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## **El Camino College's Paralegal Studies Program Reapproved by American Bar Association**

When her employer abruptly closed his forensic engineering firm six years ago, El Camino College alumna Alissa Pappadake started the process of looking for a new job.

As a legal secretary and office manager, she spent most of her time reviewing and summarizing legal documents for large product liability cases. She wanted to stay in this field, but it soon became clear that she would need a paralegal degree in order to work in a law firm. During her job search, she found out about the El Camino College Paralegal Studies Program.

“I met with a counselor who explained the program and how it was taught by lawyers and judges, and it was exactly what I was looking for,” said Alissa, a Torrance resident. “Plus, it was more affordable and convenient than any other program in the area.”

El Camino College's Paralegal Studies Program, which offers an associate degree and a certificate of achievement, was recently reapproved by the American Bar Association (ABA). The program has a long tradition of excellence, and has been approved by the ABA since the 1970s.

“This ABA approval means a lot in the legal community,” said Professor Vi Pham, ECC's paralegal studies program coordinator. “People know that a degree or certificate from El Camino College means something and that makes a big difference, especially in the particular areas where our students want to be employed.”

For this designation, the ECC program meets strict requirements regarding faculty, curriculum, facilities and other criteria. Students learn through a rigorous curriculum that takes a practical approach, focusing on hands-on experience and what paralegals will do on the job so they are ready for the workplace.

“I really can't say enough good things about the ECC program,” said Alissa, who is now working at a probate firm. “I would never have the job and experience I have now without it.”

Through classes and lectures, students in El Camino College's Paralegal Studies Program learn to apply theories and principles of law to prepare legal documents, draft pleadings such as court forms, prepare for litigation and learn case management techniques. Graduates also receive assistance in career counseling and job search opportunities.

Paralegals are typically employed by law firms or attorneys and can do legal research, interview clients, draft legal documents and help with case planning. When Alissa first enrolled in the ECC program, she thought that at 30 years old, she'd feel out of place in her classes.

“That wasn’t the case at all,” Alissa said. “We worked on assignments together and as the program advanced, the same group of students was in most classes. There was a real sense of camaraderie. We helped each other study and worked on group projects together in the library.”

Progressing into the program, Alissa became extremely involved at El Camino College, serving as secretary and president for the campus’s paralegal club, in addition to interning at the Family Law Center at the Torrance Courthouse and at an estate planning firm, which helped her land a job with an area probate firm after graduation, where she works now.

Alissa said the dedication of staff and professors at El Camino College was extremely important to her success.

“Every one of my professors wanted us to succeed and took great pride in their work,” she added. “Judges would come from a long day at court and never made the class feel rushed, or like it was a secondary concern to them.

“There are so many opportunities for student paralegals and if you're willing to put in the time and work, El Camino College is absolutely the place to take advantage of those opportunities.”

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