



Western
Association of
Legal
Assistants

Fall 1988
Edition

REPORT ON VVI LEGAL ASSISTANT PROGRAM

The Vancouver Vocational Institute began their first year of the Legal Assistant program last October. Prior to that a year of ad hoc advisory committee meetings were held to assist the college in creating a program that would turn out professionals and also meet the needs of the community.

Numerous hours were spent on deciding what to call the program and the graduates that went out into the work force. Examples of suggestions were "Paralegal secretary", "Paralegal Assistant" and "Specialized Legal Assistant" to name but a few.

The reasons for disagreement were varied, but it appeared that part of the problem lay in the curriculum that was introduced to the committee. It lacked any substantive law training. A student would take brief introductory procedural courses to law and then launch into a specialty, such as litigation, corporate, conveyancing, etc., with the emphasis on "how to" work.

Because the program was geared to tap into the market of those legal secretaries wanting to become legal assistants in a minimal amount of time, prerequisites for entry into the program were at least two years work in a law office or related area, and typing.

Although the committee was assured that studies had been done to determine what lawyers required from their assistants, and Capilano College and VVI had a running dialogue with respect to the course content, it was obvious from the start that like many people out there, VVI didn't know what Legal Assistants do.

All of a sudden, the committee was dissolved (that is to say no more meetings were called), and rumour was that the college couldn't obtain the necessary funding to get the program started. At this time, some progress had been made with respect to creating a program that met the needs of the target market (legal secretaries), but a name had still not been decided upon.

One year later another committee was formed. This committee was to be a permanent advisory committee to the new "Legal Assistant Program". The first meeting was held in September, 1987 and the program was already underway. The committee was advised that the ad hoc committee's work was done and the purpose of this committee was to liason, as members of the community, with the college and advise on issues such as promotion, recruitment of students, basic program definition, scholarships, etc..

The committee soon learned that changes had been made to the program:

- there would be one theory course consisting of one lecture devoted to each area of law
- prerequisite training was now one year of legal secretarial with a VVI certificate or three years in the legal field
- the program was still to be nine months of instruction and three months of practicum, but the students were expected to do their practicums for free
- one person was going to teach the entire course
- course content would be developed as the students' needs became clearer

The first group of students was from varied backgrounds, some with no legal exposure whatsoever.

To illustrate the general attitude of the subsequent meetings of the committee and the college during the next year, here is a sample of some of the members' comments:

"Screening and selection is very important because students must understand that their certificates will not turn them into quasi-lawyers"

"It is important to teach students that they assist with the mechanics of the practice, and do not make legal decisions, which is the province of the lawyer. If a legal assistant goes beyond that, the lawyer could find him/herself being sued or called up before the Law Society"

"Impress upon students to be cautious, safe and responsible workers by:

1. intensive group discussion,
2. mandatory attendance.

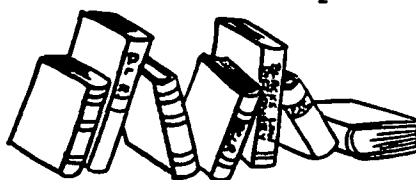
As of June, 1988, 11 out of 20 students remained in the program. Fifteen new students had enrolled for September.

Two of the remaining students attended one of the committee meetings and not surprisingly, their sentiments were as follows:

- not enough instruction
- one teacher is unrealistic
- need specialized teachers
- program was misrepresented
- course material was ill prepared
- specialty courses were dropped part way through
- legal background should be a prerequisite

In September, 1988, the program was cancelled. The committee was not notified and no reasons were forthcoming.

I think the foregoing leads to this conclusion: VVI bit off more than they could chew, but given the attitudes expressed by both college and committee, this writer is not too upset about that.



W I N E A N D C H E E S E A F F A I R



TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1988

5:30 P.M.

LYALL McKERCHER HANNA - 1500-885 West Georgia
Main Boardroom - 15th floor

Admission: \$6.00

Our guest speaker at the upcoming wine and cheese affair on September 27 is DENISE PALMER, who is a Legal Assistant for the Law Society. As many of you are aware, the Law Society's Planning Committee has formed a subcommittee on paralegalism, set up to investigate those Legal Assistants working independently (without the supervision of a lawyer). They are also looking into the qualifications of Legal Assistants in this province and the supervision they require.

Our Education Committee advises that WALA has never been contacted with regard to this subcommittee, although we have submitted enquiries to the Law Society. Here is your opportunity then to communicate your views as a member of WALA.



**If you cannot send in your RSVP, please phone Thora Arnason at 685-6000 to advise of your attendance and you may pay at the door.

WILL ATTEND THE WINE & CHEESE AFFAIR
ON SEPTEMBER 27, 1988, at 5.30 P.M.. I can be reached at _____.
Enclosed is my \$6.00 _____.