

Paralegal Certificate vs. Certified Paralegal

These terms are often confused by legal professionals, educators, and students; however, the terms have separate and distinct meanings.

A **paralegal certificate** is something that a paralegal will possess upon successful completion of a formal program in paralegal education and training. Depending upon the prerequisites of the program, the student *may* have a bachelor's or associate's degree in another field. The certificate program will only offer legal specialty courses and could be a program that lasts six weeks to several months. Once the student successfully completes the prescribed course of study, the student is issued a certificate. This paralegal is now "certificated" in paralegal studies. Not all paralegal education and training programs are created equal; each program will develop a curriculum that follows the guidelines of their accrediting body, if applicable.

Occasionally, a paralegal may present him/herself "certified" by virtue of completing a paralegal training course or another type of preparatory education. Although the student may receive a certificate upon completion, this does not make the student a certified paralegal. In this instance, the certificate is an acknowledgment of completion of a paralegal training program. Professional certification from an entity such as NALA or TBLS recognizes specific skills, experience, and knowledge.

A **certified paralegal** is one that has successfully passed one of the voluntary certification examinations offered by a certifying organization (see table on page 2). Certification grants formal recognition to a paralegal that has met certain educational and work experience requirements **and** passed the exam given by the certifying organization. Upon successful completion of the organization's exam, the paralegal is a "certified" paralegal and may represent him/herself as such by displaying the designation attributable to the organization. There is no single authority in the United States that oversees the paralegal profession.

DESIGNATION	BASIC PREREQUISITES FOR APPLICANTS*	CERTIFYING ORGANIZATION
CP/CLA* <i>Certified Paralegal/Certified Legal Assistant</i> <i>*Those who successfully complete the Certified Paralegal examination today are awarded and encouraged to use the Certified Paralegal (CP) credential. However, some with this certification continue to use the Certified Legal Assistant (CLA) credential.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Graduation from an ABA-approved program, an associate degree program, a post-baccalaureate certification program in paralegal studies; OR a bachelor's degree in any field + one year of paralegal experience - High school diploma + 7 years of experience as a paralegal, AND 20 hours CLE within 2 years of exam <p>Recertification (every 5 years) requires 50 hours of CLE, including 5 hours of ethics.</p>	NALA – The Paralegal Association www.nala.org
ACP <i>Advanced Certified Paralegal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Already earned (and maintained) the CP credential <p><u>Specialty Areas:</u> Business Organizations-Incorporated Entities • Criminal Litigation • Discovery • E-Discovery • Family Law-Adoption & Assisted Reproduction • Family Law-Child Custody, Support & Visitation • Family Law-Dissolution Case Management • Family Law-Division of Property & Spousal Support • Land Use • Real Estate Principles • Trial Practice</p>	NALA – The Paralegal Association www.nala.org
RP <i>PACE Registered Paralegal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Associate's degree in paralegal studies + 6 years of paralegal experience; OR - Bachelor's degree + 3 years of paralegal experience; OR - Bachelor's degree + completion of paralegal program + 2 years of paralegal experience; OR - Four years of substantive paralegal experience on or before 12/31/2000 	National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA) www.paralegals.org
CRP <i>Core Registered Paralegal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bachelor's degree, paralegal certificate, or associate's degree (no experience or CLE); OR - Associate's degree + 1 year of experience + 6 hours CLE; OR - High school diploma or GED + 5 years of experience and 12 hours CLE in the 2 years preceding the exam 	National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA) www.paralegals.org
ALP <i>Accredited Legal Professional</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Completion of an accredited business/legal course; OR - Completion of a NALS Legal Training Course; OR - One year of general office experience <p><i>Certification should demonstrate ability to perform business communication tasks, maintain office records/calendars; understanding of office equipment/computer terminology; aptitude for understanding legal terminology, legal complexities, & supporting documents; knowledge of law office ethics.</i></p>	NALS – The Association for Legal Professionals www.nals.org
PLS/CLP* <i>Professional Legal Secretary/Certified Legal Professional</i> <i>*NALS has adapted the name of its Professional Legal Secretary certification to include the optional designation of Certified Legal Professional (CLP). Persons who attain or have attained this certification may use either the PLS or CLP designation.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimum of 3 years of experience in the legal field (partial waiver may be granted for post-secondary degree or other certification in lieu of experience) <p><i>Certification should demonstrate mastery of office skills; ability to interact on a professional level with attorneys, clients, and other support staff; the discipline to assume responsibility and exercise initiative and judgment; working knowledge of procedural law, the law library, and how to prepare legal documents.</i></p>	NALS – The Association for Legal Professionals www.nals.org
PP <i>Professional Paralegal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimum of 5 years of paralegal experience; OR - Bachelor's degree in paralegal studies; OR - Graduation from an ABA-approved paralegal program or another accredited program; OR - Bachelor's degree in any field + one year of paralegal experience 	NALS – The Association for Legal Professionals www.nals.org
TBLS-BCP <i>Texas Board of Legal Specialization-Board Certified Paralegal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimum of 5 years of experience as a paralegal - 3 years of Texas experience in the particular specialty area (see below) - 30 hours of relevant CLE in the 3 years preceding exam application PLUS one of the following: 1) successful completion of CP exam, 2) Bachelor's degree, 3) Completion of ABA-approved paralegal program, or 4) Seven years of paralegal experience <p><u>Specialty Areas:</u> Bankruptcy • Civil Trial • Criminal • Estate Planning & Probate • Family • Oil, Gas & Mineral • Personal Injury Trial • Real Estate</p> <p>Recertification (every 5 years) requires completion of 75 hours of CLE in the specialty area.</p>	Texas Board of Legal Specialization (TBLS) www.tbls-bcp.org <i>The Texas Board of Legal Specialization is a professional certification organization that provides certification to both attorneys and paralegals in TEXAS STATE LAW only.</i>

*For detailed prerequisites, see the certifying organization's website.