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The New PSA Board
This fall, the new PSA board took office and kicked off the fall semester with the annual ice cream social. The new board members are:

President: Rachel Chrisinger
Vice-President: Dan McOwen
Vice-President of Distance Students: Trina N. Brown
Secretary: Priya Patel
Treasurer: Jessica S. D’Amico
PR/Events Coordinator: Tina Miller

Learn more inside!
(story continued on page 3)

Fall Career Event
The Paralegal Profession: An Insider’s Perspective
November 7, 2013
See page 2 for details
The Paralegal Profession: An Insider’s Perspective

Thursday, November 7 from 6:00-7:30pm
Funger Hall Room #223 (2201 G Street, NW, George Washington University)

Registration now available at: http://gwparalegal.eventbrite.com/

This panel discussion will explore the breadth of the paralegal profession by comparing and contrasting the many diverse settings a paralegal might work as well as legal specializations. Panelists will share their experiences and offer professional advice. Additionally, geographical differences regarding hiring preferences and trends impacting paralegals will be addressed. This session will be live streamed for GW online students and questions may be submitted to panelists in advance as well as during the session using the hashtag #GWParalegalCareers (Twitter, Facebook)

Panelists:
· Maria S. Bright, Paralegal Specialist, Armed Services Board of Contract Appeals
· Kathleen Crabtree, Paralegal (Downstream Law - Research & Engineering), Exxon Mobil Corporation
· Pascalle Goddard, Senior Litigation Paralegal, Hollingsworth LLP
· Shahrzad Spieler, Senior Paralegal, Sterne, Kessler, Goldstein & Fox

Moderator: Tara Kim Eberhart, Senior Firmwide Paralegal Manager, McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP
The New PSA Board
(continued from page 1)

The new board is comprised of distance and on-campus students. Read more about them below:

Rachel Chrisinger is currently a second year graduate student in the Paralegal Studies Program at George Washington University where she is attaining her Master’s degree. Rachel is currently a paralegal intern at the Law Offices of Paul Strauss and Associates. Rachel is the current president of the Paralegal Student Association (PSA). Rachel holds a B.A. in Political Science with a minor in Psychology from Old Dominion University (ODU) in Norfolk, VA. Rachel is originally from Tallahassee, Florida and currently lives in HOVA on the GW campus. Rachel has been in the DC area since August 2012. If you would like to contact Rachel, email her at: Rchri005@gwu.edu.

Trina N. Brown is a Certified Paralegal/Paralegal Manager and Jury/Trial Consultant with 20 years of legal experience. She is the President & Founder of The Paralegal Manager, Inc. a paralegal mentoring and freelance paralegal company. Her background includes a Certificate in Paralegal Studies and BA in Organizational Dynamics. Trina is a member of the State Bar of Texas Paralegal Division (Pro Bono Ad Hoc Sub-Chair & Paralegal Mentor); The Fort Worth Paralegal Association (Ethics Committee Chair); The International Paralegal Management Association (Dallas/Fort Worth Co-Chair) and the American Society of Trial Consultants. Follow Trina on Twitter: @TheParalegalMgr.

Priya Patel. Hello fellow Paralegal students! My name is Priya, the new secretary for the Paralegal Student Association! I was born and raised in Edison, New Jersey, but have been in Washington, DC for the past four years. I recently graduated from GWU with my BA in Criminal Justice and I am now pursuing my Masters in Paralegal Studies. Currently, I am working as a Pre-Litigation Paralegal at Cohen & Cohen, a personal injury firm near DuPont Circle.

Jessica S. D’Amico is second year graduate student in the Paralegal Studies Program at George Washington University, where she is also Treasurer and Editor-In-Chief of the Paralegal Student Organization’s newsletter. She currently works as a Legal Assistant at the United States Department of Justice. She specializes in legal research, cite-checking, and assisting attorneys with technological questions. Jessica also has 8 years of experience as a writer and editor. She graduated cum laude from The Johns Hopkins University with a B.A. in Classics with a focus in art and archaeology. In her spare time, she enjoys reading and volunteering with animal rescue groups. Contact Jessica at jessdamico@gwu.edu.
Daniel McOwen (Dan) is currently a full time graduate student in the College of Professional Studies at The George Washington University (GW). Prior to GW, Dan graduated from the University of New York at Canton with a Bachelor’s degree in Legal Studies. Born in Buffalo, NY, Dan’s professional experience began right out of high school in the U.S. Navy, since that time he has managed an aircraft tire facility, owned and operated an export tire company in upstate NY, undergone a mid-life career change and worked as a wills trusts and estates paralegal. Dan is also a USA hockey certified coach and volunteers coaching pee wee kids (11-12 year olds) in the Ithaca Youth Hockey Association. If you would like to contact Dan, email him at dmcowen424@aol.com, or usnavy124@gwmail.gwu.edu.

Tina Miller. Hello All! I was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia, and I am currently living in the same neighborhood I grew up in. I graduated from the University of Richmond with my Bachelors Degree in Paralegal Studies, and I am now pursuing my masters degree in Paralegal Studies. I am working as a Legal Assistant at SunTrust Mortgage, Inc. in the Litigation Department.

Want to write for the newsletter? Have an idea for an article, or do you want the newsletter to cover a certain topic?

We need you!

Contact the editor, jessdamico@gwu.edu, for details on how to contribute.
Why Join The PSA?

The PSA offers its members a number of benefits, such as:

**Mentorship Program.** Have questions about how the program works, or is the Bluebook troubling you? You will be matched with a second-year student who can offer guidance, help, and support through the questions you have as new student.

**Support Network.** Graduate school can be tough, especially if you are also working and juggling family obligations and other commitments. PSA membership helps you form a support network of friends and colleagues.

**Networking Opportunities.** PSA events will help you meet new people and form connections around the legal world.

**Enrichment Events.** The PSA hosts several events throughout the year, including a job search seminar and trips to places like the USPTO, which will enhance your paralegal education.

Visit our website:
http://studentorgs.gwu.edu/paralegalstudentassociation/

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Dues for the 2013-2014 academic year are $20.
To join, go to https://my.gwu.edu/mod/cse/. Please include your year and affiliation (campus or distance) in the notes.
Declaration Hunters

By Isabel Otero

Last October, while beginning the GWU Paralegal Certificate program, I was hired as a paralegal for a large federal agency. Among my many assignments, I have had one laborious and on-going project for pending litigation: find witnesses across several states, and obtain written declarations from those witnesses. After months of preparation, failures, and successes this is what I learned.

Don’t reinvent the wheel. If you’ve sat through at least 30 minutes of a GWU paralegal course, then you’ve heard this phrase many times. Let’s face it, it’s unlikely that we are among the first paralegals to have this type of assignment in our office or organization, and it’s even more unlikely that, given a project of this magnitude, we could possibly have all the tools necessary to begin. So, after a couple of visits with my colleagues, I found the appropriate “office-approved” format for unsworn declarations, and more importantly, the section of the U.S. Code with what became known in my office as “the magic language” of declarations. “I declare (or certify, verify, or state) under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed on (date). (Signature)” 28 USC § 1746 (2). Now, when I finally found a witness, I would know where and how to memorialize his or her statement.

Know your case. This may seem very obvious, but when I arrived on the scene, my team already had a few declarations on file and several months of litigation behind them. I could have trusted the previous declarations, and made sure that the questions I asked led to similar results. Trust me, you want to get some semblance of a briefing before you have to go ask potential witnesses questions, and you want to go through the previous motions and discovery to see what you’ve missed. Getting up-to-date on your case can lead to some creative attorney wrangling; they are usually very busy – especially in the world of the cash-strapped federal government. Go to your attorney prepared with substantive questions, so remember your assignment and do some homework before you catch your attorney. Finding potential witnesses can be very difficult depending on the constituency you’re trying to reach (e.g. migrant farm workers). Once you find a witness that may very well be the last time you find him or her again. You want to be prepared to ask them questions, and you want to have the elements of the case straight.

Come up with a battle plan. If you’ve done the previous steps, then you’re ready to find the witnesses, and you need to have a plan. The best case scenario: a list of potential witnesses already exists – simply waiting for you to contact them. We can dream. Since that’s unlikely always remember: lawyers make paper trails – follow them.
Within the evidence your team obtained through litigation, you will begin to see the types of people with which you wish to speak, and you may begin to see the potential level of difficulty for finding them. There are a variety of litigation tools that could help you get up-to-date information on the potential witnesses such as Lexis’ Public Records or Accurint databases, or Westlaw’s Public Records or CLEAR databases. Depending on the organization or office with which you work, you may have access to some or all of these databases. Your job will be to find the most updated information on your potential witness, as this will give you the highest chance of reaching him or her. Targeting witnesses can mean anything from making cold-calls or physically traveling to their homes, so do this work before you begin to reach out to people. You may find that there is a cluster or potential witnesses in a certain area and such a find can make your job a little easier and potentially save your office or organization money.

**Practice your questions, but be ready to follow a witness’ lead.** It is important to get a consensus from your team about the questions you will be asking witnesses and the information you wish to seek. You should definitely have sample questions and a type of script before you begin to reach out to witnesses. It’s often odd and somewhat frightening for people, not desensitized to legal proceedings, to get a phone call or a visit from the federal government or a fancy law firm. So, be prepared to speak to people with varying degrees of education or knowledge about your case, and be prepared to answer questions yourself (i.e. “Why are you at my house?” or “Am I in some kind of trouble?”). It’s important to listen and not just ask questions. Engage the person in an actual conversation, or make the person feel comfortable if you’re there to help with the interrogation (e.g. **acknowledge that you’re in their home and be extremely polite**). Talking to strangers, and specifically getting strangers to tell you important information quickly, can be difficult but it can be practiced.

Declarations are a small part of evidence gathering, but the declarations that your team will need must be accurate, reflective of the theory of the case, and should lead to good witnesses for your side. You need to know why you’re looking for someone, what you want to find out, and where you’re going to start searching for that person. If you are organized and tenacious, then you will be helping your team gain valuable witnesses –or know sooner rather than later that the theory of the case needs work. Patience is the key to witness search, and organization is the key to obtaining written declarations.

I’m certainly still learning the ropes, but the longer I have this project the more I feel like a veritable “declaration hunter.” Who knows, maybe the next newbie paralegal in my office will come ask me for some advice on her new and daunting assignment.
Caveat Googleor:
Tips And Cautions When Using Google For Legal Research

By Jessica S. D’Amico

Google, perhaps the most ubiquitous name on the web, has come under fire for skewing its search results, and biasing results based on a user’s past queries. At the same time, Google is still one of the best tools for conducting fast and free Internet research. Google Scholar can save a busy student hours in the library. To make the most of Google, the savvy researcher must separate its powerful tools from the noise.

First, a word about basic search. It is important to remember that Google assumes there is an “and” operator between words entered in the search bar. If a user enters “cats dogs,” the results will include both words. If a user wants a search to include either phrase, they should type “OR” in between the terms. Practically, all that really needs to appear in the search bar are the key words a user wants to see in their result; prepositions, conjunctions, and articles are extraneous. In other words, the search bar should contain exactly what is sought in the results.

On the other hand, to exclude a word, use a minus sign. This can save time when looking for information containing one word with two or more very different meanings. For example, a person might want to research giant pandas, but they don’t want to sift through search results for red pandas (an unrelated animal), or the Fiat Panda (a car found mostly in the UK). Searching for “panda –red” or “panda –fiat” will exclude those kinds of results.

The flip side of this specificity is one of the weak aspects of Google Scholar: it does not contain a standard, controlled vocabulary. A controlled vocabulary standardizes a variety of terms with the same semantic meaning. For example, different regions in the United States call sweetened, carbonated beverages terms like “pop,” “coke,” “sprite,” or “soda,” while all talking about the same drink. In professionally indexed databases all the terms are normalized to one standard term. Therefore, a search for “pop consumption in 2013” would return information about soft drink consumption in 2013, regardless of whether the term “pop” or “soda” was used by the author. Google does not have this semantic underpinning, so the user must search for each specific term to ensure they are seeing all the relevant results.
With knowledge of these limitations, a smart user can work around the shortcomings of the system and quickly extract valuable information. However, there are a few more caveats:

First, Google warns that the court opinions are not guaranteed to be complete or accurate. Google is not a reporter of cases like WestLaw or Lexis, so the decision posted on Google may be missing key elements. In addition, Google doesn’t give any editorial enhancements like case history, headnotes, or notes of decisions. Therefore, the case may have been overturned or upheld, but that information will be missing.

Second, a user must filter out Google’s Adwords results. Google sells vendors prime advertising space on the results page. If a user’s search terms match Adwords that vendors have purchased, ads will appear in a beige box at the top of the screen and along the side bar. These are the results companies pay Google for people to see first, so beware that they aren’t part of the regular search results.

Finally, search history can influence future results. Google records, tracks, and analyzes each search its users run. They later sell the randomized results to marketing analytics firms and use them to sell different Adwords based on what people are querying. Google will track if a user favors a specific political slant or any other demographic preference. For example, if a user consistently selects liberal news outlets, conservative ones will appear lower in subsequent searches. If that user later wants to see a conservative perspective, they will need to scroll further through the results to find that perspective. In this way, one initial click of specific link sets in motion a preference engine that determines future results. This self-reinforcing bias is problematic for a legal researcher trying to get a balanced picture of an issue.

In sum, while Google is a helpful research tool, users can’t simply rely on quick searches to find information. A user must work within Google’s constraints and maintain an awareness of how its results may be skewed.