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# GEARS OF LAW

**April 2015**

## Twenty Questions

*Each issue we are giving readers a glimpse into the lives and interests of legal professionals through a series of questions and answers (twenty to be precise). Each issue will feature a different professional responding to the same twenty questions. This issue’s installment features Bor Yang, one of our very own professors. Sadly, Bor will be leaving us after this semester. We would like to thank her for her commitment, passion, and desire to see us succeed in all of our studies. Even though we will greatly miss her, we wish her all the best in the future.*

**1. What is your name?** Bor Yang

**2. What is your title/position?** Attorney and NHCC faculty

**3. What has been your largest success or achievement (academically or professionally)?**

- Becoming an attorney at the age of 25. It’s a very typical age for law school graduates but I felt very young.
- Winning a disability case for an eight year old child.
- Being told after ten or more years that one of my very first divorce clients, who was a victim of domestic violence, became an attorney herself and remembers me as being an important part of her achievement.

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## Cover Letters

**By Patti Keyes**

I think most of us can agree that going through the job search process can be somewhat painful. In fact, I have heard it compared to getting a root canal. One of the major components of the job search process is drafting a cover letter, which often times gets underestimated for its value and worth. It is a major part of the job search process: a part that should be embarked on seriously and with extreme thoughtfulness and care. Taking the time you need to construct an effective professional cover letter designed for a specific position can be the difference between getting your foot in the door for an interview or landing in the deleted folder or trash can.

Many job seekers will create a generic cover letter, just changing the name of the organization and contact in all the places where it appears in the letter. Employers are astute and can usually identify a generic letter when they see one. I’ve also heard horror stories from applicants that didn’t change all the names when submitting to a different employer – turned out to be quite an embarrassment. While having a generic cover letter can be a helpful place to start, tailoring your letter to a specific job in a specific company or firm can make your application and resume more persuasive to the potential employer. A tailored letter will also tell the employer that you have done your homework on them and on the job opening. They want to be convinced that you know who they are, you really want this job and you want to work for them.

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## Professional Wisdom

By Nathanael Smith

*In late February, the Paralegal Student Association hosted a panel discussion event featuring paralegals who willingly contributed their time to share their wisdom with current paralegal students. The following article details some of the notable highlights from the event. The PLSA would like to thank everyone who participated in the event for their great help in making the night a success. It would not have been possible without all your contributions and hard work!*

As defined by the Oxford Dictionary, a paralegal is a “person trained in subsidiary legal matters but not fully qualified as a lawyer” (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/paralegal>) From the way the definition is worded, it could be reasonably inferred that a paralegal’s job can look like many very different things. And that is true. The role of a paralegal can be quite broad. It can relate to a person who works in the private sector for a criminal defense attorney as well as to a person who works in the public sector for a county attorney’s office. Depending on who a paralegal works for, a paralegal’s general duties may look very different than those in other settings. Some paralegals regularly work overtime while others may never have to work a single hour of overtime. Some may have a very specific range of tasks they are required to regularly accomplish while others may be faced with a variety of new things to do each day. Some paralegals may have lots of contact with clients while others may only come in contact with others outside their firm once in a great while. In general, what a paralegal’s role and duties look like can drastically differ depending on who the paralegal works for.

Recently, the Paralegal Student Association sponsored a panel event that featured seven paralegals, each with differing backgrounds. Split into two panels (people who work as “traditional” paralegals and those who have “untraditional” jobs), the paralegals featured at the event each had diverse experiences. One was an escrow officer, another was a victim-witness advocate, another worked for a criminal litigation firm, another worked for a county attorney’s office, and another contracted her services out to many varying firms and companies.

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## This Article Has Something to Do with Networking and Me

### (I’m Not Sure of the Ratio Though)

By Michelina Lucia

Hello everyone! My name is Michelina Lucia. You may know me personally as a fellow student, professionally (and I hope also personally) as a tutor, or just seen me in a class or in an NHCC hallway.

Maybe you don’t know me at all which truly is a tragedy as I am quite the person to know. In any case, I will be graduating this spring and wanted to take the time to give you a few tips that I have learned in my jaunt through the paralegal program. I have learned these tips from fellow students, paralegal faculty, and the other NHCC faculty I have had the privilege to work with as a student, tutor, Officer in Phi Theta Kappa, and Community Liaison in the Paralegal Student Association.

Sooooo... if you’re starting out, the best thing you can ever do for yourself is to get to know the other students in your Introduction to Law class or your first classes in the Paralegal program. They will be at your side for the next two years so you might as well get to know them. Also, when you get closer toward graduation, the students you know and socialize with will be your co-workers and colleagues in your future career.

**The legal field is one in which you must network to excel in.** Classes are basically built-in networking for you. Use them.

If you are coming close to your last semester, or are in that last semester now, take note of your fellow student’s contact information. You now know many new paralegals. There will come a time when you run across an area of law you are not used to working in. Your student email account will be unavailable to you when you graduate so make sure to get their contact information now. Your fellow students can be one of the reasons you succeed in your career. **Connect via LinkedIn or at least Facebook.**

As an example, last semester I took Family Law. In that class one of the students I sat with, whom I had shared other classes with, was finishing up her last semester. While discussing her internship she mentioned that she was going to refer the law firm to Mary Fenske as a good place to intern at. As I had an internship to find soon, I mentioned that I would be interested in the firm and she set me up with an interview within the next two weeks.

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## Current Events:

- How Many Crimes Do Your Police 'Clear'? Now You Can Find Out <http://www.npr.org/2015/03/30/395799413/how-many-crimes-do-your-police-clear-now-you-can-find-out>
- Let My People Go [http://www.aclifilms.com/letmypeoplego?utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_source=ExactTarget&utm\\_campaign=movie](http://www.aclifilms.com/letmypeoplego?utm_medium=Email&utm_source=ExactTarget&utm_campaign=movie)
- Killing in the heartland; heartbreak in China <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/03/us/iowa-killing-chinese-student/index.html>
- Judge says Brooklyn woman can use Facebook to serve divorce papers <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/brooklyn/exclusive-woman-facebook-serve-divorce-papers-article-1.2174577>
- In an Iowa courtroom, an astonishing case of sex and Alzheimers <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/04/07/in-an-iowa-courtroom-an-astonishing-case-of-sex-and-alzheimers/>
- Canadian dog walker hailed hero for using nail clippers to free bound, kidnapped woman from captor after five days of sex assaults <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/dog-walker-hero-nail-clippers-free-captive-woman-article-1.2180606>
- Google patents ability to control a robot army <http://qz.com/383275/google-has-patented-the-ability-to-control-a-robot-army/>
- Law firms challenging Delaware's current 'appraisal arbitrage' laws <http://www.insidecounsel.com/2015/04/07/law-firms-challenging-delawares-current-appraisal>
- Plushenko: Russian lawmaker's push for just two Olympics 'inappropriate' <http://www.foxsports.com/olympics/story/olympics-russian-evgeny-plushenko-restrict-athletes-lawmaker-skater-040715>
- Sex offenders can be within 1,000 feet of schools after federal judge strikes down parts of law [http://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2015/04/part\\_of\\_michigan\\_sex\\_offender.html](http://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2015/04/part_of_michigan_sex_offender.html)
- Virtual protest: Demonstrators challenge new law with holograms <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/12/europe/spain-hologram-protest/index.html>
- New Mexico Is The Second State To Ban Police From Seizing Innocent People's Property <http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2015/04/14/3646619/new-law-bans-civil-forfeiture-in-nm/>
- When Do Sports Become Criminal? [http://blogs.findlaw.com/tarnished\\_twenty/2015/04/when-do-sports-become-criminal.html](http://blogs.findlaw.com/tarnished_twenty/2015/04/when-do-sports-become-criminal.html)
- Tsarnaev guilty on all charges in Boston Marathon bombing <http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/crime/jury-reaches-verdict-in-boston-marathon-death-penalty-trial/ar-AAzUmL?ocid=ansnewsap11>
- Europe v. Facebook: Facebook faces European privacy lawsuit <http://www.rcrwireless.com/20150409/big-data-analytics/europe-vs-facebook-facebook-facing-european-privacy-lawsuit-tag20>
- Big Changes Coming to Minnesota's Custody and Child Support Laws <http://family-in-law.com/big-changes-coming-to-minnesotas-custody-and-child-support-laws/>
- Richard Dreyfuss Sues Disney Over 'What About Bob?' Profits <http://www.msn.com/en-us/movies/news/richard-dreyfuss-sues-disney-over-%e2%80%98what-about-bob%e2%80%99-profits/ar-AAaFKnS?ocid=ansVariety11>
- Arizona judge sentences murderer Jodi Arias to life without parole <http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/crime/convicted-killer-jodi-arias-faces-sentencing-in-arizona/ar-AAaVKeb?ocid=ansnewsreu11>
- Ex-NFL star Hernandez convicted of murder, sentenced to life <http://www.msn.com/en-us/sports/nfl/aaron-hernandez-found-guilty-of-1st-degree-murder/ar-AAb1qqC?ocid=ansnewsap11>
- Lacey Spears Gets twenty Years to Life for Poisoning Five-Year-Old Son to Death with Salt <http://www.people.com/article/lacey-spears-sentenced-salt-poisoning>

## 20 Questions Cont'd

**4. What is the biggest challenge you have faced in regards to the legal profession and how did you overcome it?** Representing clients without much help from senior attorneys. I just did what I had to do. I think you can cry and complain but do it in the privacy of your own house, car, or bathroom and much later. There's no time for crying or complaining on the job.

**5. Do you live by a motto? If so, what is it?** I think there are several principles that have influenced me through different stages of life. One principle or motto that feels particularly relevant right now is the idea that we're meant to be and feel challenged throughout life, both personally and professionally. If there's no part of you that is at least a little scared of something new then you're not growing or developing. Never allow yourself to feel stagnant or stuck for too long. You're doing a disservice to yourself and to others.

**6. What court case (either past or present) interests you the most? Why?** There are many cases that are interesting and for different reasons. I'm always fascinated by decisions of the Supreme Court that are divided. All of the death penalty cases are also interesting to me.

**7. What do you like most about Minnesota?** I enjoy the cultural and ethnic diversity in Minnesota and will miss that in Vermont. Minneapolis in particular is home to many world renowned chefs and restaurants. I also love walking around Lake Calhoun and I've had some really great hikes in Northern Minnesota that will be part of me for life.

**8. What do you think the largest change for the legal profession will be in the future?** Electronic and technical advances.

**9. Describe yourself using three words:** Compassionate, adventurous, humanitarian.

**10. What is/was your favorite subject in school?** Art and Social Psychology.

**11. Who is your biggest role model?** My parents. They are compassionate, honest, just and resilient people. My mom is extremely intelligent. My dad has a great sense of humor. They both give great advice.

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## Cover Letters Cont'd

Before you start your letter, review the job posting to get a better idea as to what the job entails and specifically what the employer is looking for. Research the law firm or company so you have a better understanding of who they are and what they do.

Your cover letter should complement your resume. It should be organized from the beginning through to the end.

I hope the following will help serve you as a cover letter template:

*Your name*

*Address*

*City, State and Zip*

*Telephone Number*

*Email address*

*Date*

*Employer's Name (try to find out who you should be directing this letter to)*

*Professional Title*

*Organization Name*

*Address*

*City, State and Zip*

*Dear Mr. or Ms. Last Name :* (if you are unsuccessful finding out who to direct your letter to, you can also use:

*Dear Human Resource Representative, Dear Hiring Manager, Dear Hiring Representative:*

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## 20 Questions Cont'd

**12. Share something people would be surprised to know about you:** All of my students and colleagues know that I have a disability but I'm not sure anyone knows that it is polio, a virus that affected the size and muscles of my right leg. I contracted the polio virus as a toddler, after I had been walking for awhile. Having been born in a third world country, during the aftermath of the Vietnam War, and in poverty, there were no vaccines or medical help for me. I've tried to live a life that I wanted and not one that some people may have expected for me; hiking, swimming, skiing, becoming an attorney, teaching, getting married, having kids, etc.

**13. What is the number one advice you would give to someone entering the legal profession?** For paralegal students – be confident in yourself and your ability to be resourceful. Find a balance between work and family and friends. Read lots of books and travel. For students who want to become lawyers, study really hard for the LSAT, get into a great law school, limit how much you borrow and upon graduation, find great mentors. Again, read lots of books and travel.

**14. What is your favorite movie?** Pan's labyrinth, Whiplash, Amelie, Life of Pi, The Secret Life of Walter Mitty and more.

**15. If you only had one day left to live, what would you do?** I would be on a secluded white sand beach or on a mountain top with my parents, siblings, husband and children, enjoying some carbs, relaxing and laughing a lot.

**16. What is one goal you have for the future?** To write a book.

**17. What is your favorite book?** Great Gatsby, Kite Runner, Love Does and more.

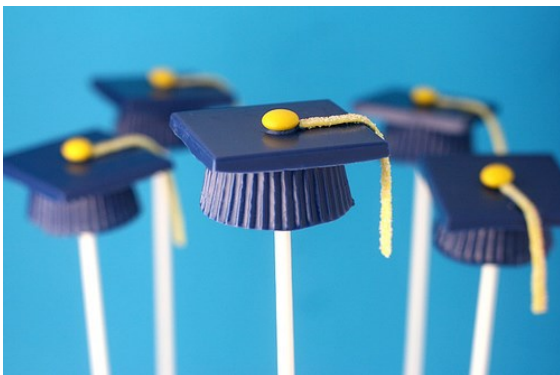
**18. Which country would you like to visit the most if you were given the chance to?** We're all given the chance. I have yet to see New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Bora Bora.

**19. If you could give advice to your younger self, what would it be?** Don't take yourself so seriously and study abroad in college.

**20. If you could redo your career and start over, with the option of picking another career, would you redo it?** I'm happy so I try not to look back too much but I always say that I went to law school because math never came easy to me. In retrospect, I would have had to work really hard and struggled a bit but I probably would have done just fine in medical or pharmacy school.

### ***Bonus Question:***

**21. What area of law do you like the most (criminal law, probate law, contract law, family law, etc.) and why?** In general, criminal law interests me most. But I wouldn't want to practice in it. I also think environmental law is interesting and in a different life, I would've tried entertainment law.



## **Congratulations Graduates!**

The PLSA would like to congratulate all the paralegal students who are graduating this spring. We wish you all the best in the future and are glad we were able to share your experience at NHCC with you!

## Professional Wisdom Cont'd

While they all shared varying backgrounds, they were able to provide advice that could fit into any paralegal's situation. Some of the most interesting pieces of advice they gave included:

### *In general:*

- get whatever experience you can
- temp jobs can be looked at as good opportunities to figure out what you like and what you don't
- figure out what you like doing early on instead of being stuck later on in your career
- feel free to apply for any job listing requiring five years of experience or less

### *On how to cope with stress/emotional cases:*

- have a class of wine
- exercise/go running
- find something you enjoy doing outside of work

### *On most important skills for paralegals to have:*

- time management
- ability to multitask
- communication skills
- computer skills
- attention to detail
- flexibility
- ability to type fast (ideally, 70+ words per minute)

### *And last but not least, on how to keep organized:*

- gain as much information you can from others you work with on what helps them; learn from others
- keep good notes
- use a calendar (such as Outlook)



## Cover Letters Cont'd

### FIRST PARAGRAPH:

Why are you writing, be specific about the position for which you are applying and how you heard about the opening. Was it a posting you received from North Hennepin? Saw on a website (which one)? Was it a referral (if so indicate the individual that referred you)? If you are sending out an unsolicited resume, indicate why you are interested in them. Did you read about them? Do they practice in an area of law that you are interested in?

### SECOND PARAGRAPH:

The mid-section of your cover letter should be one paragraph or two SHORT paragraphs that make relevant points about your qualifications. Highlight your education or skills. This includes your Associate Degree in Paralegal or your Paralegal Certificate from an American Bar Association approved program. This could include assignments, research projects, and relevant coursework. Connect these highlights to the position you are applying for. Keep in mind that you can also include relevant skills such as communication, writing, research and analysis, computer skills etc. that are evidenced through your educational experience. This entire paragraph does not need to entirely focus on education. You can also highlight your relevant job, internship or volunteer experiences and/or skills. Look at your resume and choose three or four relevant points that demonstrate the skills the employer is looking for. Look at the job description for key terms used. Make sure you make reference to the specific qualifications using the key terms they are looking for and communicate how your skills or experiences relate to those qualifications.

### Remember:

- Your cover letter is considered a good example of your writing skills!
- Still apply even if you don't have all the qualifications the employer is looking for in the job posting. Most candidates don't! Wow them with the qualifications you do have as well as a fabulous and flawless cover letter and resume!
- Highlight skills and specific achievements that demonstrate why you are qualified for the position, and use key terms from the job description that are relevant to your background.

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## Cover Letters Cont'd

### THIRD PARAGRAPH:

The conclusion. This should indicate the plan of action you will be taking. Are you going to call the employer or ask that they contact you to set up an interview? Include day and evening contact information if appropriate.

MAKE CERTAIN that you thank them for taking the time to review your credentials.

*Sincerely,*

*your typed name if submitting online or your written signature*

I would like to leave you with a few cover letter tips:

- Your cover letter should never be longer than one page. Be brief! An ideal cover letter will be three to four concise paragraphs with relevant information that fits onto one page.
- Address the cover letter to a specific individual. If no name was given on the posting, call the organization and track it down. Make sure it's spelled correctly and make sure you confirm the gender of the individual if the first name doesn't make that clear. Sometimes you won't be able to secure that information, then just use the term they've used in the posting or if nothing appears, Dear Hiring Manager:
- Match the font style and formatting of your resume to the cover letter.
- Proofread, proofread and then proofread again!! Have someone else proofread. Don't make any errors!! Think of all your hard work ending up in the trash because of an error on your cover letter or resume!
- When submitting a cover letter and resume via email, save it in a pdf file and send it as an attachment. Sending in a pdf file will secure the format does not change. Simply state in the body of the email that you are attaching a cover letter and resume for whatever the job is that you are applying.
- Develop a system or keep a log of all the cover letters and resumes you've sent. Include dates, contact persons, follow up dates, job descriptions or postings, etc. You'll be happy you did once you've sent out 10 to 20 applications! Trust me - keeping a well organized job search will be well worth your effort!

Good luck!



## Networking and Me Cont'd

That interview turned out to be my internship which has been phenomenal. Additionally, the other students I have known and remained in contact with have alerted me to job openings at their firms, and answered my questions relating to the legal field beyond what we learn in class. Basically: get to know your fellow students and keep up the contact.

**Never underestimate the power of a kind word.** The word 'networking' is, according to Merriam-Webster, "...the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business" But how can one cultivate business relationships? Simply this: treat the other person courteously: as an individual not just a random person you interact with.

When sending an email, start by mentioning something positive about the day, (e.g. the first sunny day of spring) or something about their lives (e.g. you know their child is sick, "I hope your family is feeling better"). You get the picture. Emails are impersonal at the best of times and when you have business to conduct they are even more so. Don't write a paragraph to them, but a well-placed pause to recognize that they, too, have lives will go a long way.

Always, always, ALWAYS finish by thanking them for taking the time to do whatever it is you're emailing them for. Even if you're just thanking them for taking the time to read your email. We live in a society that values time above everything else. The legal field intensifies this value to the Nth degree. I can't stress enough how important it is to thank someone for their time.

I recently worked with a person who was, shall we say, less than willing to give me some photographs I needed for a case. I spoke on the phone with that person multiple times and when I remained insistent that we had been promised the photographs that person's temperament took a swift downward turn. **As soon as I realized they were closing up, I made sure to recognize verbally that they must be very busy** and hinted at over worked. Almost immediately the person's demeanor switched back to concerned but helpful. As soon as I got the photographs in an email I shot an email back thanking them for sending the photographs so quickly.

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## Networking and Me Cont'd

The response I received can only be described as cheery.

Another tip: **handwrite** when you can. Everyone loves to get a hand written note. Hand writing shows that you took the time to find a note, envelope, and pen just to send a message to them.

**Writing to others is about them, not you** and people will pick up on the time you take simply for their feelings.

While a note is always nicer than an email, if you do email, just don't fall into the trap of the 'impersonal email'. Don't be chatty; however, think how you would actually speak to them and then re-read your email. Does it sound artificial or stilted? Then re-write.

These are just some ideas for networking. You cannot go wrong, however, if you keep to this rule: treat the other person as you would like to be treated. This is not altruism, **this is humanism**. So often in the legal field, we lose track of kindness, especially when working in some harder areas of law. Networking is the term the legal field uses to mean keeping humanism in the legal field.

I hope this helps you wherever law has or is taking you. These examples have certainly helped me get as far as I have and have opened numerous doors for me both in and outside of the legal field. Good luck with all of your classes this summer and fall and those graduating students who are reading this. Good luck on the job search. **Yay us, we made it!** First and second years: Yay you, I have no doubt you can make it, you're baby paralegals after all.

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## Reminder: Class Registration!

The PLSA would like to remind you that Spring and Summer registration for classes is open. Although the Spring semester has not yet officially come to an end, now is the time to start thinking about the next step.

The following Paralegal courses are offered this summer:

- PLEG 1111-91:** Introduction to Law and Paralegal Studies with Carrie Vaia

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 6:30pm-9:10pm

- PLEG 1411-01:** Litigation I with Shawn Woodbury

Mondays & Wednesdays, 3:00pm-5:40pm

- PLEG 2620-91:** Property with Carrie Vaia

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30-6:10pm

- PLEG 2930-91:** Legal Studies Seminar and Internship with Mary Fenske

Mondays and Wednesdays, 6:00pm-9:35pm

Classes start soon so don't delay!

The full details regarding these classes and information regarding fall 2015 classes can be found via the following link:

[https://webproc.mnscu.edu/registration/search/basic.html?campusid=153&\\_ga=1.73436497.216517171.1429757359](https://webproc.mnscu.edu/registration/search/basic.html?campusid=153&_ga=1.73436497.216517171.1429757359) or by clicking on "course schedule" under the "registration tab" from NHCC's homepage: <http://www.nhcc.edu/>

