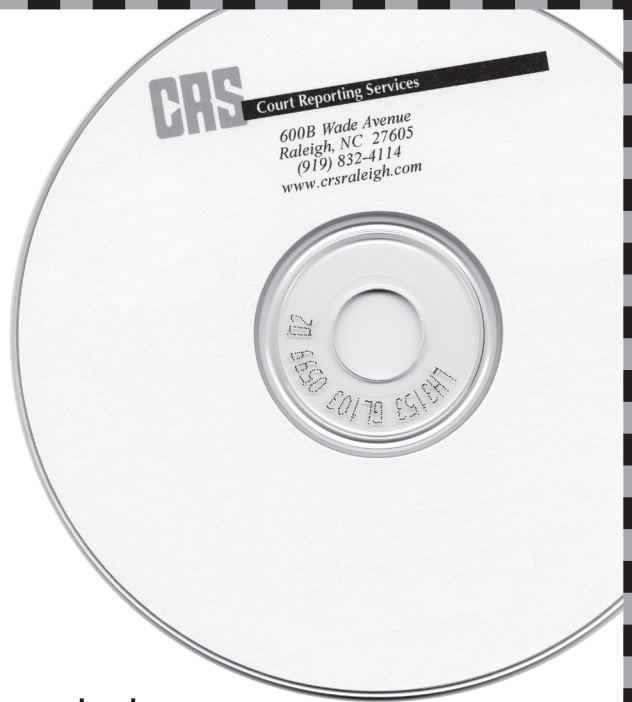
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