**Department/Program Review Summary**

**2019-2020**

**Department: Legal Studies -** 0423-Paralegal Program/0422 Law

**Date of Review:** February 21, 2020

**Review Team Members and Titles:**

Kathleen Cleary, Interim Provost

Jennifer Kostic, Associate Provost

Jared Cutler, Assistant Provost of Accreditation and Assessment

Angela Currier, Chairperson/Professor, Biology

Angela Fernandez, Assistant Professor, Criminal Justice

Carol Glaser-Atkins, Deputy Title IX Coordinator, Vice President for Human Resources

Debbie Munt, Paralegal Specialist, U.S. Attorney’s Office

Kelsey Roeber, Academic Advisor, Academic Advising

Mariam Yarnall, Associate Professor, Nursing

**Department Members Present:**

Elizabeth Orlando, Dean, Business and Public Services

Jenna Beck, Chair, Law and Public Safety

Faculty:

Adam Arnold, Assistant Professor, Law

Myla Cardona-Jones, Instructor, Paralegal Program

Lauren Dreshman, Associate Professor, Law & Paralegal Program

Staff:

Jennifer Tallman, Administrative Assistance, Paralegal Program

**Commendations:**

* This is a department with an exemplary level of engagement outside the classroom. The amount of Service Learning and Legal Clinic work the department does is truly impressive, particularly considering that in many cases this work serves vulnerable populations, such as refugees and those seeking to have their criminal records sealed. The services the department provided in the wake of the May 2019 tornados deserves special mention. For the past three years students in the Legal Studies program have been able to see the Ohio Supreme Court in session. It is a testament to the high quality of the faculty and the dynamic leadership of the chairperson that students have so many opportunities for extracurricular learning and service in this department.
* While development and maintenance of the Open Educational Resources (OER) for LAW 1101 has been time and resource intensive, it has been a tremendous financial benefit to students in the course. The department estimates that all told students have been saved $150,000, which is particularly impressive considering the financial challenges many students experience. The department deserve praise for its willingness to invest this work and effort on behalf of its students.
* Few departments on campus do such an excellent job of deploying their administrative assistant for student and community outreach. The department has done an outstanding job of capitalizing on her experience and skills - for example, in her weekly outreach to students who have expressed interest in the program. The department is making smart use of a talented individual, who is a particularly valuable resource due to her additional expertise as a graduate of the program.
* American Bar Association approval is a truly monumental task, and the review team wishes to congratulate the department on maintaining approval. Few things speak to the quality of the department like the statement made by one of the site team visitors that this was a program they would want to be in. ABA approval is crucial to the very survival of the department, and department personnel deserve a great deal of praise for the way they have had no difficulty in maintaining approval.
* The department should be commended for its willingness to meet the educational needs of students wherever those needs may be found. For example, when asked to begin offering the Legal Studies program in Mason, the department went to the effort to get American Bar Association approval and provided a great deal of support to this endeavor. In the meeting with the review team, all of the faculty expressed their willingness to step up and address any needs that should arise in the various Sinclair locations across the region.
* Assessment is done exceptionally well by the department, in part due to the requirements of the American Bar Association, and in part due to the assessment expertise possessed by the department chairperson and faculty members. Few departments have as much comprehensive trend data for all of their program outcomes as this one does.
* Legal Studies also has an excellent, well-crafted mission statement that concisely but completely encapsulates the purpose of the department and explicates its program outcomes.
* During the meeting with the review team the department expressed concerns about the professionalism of its students. However, it must be said that the department undertakes an impressive array of activities designed to develop and enhance the professionalism of its students, with graduate panels, conversational letter writing assignments, evaluation of communication skills in conversations with hypothetical clients, mock interview with attorneys, and professionalism points that are tracked throughout courses in the curriculum. While the department feels more needs to be done, it deserves a great deal of credit for the work that is already being done in this regard. The department also provides an excellent orientation as students enter the program, helping to set the expectations students will need to meet during as they pursue their degrees.
* The department has a well-established internship program that provides students with valuable experience in the workplace. The review team was particularly impressed by the two questions that are always asked during visits to internship sites: “what can we do differently or better” and “what are your needs”? These questions convey to local employers the department’s keen desire and commitment to meeting their needs.
* This is a department with a long history of service to the Dayton Paralegal/Legal Studies community. The fact that the department recently held its 40th Anniversary Celebration is nothing short of remarkable, and the attendance and support of the local legal community speaks volumes about the high regard in which the department is held. This is truly a department Sinclair can be proud of, one that truly represents the institution well.
* The department should be commended for the work it invested in the name change – the department took the time to research the issue and benchmark other programs, and the change to Legal Studies appears to have paid off in terms of increased enrollment this past Fall semester.
* The review team was impressed by the quality of the self-study that was submitted – it was comprehensive, thoughtful, and candid about opportunities for improvement. It did a great job of highlighting and showcasing all of the excellent work that is being done by the chairperson and the faculty.

**Recommendations:**

* During the meeting with the review team there was extensive discussion about the possibility of offering the Legal Studies program at the Mason location again. Some faculty expressed concerns about whether there is really a demand for the program – the department is strongly encouraged to take an honest look at whether there is really the student demand to support program enrollment in Mason, should examine the pros and cons of offering the program at that location, and be prepared to make an informed recommendation. Rather than waiting to be told whether they should offer the program or not, the department should be poised to provide crucial input that will be considered when that decision is made.
* Without question, the department has put a lot of work into developing professionalism in its students, with several specific strategies that have been implemented for this purpose. The department has worked with Student and Community Engagement in the past to some extent, and the review team encourages the department to work with them more in the future. Representatives from Student and Community Engagement should be invited into class to reinforce what the faculty have taught the students regarding professionalism and the development of soft skills. In addition, the department should continue to emphasize the importance of professionalism as part of the orientation.
* The department mentioned the possibility of developing a mentorship program involving graduates – the review team encourages the department to move forward exploring and implementing a mentoring program of this kind.
* During the meeting with the review team, the department mentioned the need for outreach to younger populations as a means of recruitment, educating youth about the opportunities in the Legal Studies field. The department is encouraged to prioritize these efforts, and to develop specific strategies for accomplishing this outreach. The department is also encouraged to connect with the Student Enrichment office as part of these efforts.
* The review team encourages the department to continue to track the impact of the name change on enrollment. In addition, there was some discussion about outcomes for students in PAR 1101 – Paralegal Principles. Of those students who don’t succeed, how many change majors subsequent to the course? Tracking this will help the department determine how many students enter the course thinking they want to go into the Legal Studies field, but change their minds after learning more about the field.
* There was extensive discussion in the meeting with the review team surrounding the need for co-location with other areas in the department. As the backfill process is still ongoing, the department will need to advocate for itself – and enlist the division dean to advocate – to ensure that this need will be addressed as backfill plans solidify. As part of this consolidation effort, the department should also advocate for itself for the re-creation of the Paralegal classrooms that once existed in Building 14 prior to its conversation to a Health Science building.
* In the interests of strengthening study skills and improving the writing capabilities of its students, the department is encouraged to work with the Tutoring and Learning Center to develop instruction in these areas that can be offered as part of its courses.
* The department should continue its efforts to develop a pathway for its students to transfer to UD. Other articulation agreements may need to be updated as well – the department is encouraged to review existing articulation agreements and determine which ones may need to be updated.
* The department noted the challenges in encouraging students to participate in volunteer activities. The department should seek feedback from its students regarding volunteer opportunities they are interested in, and ways that participation in these opportunities can be increased. Students should help drive decisions about which volunteer opportunities the department makes available to them.
* The department has developed an excellent set of goals in the self-study, and is strongly encouraged to pursue them over the next five years. The Nurse Paralegal program seems especially promising – the department is strongly encouraged to move forward with exploration in this area.
* The department is encouraged to continue to offer CLE opportunities, and determine whether more should be made available.
* While the Legal Studies program experienced a notable increase in enrollment this past Fall semester, the department should still develop a plan for increasing enrollment in the future. The review team encourages the department to develop a brief strategy document describing specific steps that will be taken to increase enrollment in the years to come. These steps should include ways for attracting students interested in eventually enrolling in law school.
* Some departments on campus have developed brief videos that are provided in links on the registration site, where students who are registering for classes can view the video and get a sense for what the course will be like. The department is encouraged to explore development of such a video for the PAR 1101 – Paralegal Principles course.

**Overall Assessment of the Department’s Progress and Goals:**

Sinclair is fortunate to have such an exceptional Legal Studies department, and the review team was extremely impressed by the high level of engagement displayed by the faculty and chair in terms of extracurricular learning opportunities and Service Learning opportunities. The department is held in high esteem by the local legal community, which is the product of more than four decades of hard work and commitment in educating paralegals. This department has a strong commitment to the success of its students, and a willingness to go above and beyond in preparing them for the workforce.

While a number of recommendations have been suggested by the review team, this should not overshadow the many commendations the review team has shared, and the overall high level of respect for the department that the review team developed throughout this process. Most of these recommendations are merely extensions of suggestions for self-improvement the department made itself in the self-study and in conversation with the review team. The review team appreciated the honest, in-depth discussions that occurred in the meeting with the department, and wishes to express its admiration and appreciation for the excellent work it is doing educating its students.

**Institutional or Resource Barriers to the Department’s Ability to Accomplish Its Goals, if any:**

* Space resources are an ongoing concern for a number of departments at Sinclair. As backfill discussion move forward, departments will need to learn to advocate for themselves, clearly articulating, documenting, and communicating their space needs to college administration.
* Marketing is a challenge for many departments at Sinclair. This is one of several programs at Sinclair with abundant employment opportunities, and limited means of informing potential students of these opportunities.
* There is a need for faculty development in classroom management techniques and training for handling certain situations that may arise on occasion. These issues require an institutional response, particularly in the areas of Title IX, Student Services, etc. How can we better inform faculty on problem signs in student behavior and how best to respond to them? How can we expand this kind of professional development to adjunct faculty? We as an institution need to help faculty develop a better understanding of how to manage difficult situations - and difficult students - in a classroom setting.
* There is a need for better development of study skills in students across the institution. What additional resources could be developed to nurture and expand study skills for students campus-wide?