

## **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PARALEGAL CERTIFICATE AND CERTIFICATION?**

It is important to distinguish between a paralegal certificate and certification. A certificate verifies that a student has successfully completed a paralegal educational program. Generally, these programs are offered at universities and colleges. The prerequisites may vary but many require the entering student to have an associate or bachelor's degree in another area. For example, if a program offers a post-baccalaureate paralegal certificate, the student will have obtained a bachelor's degree in an area other than paralegal studies. It is possible that the student will take only legal specialty courses since they have completed their general education requirements during the pursuit of their associate or bachelor's degree. Upon successful completion of the institution's educational requirements, the student is issued a certificate of completion. The student is now certificated in paralegal studies.

A certified paralegal is one that has successfully completed a certification exam. Certification is the process through which an organization grants formal recognition to an individual that meets certain established requirements. This may include meeting educational requirements, prior work experience as a paralegal and passing an examination. Once the paralegal has met these criteria, they may use a special designation namely, "certified paralegal".

Currently, all certification programs in the United States are voluntary. Therefore, a paralegal may work in the field without obtaining certification. The two major paralegal organizations, NALA and NFPA both offer certification exams, as do some states. The scope, duration and requirements for the exams vary with each organization.