

IDENTIFICATION OF SKILLS STANDARDS  
FOR ENTRY LEVEL LEGAL OFFICE SUPPORT STAFF IN URBAN OKLAHOMA:  
A DELPHI STUDY

By

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Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
July, 2010

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study is dedicated to my late parents, William McKinley (Mac) and Mary Elizabeth Motley Reese, for their undying love and ability to instill in me the belief that anything is possible with hard work and perseverance.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to my advisor and chair, Dr. Lynna Ausburn, who provided support, guidance, patience, encouragement, and friendship during this nine year journey. I am profoundly indebted to Dr. Ausburn for her continuous leadership during this process. Dr. Ausburn exemplifies the meaning of mentorship, scholarship, and professionalism. Thank you for helping me to stretch my scope of thought and practice.

I would like to greatly thank Dr. Mary Jo Self, Dr. Gary Conti, and Dr. Belinda McCharen for their dedication and commitment to the growth and development of scholars. I would like to thank Dr. Self for giving me a solid historical and foundational view of occupational studies. Dr. Conti, thank you for opening my mind to the endless possibilities of delivering and receiving education. Dr. McCharen, thank you for helping me to solidify creative thoughts in the realm of workforce development.

Terral (Terry) Marcellus Ward and Tonya Ward Murphy, your patience and understanding during this lifetime process were invaluable. It's wonderful to experience the reflection of unconditional love from you. We grew up together and fully maintained

our commitment to family. Continue to strive for excellence in all you do and carry our commitment forward. Thank you for a lifetime of teaching me to be a mother. I am honored to have been blessed with and granted the duty of nurturing you. Scotty Murphy, thank you for your quiet presence and support, this too, sustained me during hard times. I could not have dream of a better husband for Tonya and brother for Terry. I love you all.

Kaleb Daniel Ward, Nathan Reese Murphy, Isaiah Marcellus Ward, Alivia Renee Ward, and Conrad Elijah Murphy, thank you for providing me with joy, smiles, hugs, happiness, and ALL the good things that come with being a grandmother. I love you all greatly and equally.

I want to thank my siblings, Marlene and James Brown, Marilyn King, Timothy Reese, Michael Reese, Darla Kizzee, the late William Reese, Jr., Philip Reese, and Wesley King, Sr.. I had the advantage of being the youngest and having the opportunity of learning from each of you. Thank you for unknowingly teaching me to survive and dream. I am forever grateful to all of you.

I want to thank my friends Robert H. Alexander, Jr., Annita Bridges, Maggieann Green, Loretta Hobbs, Sandra Wiley, and Diane Strickler. Diane, being connected to you as my yoga instructor has truly been invaluable. Your love for yoga and mankind helped me to achieve the level of focus required to complete this study. <NAMASTE>. Maggie, through thick and thin, you have been there cheering me on to the finish line. Thank you for our lifelong friendship. Loretta, we stayed connected through the years and you have helped me keep the dream alive. Thank you for our lifelong friendship.

Saundra, though many years have passed, you know just what to say to give a good dose of encouragement. Thank you for our lifelong friendship.

Robert and Annita, it's very difficult to dream beyond that which you know or can see; you helped me see and dream beyond the arrow's shot. You helped me look within and face my strengths and fallacies. You gave me the latitude to experiment and grow. These things helped me pursue excellence in the valley times. Thank you for your trust and our lifelong friendship. I will be forever grateful to you.

In conclusion, I would like to sincerely thank the experts that agreed to be a part of this study, Beverly McElroy, Michelle Munda, Michelle Stewart, Lisa Rose, Lorri Cargill, and Velinda Goss. I could not have completed this study without you and your willingness to commit your time and expertise to this project. I am and will always be deeply grateful for your commitment to serve as expert panelists. Future entry level legal personnel, students and curricula will benefit from your participation in this research study.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

Virtually every aspect of our lives involves the legal system, from opening a checking account to signing a deed for a home. Lawyers are at the heart of this system and in many ways are the link between the legal system and society. The importance of the role of lawyers in American society has been addressed by both the U.S. Department of Labor and the American Bar Association. “They hold positions of great responsibility and are obligated to adhere to a strict code of ethics” (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008, O\*NET 23-1011.00). Regarding the client-lawyer relationship, the American Bar Association (ABA) Model Rules of Professional Conduct states in Rule 1.1: Competence that, “A lawyer shall provide competent representation to a client. Competent representation requires the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for the representation” (ABA, 2007, p. 10).

In order for lawyers to function ethically and competently and service their clients more efficiently and cost effectively, they require assistance in the form of a legal support staff that consists of legal administrators, paralegals/legal assistants, and legal secretaries. Administrators assist with the day to day operation of managing the law firm, while paralegals/legal assistants and legal secretaries work directly with lawyers to provide legal and office services. The Association of Legal Administrators (ALA), National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA),

and National Association of Legal Secretaries, formally known as NALS, are national professional group organizations for each of the particular legal office support jobs. A review of the literature reported here in Chapter II revealed that each has established codes of professional ethics, conduct, and competence which are in line with those set forth by the ABA for lawyers.

With the high standards and level of responsibility required in the legal industry, providing a competent labor pool for staffing law offices presents challenges. While job shortages may not affect every discipline, a definite deficiency is being observed in regards to entry-level legal office support staff personnel. Sostek (2007) asserted that “They might not have the fancy degrees, academic honors or journal publications that usually impress law firms, but there’s nobody more sought after right now than legal secretaries” (p. 1). Erb (2000) also addressed a shortage of skilled professionals in the legal field, stating that “Law firms and other professional services companies are grappling with one of the worst labor shortages in years for essential back-office workers – the legal secretaries, paralegals and payroll specialists who keep the firm humming” (p. 1).

Several sources have addressed this shortage of qualified legal personnel and its relationship to availability of suitable and appropriate preparatory education. Mitchell (1999) cited a white paper prepared by the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) which stated that “Chapter leaders expressed the concern and frustration of their members in trying to hire qualified, competent legal secretaries” (p. 1). Sostek (2007) quoted Steve Ferber, director of human resources of a Pittsburgh law firm, who claimed that “The real issue is where do they develop new legal secretaries. There used to be trade schools and business schools, but those programs are very, very minimal” (p. 1). Mitchell (1999) also identified a link with education in her statement that “Many (ALA) chapters are working together with schools in their areas to

heighten the awareness of employment opportunities in the legal marketplace and to address changes in curriculum to better meet their job requirements” (p. 1). In addition, Mitchell asserted “As the legal profession approaches the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it faces a changing landscape in the overall delivery of legal services, driven by internal and external competition, client service needs and demands, increased use of constantly evolving technology, and personnel issues ranging from disaffection among lawyers to a limited pool of qualified support staff” (p. 2), and that legal firms are presently feeling the affects of a diminishing workforce from the administrative support staff and those who are entering this profession are noted as being skillfully and technologically unprepared. This perceived lack of adequate educational preparation of legal support staff personnel raised for this researcher questions about the availability of appropriate competency specifications for these jobs and provided interest in this study.

For entry-level legal professional training in Oklahoma, the educational training agency is the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education (ODCTE). With the help of advisory committees and industry specialists, ODCTE has successfully generated *duty-task lists*, or skills standards, that establish criteria for educational curricula and student development in many job classifications, including those for general office and secretarial personnel. The U.S. Department of Labor assists with personnel development through the use of Skills and Tasks for Jobs by the use of the *Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) Report for America 2000*.

Both of these methods use skill specification reports that incorporate for a related group of occupations the job-related tasks and duties for the purpose of expanding, advancing, and maturing the talents of personnel to accelerate and secure their position in the workplace. In

these specifications, *tasks* are generally viewed as specific job-related activities, while *duties* are clusters of related tasks. While the duty-tasks lists (DTLs) from the ODCTE and the SCANS Report are impressive in their scope and range, this researcher has observed that they examine secretarial and office duties in a very generic fashion and have only limited success in serving as a basis for specialized training in the legal field. Legal support staff duties/tasks are very specialized and it has been the experience of this researcher that they are not well served by generic DTLs and training based on them.

Many years of personal experience and professional contacts in the legal industry coupled with analysis of current ODCTE DTLs for office professionals led this researcher to the belief that the legal industry requires the guidance of legal experts and specialists to develop an appropriate set of skill standards specifically intended for entry level legal office staff to guide pre-service education for these vital professionals. This perceived workforce education need served as the impetus for this study.

### Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study used the input of industry experts to identify specific skills necessary for entry level office support staff personnel in the legal industry. The theoretical framework was based on the dual strands of *competency-based education* and a *task analysis approach* for generating industry-based skill standards or competencies.

#### Competency-Based Education (CBE)

Competency-based education (CBE) was developed from a necessity that was brought on by requirements placed on educators to be accountable for the end product in the educational process (Elias & Merriam, 1995; Finch & Crunkilton, 1989). Finch and Crunkilton (1989) asserted that the key component in CBE is competency, with the

specific competencies being “tasks, skills, attitudes, values, and appreciations that are deemed critical to success in life and/or in earning a living” (p. 242).

Gray and Herr (1998) provided seven characteristics of CBE that can make it valuable in guiding industry-specific education and skill development:

1. The goal is to teach essential outcomes.
2. Outcomes are described in behavioral, observable, or criterion-referenced learning objectives.
3. Outcomes are taught in a prescribed sequence.
4. Instruction is narrowly focused on learning objectives.
5. Assessment is defined by the behavioral objectives and is typically in the form of demonstration or application.
6. A minimal level of competence is established which all students must obtain before continuing to the next behavioral objectives.
7. Students or clients are provided with frequent/timely feedback regarding their performance. (p. 149)

CBE is compatible with the psychology of Behaviorism. John B. Watson, the acknowledged leader of behaviorism “adamantly endorsed the idea that psychology was a science of behavior, not a study of the mind or mental activity” (Elias & Merriam, 1995, p. 82). Behaviorism was advanced in psychological circles with the writings of B. F. Skinner. According to Elias and Merriam, “Skinner firmly believes that humans are controlled by their environment, the conditions of which can be studied, specified, and manipulated. An individual’s behavior is determined by the events experienced in an objective environment” (p. 83). Skinner stated that “a scientific analysis of behavior must assume that a person’s behavior is controlled by his genetic and environmental histories rather than by the person himself as an initiating, creative agent” (Skinner, 1976, p. 208).



Modern Behaviorism aligns with the positivist research theoretical perspective and contends that one arrives at knowledge through scientific observation and the measurement of facts (Elias & Merriam, 1995). To align Behaviorism with positivism logically supports objectivism as the epistemology because positivists focus on the world of science (Crotty, 1998). Their belief and confidence in science was derived from the idea that accuracy and certainty could result from scientific knowledge (1998). To express the connection between positivism and objectivism, Crotty (1998) stated:

Whereas people ascribe subjective meanings to objects in their world, science really 'ascribes' no meaning at all. Instead, it discovers meaning, for it is able to grasp objective meaning, that is, meaning already inherent in the objects it considers. To say that objects have such meaning is, of course, to embrace the epistemology of objectivism. Positivism is objectivist through and through. From the positivist viewpoint, objects in the world have meaning prior to, and independently of, any consciousness of them. (p. 27)

The grounding of CBE in the Behaviorist and positivist traditions are reflected in its insistence on clearly stated competencies stated in terms of observable and measurable learner behavior as the basis for assessing learning and success. The relationship of this approach to workforce training derives from its use of industry experts to identify the competencies required for successful on-job performance. Clear statement and objective assessment of these industry-identified competencies are the foundations of CBE (Blank, 1982).

### Task/Job Analysis

Elias and Merriam (1995) asserted that "Developing a curriculum or course for competency-based occupational technical instruction begins with a detailed job description. These descriptions include location and general working conditions, job functions, general duties, contingent responsibilities, and so on" (p. 95). This process is generally referred to as task or job analysis. The task analysis method identifies and verifies specific tasks performed by

workers in a particular job (Blank, 1982; Finch & Crunkilton, 1989; Mager, 1997b). Verification is accomplished by having the on-job tasks identified by industry practitioners and experts. The critical outcome document of an occupational task analysis is typically a Duty Task List (DTL) that lists and groups job competencies.

In the task analysis process, data are gathered from industry specialists regarding specific job competencies and are presented in the form of job functions in detail according to duties and tasks as defined by Finch and Crunkilton (1989):

Duties are large segments of work done by an individual that typically serves as broad categories within which tasks may be placed. Examples of duties would be organizing and planning, typing, maintaining equipment and tools, and loading and hauling. Tasks, on the other hand, are work activity units that form a significant aspect of a duty. Each task has definite beginning and ending point and usually consists of two or more distinct steps. Examples of tasks performed by workers would be planning menus, filing materials, computing depreciation, and winterizing vehicles. (pp. 144-145)

Thus, the intersecting CBE theory with task/job analysis is the specification of an occupationally – specific DTL that can serve as a curriculum or training blueprint for occupational preparation.

### DTL Methodology

Instrumental to the task analysis process in CBE is the traditional methodology of DTL development. Developing A Curriculum (DACUM) is a specialized method that has been traditionally used for developing an occupational analysis and an industry-based DTL for occupationally-specific CBE. The DACUM process is a methodological approach that utilizes occupational experts to identify the skills and tasks (i.e., competencies) required of individuals in a particular occupation for the purpose of “curriculum development, curriculum review and revision, training needs assessments, competency test development, worker performance evaluations, job descriptions, process descriptions (ISO 9000), student recruitment, student

counseling, student achievement records, training program review, curriculum articulation, tech prep program development, job modifications, and career development/planning” (Norton, 1997, p. 25). The DACUM committee functions as a group in a face-to-face (F2F) environment under the guidance of a trained facilitator over a time period of from two to four days (Blank, 1982; Finch & Crunkilton, 1989). This researcher has completed her DACUM training and is currently a certified DACUM facilitator. In current practice, the DACUM product is a Duty-Task List (DTL) in which working on-job competencies are stated as performances called “tasks,” which are listed in related groupings called “duties” (Blank, 1982).

The Delphi Method is very similar to DACUM in that the Delphi Method can be used for the same purposes as DACUM as well as many other cross-industry program analyses. Adler and Ziglio (1995) described the Delphi Method as “a structured process for collecting and distilling knowledge from a group of experts by means of a series of questionnaires interspersed with controlled opinion feedback” (p. 5). While a DACUM session can be completed in two to four days, in many cases it can be difficult for experts to assemble for multiple days away from the office. The Delphi Method allows the versatility of being administered either F2F or at distance which adds a level of anonymity for the experts in their reporting process. The distance use of the Delphi Method allows for participation via Internet and openness through anonymity, as well as easy participation by industry personnel without having to miss several days of work.

Both methods meet requirements for industry-driven task analysis. The intersection of DACUM and Delphi is a 3-round Internet Delphi which meets the theoretical requirements of CBE and task analysis while accomplishing accessibility by industry expert participants. For these reasons, this method was selected for this study. For this study, the theoretical and

methodological foundations are interwoven in the study's concept. This is illustrated graphically in Figure 1.

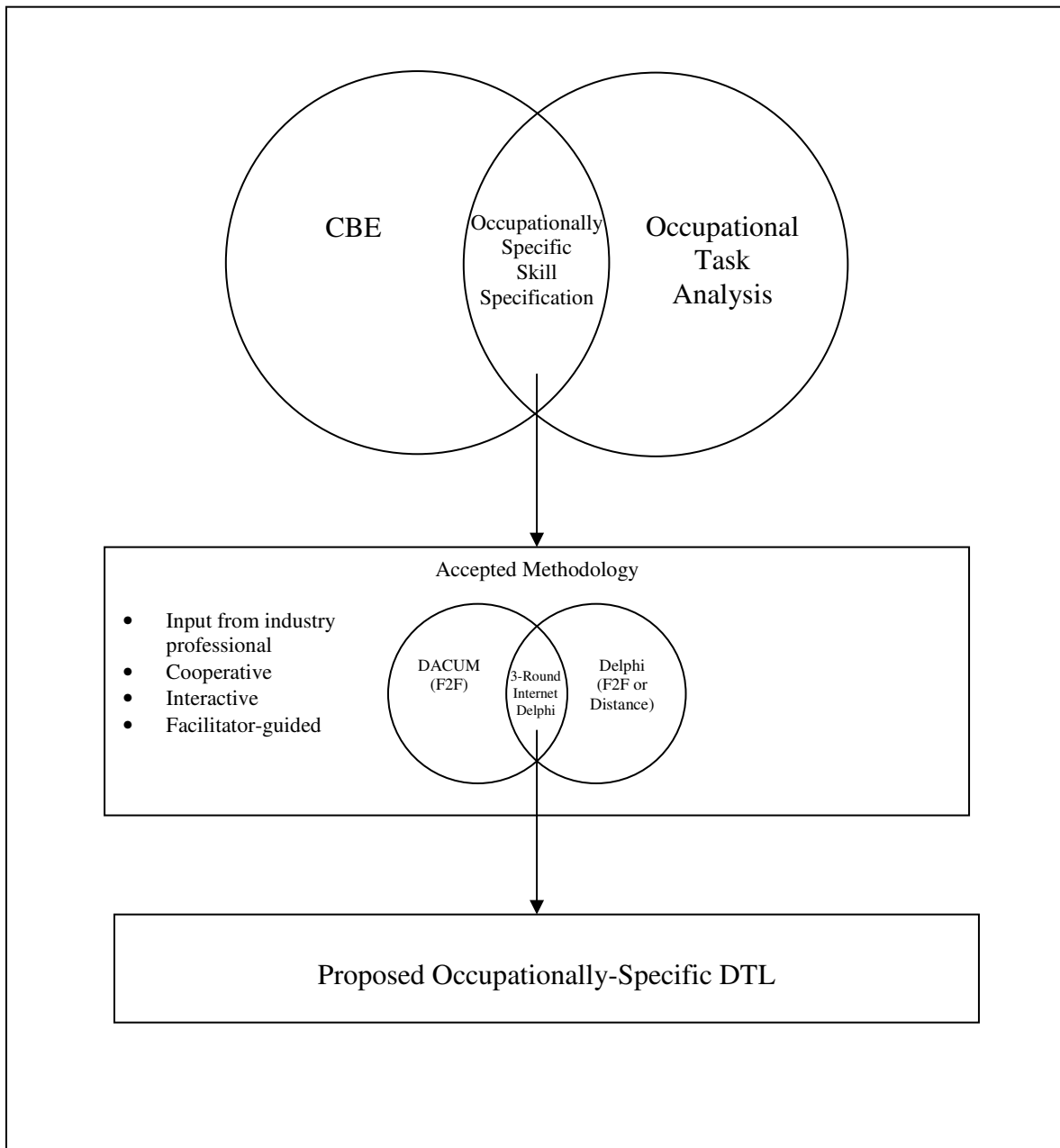


Figure 1. Theoretical/Conceptual Framework for the Study.

This study is conceptualized as an application of Delphi methodology to develop an industry-driven, occupationally-specific listing of required competencies in the form of a DACUM-style DTL for legal office professionals.

#### Statement of the Problem

The legal field requires legal competencies, attention to detail, knowledge and understanding of procedures and processes. Corporations and individuals depend on lawyers and law firms to provide the finest legal acumen, which requires an exceptional team of support staff members to carry out daily tasks to as close to faultless precision as possible. Law firms are responsible for matters affecting the lives and livelihood of their clients. A positive outcome is dependent upon the competence of the attorneys and their entire team. Each member of the legal team has a specific, precise role to play and ineffectiveness of any one member may affect the outcome of the case.

With a shortage of talent in the labor pool for support personnel in the legal support market, appropriate training is critical to the life and success of the entry level legal office support personnel. The problem for this study was that there currently existed no comprehensive list of competencies on which to base sound curriculum for training legal support professionals in Oklahoma. Failure to provide training facilities with a precise and comprehensive list of skills required of entry level legal support staff hindered the development of more prepared team members to the legal field who are well-equipped to contribute effectively to a competent legal team and to earn a quality salary in accordance with their ability.

Thus, there was need for an industry-specific and comprehensive set of skills for training Oklahoma legal support staff that was developed based on DACUM methodology principles and appropriate for CBE curriculum development and instructional principles.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to use expert input to identify and describe critical skills or competencies perceived by the legal industry to be required to train competent team members in the legal office environment. Specifically, this study focused on fulfilling this purpose in the context of urban Oklahoma, where a large number of legal office professionals are employed.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What skills and tasks do urban Oklahoma legal industry experts perceive to be critical for entry level legal office support staff?
2. How do the Oklahoma industry experts rate, rank, and cluster the identified skills and tasks?

## Data Sources and Methodology

Data for the study were obtained from a panel of legal industry experts. Job skill categories for initial thought stimulation for job duties were discussed and assembled by the researcher with the assistance of an administrator with credentials of 24 years of experience in the legal field, serving in all capacities of a law firm except attorney, and being the sole certified legal manager in the state of Oklahoma. The strength of this expert's credentials gives validity to the initial instrument. The following categories were determined to be helpful for thought stimulation:

- Oral Communications
- Written Communications
- Client Assistance
- Legal Procedures

- Investigative Functions
- Legal Research
- Instrument and Document Preparation
- Judicial/Trial Assistance
- Office Functions
- Education
- Rational Abilities (getting along with others and having a good perception of self)
- Emotional Maturity
- Positive Attitude (of self, their work, and their co-workers)
- Other/Miscellaneous

The Delphi technique was used to conduct this research study and gather task analysis data utilizing a mixed-methods design to gather, analyze, and interpret the data. The researcher-developed questionnaires were developed for use with the expert panelists consisting of legal administrators from urban locations in the state of Oklahoma. Round one of the Delphi used an open-ended questionnaire based on the broad categories listed above, while rounds two and three used more structured rating and ranking responses to obtain data.

#### Study Participants

According to Delbecq et al. (1986), participants selected for the Delphi process need to include the following:

...top management and decision makers who will utilize the outcomes of the study; professional staff members who are to support the outcomes; and the respondents to the Delphi question whose judgments are being sought as a part of the study. (p.85)

Linstone and Turoff (1975) felt that there was no general rule for selection of panel members but added that individuals who can be involved on the panel include the stakeholders, experts, and facilitators. Ausburn (2002) made it clear that “The focus in selecting participants is not so much their representativeness of a population, but their knowledge or expertise in the topic under examination” (p. 37).

For this study, the participants or Delphi panel were six legal administrators from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma each with a minimum of 10 years of experience in the legal office environment. This panel was identified as the industry experts to provided input for the study.

#### Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

The following assumptions were accepted for this study:

1. It was assumed that the panelists selected for the Delphi possessed the expertise to determine the skills necessary for an entry level legal support staff member.
2. It was assumed that the panelists who participated in the Delphi responded honestly and meticulously.
3. It was assumed that the researcher remained a neutral facilitator of the Delphi process and exerted no personal influence over its input or outcomes.

The study was bounded by the following limitations and delimitations:

1. The Delphi panel was limited to the large urban area of Oklahoma City. Input and expertise was not obtained from other areas of the state, thus limiting generalization of the study’s findings.
2. While in many firms, a managing attorney performs the duties of personnel selection, the panelists did not include managing attorneys.



3. The findings of the study will be shared with the Oklahoma CareerTech system, but no suggestions for particular curriculum will be made.

## Definitions of Key Terms

### Conceptual Definitions

- American Bar Association (ABA) – The American Bar Association is the largest voluntary professional association in the world. With more than 400,000 members, the ABA provides law school accreditation, continuing legal education, information about the law, programs to assist lawyers and judges in their work, and initiatives to improve the legal system for the public. The Mission of the American Bar Association is to be the national representative of the legal profession, serving the public and the profession by promoting justice, professional excellence and respect for the law. (Retrieved January 26, 2008 from website: <http://www.abanet.org/about/home.html>)
- Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) – The Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) was formed to provide support to professionals involved in the management of law firms, corporate legal departments and government legal agencies. ALA incorporated in Pennsylvania and was founded by Bradford W. Hildebrandt, Robert I. Weil, and Mary Ann Altman. By June 1971, 100 legal administrators have joined the Association. By 2005, ALA reached a milestone in membership by achieving 10,000 members. (Retrieved January 26, 2008 from website: <http://www.alanet.org/about/history.aspx>)
- Competency – A description of the ability one possesses when they are able to perform a given occupational task effectively and efficiently. (Norton, 1997, Appendix C, p. 1)

- Competency-Based Education (CBE) – An instructional program that derives its content from verified tasks and bases assessment on student performance. The tasks (competencies) the student is to learn and perform in these programs are based on tasks which are carefully identified and verified in advance of instruction. The criteria by which the student will be evaluated, and the conditions under which evaluation will occur are also specified. Instruction emphasizes the ability to DO as well as knowing the how, and why. Student performance and knowledge are evaluated individually against stated criteria, rather than against group norms. (Norton, 1997, Appendix C, p. 1)
- DACUM – DACUM is an acronym for Developing A Curriculum. It is an approach to job, occupational, process, and functional analysis that involves bringing a committee of expert workers together under the leadership of a trained facilitator. Modified brainstorming techniques are used to specify in detail the duties and tasks that successful workers in their occupation must perform. The general knowledge and skills needed, important worker behaviors, tools and equipment, and future trends and concerns are also identified. The Center also defines DACUM as including the task verification and task analysis components of the analysis phase of curriculum development. (Norton, 1997, Appendix C, p. 1-2)
- Delphi Research – Delphi may be characterized as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem (Linstone & Turoff, 1975, p. 3).
- Duty – A cluster of related tasks from a broad work area or general area of responsibility (area of competence). (Norton, 1997, Appendix C, p. 2)

- Legal Administrator – Manages business functions as well as the overall operations of a law office. Reports to the managing partner, management committee or Chairman of the Board, and participates in management meetings. In addition to general responsibility for financial planning and controls, personnel administration, and systems and physical facilities, the legal administrator identifies and plans for the changing needs of the organization, shares responsibility with the appropriate partners or owners for strategic planning, practice management and marketing, and contributes to cost-effective management throughout the organization. (Retrieved January 26, 2008 from Association of Legal Administrators website: <http://www.alanet.org/jobs/samplejob.aspx>)
- Legal Secretary/Administrative Assistant – Secretaries and administrative assistants perform a variety of administrative and clerical duties necessary to run an organization efficiently. They serve as information and communication managers for an office; plan and schedule meetings and appointments; organize and maintain paper and electronic files; manage projects; conduct research; and disseminate information by using the telephone, mail services, Web sites, and e-mail. They also may handle travel and guest arrangements. (Retrieved January 26, 2008 from Bureau of Labor Statistic: Occupational Outlook Handbook website <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos151.htm>)
- Mixed Methods Research Approach – Collection of both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously or sequentially. (Creswell, 1998, p. 21)
- National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) – The National Association of Legal Assistants is the leading professional association for legal assistants and paralegals, providing continuing education and professional development programs. Incorporated in 1975, NALA is an integral part of the legal community, working to improve the quality

and effectiveness of the delivery of legal services. The National Association of Legal Assistants is composed of over 18,000 paralegals, through individual members and through its 90 state and local affiliated associations. (Retrieved January 26, 2008 from National Association of Legal Assistants website: <http://www.nala.org/>)

- NALS (Formerly National Association of Legal Secretaries) – Formed in 1929 in Long Beach, California, NALS remains a leader in the legal services industry offering professional development by providing continuing legal education, certifications, information, and training to those choosing the legal services industry as their career. NALS members represent every area of this industry from paralegals and legal assistants to legal administrators and office managers. Because of this diversity and an openness to welcome all members of the industry, NALS offers a broad spectrum of expertise to make the programs offered valuable to all members of the legal services industry. This allows NALS members to learn about other areas of the industry, making career enhancement as well as advancement easily attainable. (Retrieved January 26, 2008 from NALS website: <http://www.nals.org/>)
- Occupation – A work area that consists of two or more related jobs or levels. For example, in apprenticeable fields, the entry level worker may be an apprentice, followed by a journeyman, and a master craftsman. There is always some commonality to the tasks performed. (Norton, 1997, Appendix C, p. 3)
- Oklahoma Bar Association – The Oklahoma Bar Association, headquartered in Oklahoma City, is a nonprofit organization created by the Oklahoma Supreme Court to advance the administration of justice and to foster and maintain learning, integrity, competence, public service and high standards of conduct among Oklahoma's legal

community. The association has approximately 11,000 active attorneys in Oklahoma and a total membership of more than 15,000. The OBA provides education and development programs for the legal profession and the public. The bar and its members are committed to serving the public by making sure the voices of all people in Oklahoma are heard in our justice system. (OBA, 2008a)

- Paralegal/Legal Assistant – A legal assistant or paralegal is a person qualified by education, training or work experience who is employed or retained by a lawyer, law office, corporation, governmental agency or other entity who performs specifically delegated substantive legal work for which a lawyer is responsible. (Adopted by the ABA in 1997) (Retrieved January 26, 2008 from website: <http://www.nala.org/whatis.htm>)
- Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS Report) – A report written by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) that examines the demands of the workplace and whether our country's young people are capable of meeting these demands. The report defines the workplace competencies and foundation skills requires for effective job performance, proposes acceptable levels of proficiency, suggests effective ways to assess proficiency, and develops a dissemination strategy for the nation's schools, businesses, and homes. (Retrieved January 26, 2008 from website: [http://wdr.doleta.gov/opr/FULLTEXT/1999\\_35.pdf](http://wdr.doleta.gov/opr/FULLTEXT/1999_35.pdf))
- Skill – The ability to perform occupational tasks with a degree of proficiency within a given occupation. Skill is conceived of as a composite of three completely interdependent components: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor behavior. Skills tend to support the performance of many tasks. (Norton, 1997, Appendix C, p. 4)

- Skills Standards - An industry-driven document that lists the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to perform an occupation successfully. Skills standards lists are used to identify or develop instructional materials and guide competency test development. (Retrieved March 6, 2008 from Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education website: <http://cms.okcareertech.org/glossary/skills-standards>)
- Task – A work activity that is discrete, observable, performed within a limited period of time and that leads to a product, service or decision. Tasks are also frequently referred to as the competencies that students or trainees must obtain in order to be successful workers. (Norton, 1997, Appendix C, p. 4)
- Task Analysis – The process wherein tasks performed by workers employed in a particular job are identified and verified. (Finch & Crunkilton, 1989, p. 144)
- Operational Definitions
- Delphi Study – A 3-round Delphi conducted online using six Oklahoma legal industry experts, with an open-ended qualitative first round and structured-response quantitative subsequent rounds.
- Industry Expert – An individual with ten or more years of experience in their particular job and currently employed in a legal office working in the same or similar capacity.
- Ranking – A numerical score of Delphi items for relative importance among items, with rank 1 being the most important to rank  $n$  being least important. (Brown, 2007, p. 12)
- Rating – A numerical indication of perceived importance for Delphi items from 1 to 5 with rating 1 as “not important; 2 as “somewhat important; 3 as “moderately important; 4 as “important”; and 5 as “very important.” (Brown, 2007, p. 12)

- Sigma Rank Point Score ( $\Sigma$ RankPoint) – The point values assigned to summed rankings of Delphi items by reversing ranks and point values (e.g., rank 1 = 10 points, rank 10 = 1 point) so that higher ranked items have more points. (Brown, 2007, p. 12)
- Sigma Rank Score ( $\Sigma$ Rank) – The total of a Delphi item’s raw rankings. (Brown, 2007, p. 12)
- Tier Analysis – The identification by major break points in the  $\Sigma$ RankPoint scores of Delphi items and the point ranges within and between each tier level. (Brown, 2007, p. 12)

### Significance of the Study

With American’s largest skilled and knowledgeable workforce, the Baby Boomers, approaching retirement age there is an urgency to create adequate trained replacement workers. No field or discipline is protected from this evitable fate, including the entry level legal office support staff personnel. With rising unemployment rates and many American jobs being outsourced to international markets, an opportunity opens to provide quality workers with quality wages to a quality field: the legal field. The clear identification of required competencies and skills in the legal industry is necessary to provide solid preparation for this excellent employment opportunity. To date, this identification has not occurred in Oklahoma. This study provided an opportunity to fill this skill identification gap and improve the pre-service training available in the state for entry-level legal office professionals.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Professional Ethics and Standards in the Legal Professions

Historically, the law and the legal professions have established and maintained high standards of ethics and competence for their practitioners. According to Garner (2004), “law is the system of rules of conduct established by the sovereign government of a society to correct wrongs, maintain stability, and deliver justice” (p. 900). Further, “a lawyer is a person learned in the law; an attorney, counselor or solicitor; a person licensed to practice law” (p. 905). As confirmed by these legal definitions, the responsibility of lawyers and their necessity to perform at a high level of thoroughness and preparedness is enormous in scope.

At the national level, “for more than ninety years, the American Bar Association (ABA) has provided leadership in legal ethics and professional responsibility through the adoption of professional standards that serve as a models of the regulatory law governing the legal profession” (ABA, 2007, p. vii). Section 5 of Rule 1.1: Competence of the client-lawyer relationship in the rules of professional conduct states:

Competent handling of a particular matter includes inquiry into and analysis of the factual and legal elements of the problem, and use of methods and procedures meeting the standards of competent practitioners. It also includes adequate preparation. The required attention and preparation are determined in part by what is at stake; major litigation and complex transactions ordinarily require more extensive treatment than matters of lesser complexity and consequence. An agreement between the lawyer and the client regarding the scope of the representation may limit the matters for which the lawyer is responsible. (ABA, 2007, pp. 11-12)

Within the system of the law in the State of Oklahoma, once lawyers are permitted to practice, they are held to a very high standard and are required to stand in open court and take the following oath as ascribed by the Oklahoma Supreme Court:



You do solemnly swear that you will support, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma; that you will do no falsehood or consent that any be done in court, and if you know of any you will give knowledge thereof to the judges of the court, or some one of them, that it may be reformed; you will not wittingly, willingly or knowingly promote, sue, or procure to be sued, any false or unlawful suit, or give aid or consent to the same; you will delay no man for lucre or malice, but will act in the office of attorney in this court according to your best learning and discretion, with all good fidelity as well to the court as to your client, so help you God. (OSCN, 2008)

To address the issue of professional legal ethics and standards at State level, the Oklahoma Bar Association (OBA) was formed in 1904 to serve lawyers and the public, and to address ethics and professional responsibility. The mission of the Oklahoma Bar Association is to assist Oklahoma lawyers in providing justice for all. The stated goals of the OBA include:

- to foster the highest ideals of integrity and competence and to maintain the highest standards of conduct and civility
- to improve the public's understanding of the law, of the legal system, of the lawyer's role within the system
- to establish and maintain vital programs and services for all members of the OBA
- to provide a continuous forum for the advancement of ideas and concepts pertaining to the legal profession and improvement in the law
- to promote activities and programs which service the public
- to advance the administration of the judicial system
- to make appropriate policy and legislative recommendations concerning the law (OBA, 2008a)

In further support of professional ethics and competence, all lawyers who practice law in the state of Oklahoma are licensed through the Oklahoma Bar Association (OBA) and abide by the Lawyer's Creed, which states:

- I revere the Law, the System and the Profession, and I pledge that in my private and professional life, and in my dealings with members of the Bar, I will uphold the dignity and respect of each in my behavior toward others.
- In all dealings with members of the Bar, I will be guided by a fundamental sense of integrity and fair play.
- I will not abuse the System or the Profession by pursuing or opposing discovery through arbitrariness or for the purpose of harassment or undue delay.

- I will not seek accommodation for the rescheduling of any Court setting or discovery unless a legitimate need exists. I will not misrepresent conflicts, nor will I ask for accommodation for the purpose of tactical advantage or undue delay.
- In my dealings with the Court and with counsel, as well as others, my word is my bond.
- I will readily stipulate to undisputed facts in order to avoid needless costs or inconvenience for any party.
- I recognize that my conduct is not governed solely by the Code of Professional Responsibility, but also by standards of fundamental decency and courtesy. Accordingly, I will endeavor to conduct myself in a manner consistent with the Standards of Professionalism adopted by the Board of Governors.
- I will strive to be punctual in communications with others and in honoring scheduled appearances, and I recognize that neglect and tardiness are demeaning to me and to the Profession.
- If a member of the Bar makes a just request for cooperation, or seeks scheduling accommodation, I will not arbitrarily or unreasonably withhold consent.
- I recognize that a desire to prevail must be tempered with civility. Rude behavior hinders effective advocacy, and, as a member of the Bar, I pledge to adhere to a high standard of conduct which clients, attorneys, the judiciary and the public will admire and respect. (OBA, 2008b)

The Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) also addresses standards in the legal profession, specifically for legal administrators. The ALA code of professional ethics incorporates principles and rules of conduct that includes categories of integrity, objectivity, competence, independence, professional responsibility, confidentiality, and service (ALA, 2008b). ALA further states:

The legal profession and business must adhere to high ethical standards to maintain public trust. This ALA Code of Professional Ethics sets forth guidelines or standards for the ethical administration of legal practices — private firms, legal clinics, corporate legal departments, governmental agencies and the courts.

Legal administrators at all levels must become familiar with these standards and incorporate them into their everyday performance. They also should study and comply with all ethical guidelines of bar associations and law societies which apply in their own jurisdictions. Furthermore, they must take the lead in communicating relevant standards to staff personnel who may be less familiar than lawyers with the ethical guidelines of bar associations and law societies, and in communicating appropriate policies and procedures to lawyers. (ALA, 2008b)

At the level of paralegal/legal assistants, the National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) has codified standards. NALA set forth a code of ethics for the paralegal/legal assistant which was accepted by the ABA in 1997 that begins, “A legal assistant or paralegal is a person qualified by education, training or work experience who is employed or retained by a lawyer, law office, corporation, governmental agency or other entity who performs specifically delegated substantive legal work for which a lawyer is responsible” (NALA, 2008a). The first two of ten canons state:

- Canon 1. A paralegal must not perform any of the duties that attorneys only may perform nor take any actions that attorneys may not take.
- Canon 2. A paralegal may perform any task which is properly delegated and supervised by an attorney, as long as the attorney is ultimately responsible to the client, maintains a direct relationship with the client, and assumes professional responsibility for the work product. (NALA, 2008a)

National Association of Legal Secretaries (NALS) has now reconfigured itself to embrace all legal professionals and states in their code of ethics that “integrity and high standards of conduct are fundamental to the success of our professional association” (NALS, 2008a). This Code is accepted by all of its members along with ten canons of which the first two states:

- Canon 1. Members of this association shall maintain a high degree of competency and integrity through continuing education to better assist the legal profession in fulfilling its duty to provide quality legal services to the public.
- Canon 2. Members of this association shall maintain a high standard of ethical conduct and shall contribute to the integrity of the association and the legal profession. (NALS, 2008a)

## Legal Office Support Staff Jobs, Needs, and Shortages

With the high standards and level of responsibility required in the legal industry, providing a competent labor pool for staffing law offices presents challenges. While job shortages may not affect every legal discipline, a definite deficiency is being observed in regards to entry-level legal office support staff personnel. Sostek (2007) asserted that “They might not have the fancy degrees, academic honors or journal publications that usually impress law firms, but there’s nobody more sought after right now than legal secretaries” (p. 1). Erb (2000) also addressed a shortage of skilled professionals in the legal field, stating that “Law firms and other professional services companies are grappling with one of the worst labor shortages in years for essential back-office workers – the legal secretaries, paralegals and payroll specialists who keep the firm humming” (p. 1).

The critical obligation and commitment of a law firm is to provide the highest level of service to clients through the use of its staff. Many of the individual tasks of various jobs overlap in order to produce a finely oiled machine of teamwork. According to the United States Department of Labor’s O\*NET online occupational website:

While lawyers assume ultimate responsibility for legal work, they often delegate many of their tasks to paralegals. In fact, paralegals – also called legal assistants – are continuing to assume a growing range of tasks in the Nation’s legal offices and perform many of the same tasks as lawyers. (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008, O\*NET 23-2011.00)

Some secretaries and administrative assistants, such as legal and medical secretaries, perform highly specialized work requiring knowledge of technical terminology and procedures. For instance, legal secretaries prepare correspondence and legal papers such as summonses, complaints, motions, responses, and subpoenas under the supervision of an attorney or a paralegal. They also review legal journals and assist with legal research – for example, by verifying quotes and citations in legal briefs. Additionally, legal secretaries often teach newly minted lawyers how to prepare documents for submission to the courts. (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008, O\*NET 43-2011.00, 43-6012.00, 43-6013.00, 43-6014.00)

Paralegals typically possess a higher level of legal skills and in many cases are certified, while the legal secretary position is viewed as a lesser position to some people merely because of the word “secretary” that is attached to the title (Erb, 2000; Mitchell, 1999; Sostek, 2007). In reference to the term “legal secretary”, Sostek (2007) quoted Toni Robinson, co-director of the Allegheny County Bar Association Legal Placement Service’s statement that “It doesn’t sound glamorous ... but it has always been a career for a very bright person” (p. 1). President and CEO of the American Staffing Association (ASA) Richard A. Wahlquist stated that “ The No. 1 challenge is filling the pipeline with qualified people” (Speizer, 2007, p. 1).

Several sources have addressed this shortage of qualified legal personnel. Mitchell (1999) cited a white paper prepared by the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) which stated that Chapter leaders expressed the concern and frustration of their members in trying to hire qualified, competent ‘legal secretaries’ (p. 1). Sostek (2007) quoted Steve Ferber, director of human resources of a Pittsburgh law firm, who claimed that “The real issue is where do they develop new legal secretaries. There used to be trade schools and business schools, but those programs are very, very minimal” (p. 1). Mitchell (1999) also identified a link with education in her statement that “Many [ALA] chapters are working together with schools in their areas to heighten the awareness of employment opportunities in the legal marketplace and to address changes in curriculum to better meet their job requirements” (p. 1). In addition, Mitchell asserted:

As the legal profession approaches the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it faces a changing landscape in the overall delivery of legal services, driven by internal and external competition, client service needs and demands, increased use of constantly evolving technology, and personnel issues ranging from disaffection among lawyers to a limited pool of qualified support staff. (Mitchell, 1999, p. 2)

Mitchell also claimed that legal firms are presently feeling the affects of a diminishing workforce from the administrative support staff and those who are entering this profession are noted as being skillfully and technologically unprepared.

#### Competency-Based Education (CBE) or Competency-Based Training (CBT)

The principle of competency-based education (CBE) or competency-based training (CBT) is grounded in specification of clear instructional objectives. This approach has traditionally been a characteristic of occupational education. Davies (1976) credits Herbert Spencer with the origin of the movement for explicit objectives (p. 44). Spencer (1935) stated “that had we time to master all subjects we need not be particular” (p. 34), but asserted that because we cannot master everything, it is necessary to have a classification of human activities as a basis of education objectives. The importance of educational objectives was conveyed from Bobbitt (2010) in this statement:

So long as objectives are but vague guesses, or not even that, there can be no demand for anything but vague guesses as to means and procedures. But the era of contentment with large, undefined processes is rapidly passing. An age of science is demanding exactness and particularity. (p. 7)

Taba (1962) followed the same school of thought regarding objectives. Taba stated:

A curriculum usually contains a statement of aims and of specific objectives; it indicates some selection and organization of content; it either implies or manifests certain patterns of learning and teaching, whether because the objectives demand them or because the content organization requires them. Finally, it includes a program of evaluation of the outcomes. (p. 10)

Similarly, in the early 1960s, Robert Mager (1997), considered by many to be the leading proponent of instructional objectives, concurred, stating:

Instruction is only successful to the degree that it succeeds in changing students in desired ways, rather than in undesired ways. If instruction doesn't change anyone in desired ways, it isn't any good, regardless of how elegant the lectures are or how complicated the hardware used to present it is. If instruction is to accomplish desired outcomes, it is imperative that those designing the instruction, as well as

the ones doing the instruction, have a clear picture of those desired outcomes. Because objectives are tools for describing intended outcomes, they provide a key component for making instruction successful and are useful in several ways. (p. 13)

Through the years competency-based education (CBE) that is based on clear objectives or “competencies” has evolved and can mean a variety of things to different people. Brown (1994) stated that “for some Competency-based Training (CBT) is a system, while for others it can alternatively be an approach to training, a form of assessment, a model of curriculum or even the use and delivery of training using specially designed training packages” (p. 4). The specific components of a CBT system according to Brown (1994) include:

1. **OUTCOMES** to national standard specification of competence.
2. **CURRICULUM** that gives learners a clear indication of what is expected of them to demonstrate competence.
3. **DELIVERY** methods that do not oblige learners to undertake training or continue to be trained for skills they already possess.
4. **ASSESSMENT** of competence which is available when learners believe they are able to demonstrate competence.
5. **RECORD** of competencies gained and available to learners upon successful demonstration of competence. (p.4)

Gray and Herr (1998) provided seven characteristics of competency-based education that are very similar to Brown (1994). These characteristics included:

1. The goal is to teach essential outcomes.
2. Outcomes are described in behavioral, observable, or criterion-referenced learning objectives.
3. Outcomes are taught in a prescribed sequence.
4. Instruction is narrowly focused on learning objectives.
5. Assessment is defined by the behavioral objectives and is typically in the form of demonstration or application.

6. A minimal level of competence is established which all students must obtain before continuing to the next behavioral objectives.
7. Students or clients are provided with frequent/timely feedback regarding their performance. (p. 149)

Finch and Clunkilton (1989) described CBE as focusing on areas that included “nature of competency, criteria used to assess the competencies, ways that student competence is assessed, student progress through the program, and the program’s instructional intent” (p. 242). They detailed these areas as follows:

1. Competency – It reflects the ability to do something in contrast with the more traditional ability to demonstrate knowledge. Specifically competence relates to tasks, skills, attitudes, values, and appreciations that are deemed critical to success in life and/or in earning a living.
2. Criteria – In the assessment of student competence, it is not enough merely to call for a global exhibition of performance. The teacher must also have specific criteria available that clarify each competency.
3. Assessment of Competence – When student competence is being assessed, primary consideration should be given to application. Although it may not be possible for all students to be assessed as they perform in actual work settings, this is the ultimate evaluation environment one should strive for, since it is the most realistic.
4. Student Progress – A curriculum is typically divided into clearly identifiable time frames such as years, quarters, terms, semesters, and weeks. These serve as starting and ending points for various portions of the instruction and enable an instructor to say that students have completed a certain phase of the curriculum. In contrast with a time-based mode, competency-based education uses demonstrated competence as a determiner of student progress toward program completion. This enables students to proceed through a program at their own particular rates, based upon their individual abilities, and thus master specified competencies in a shorter (or longer) time period.
5. Instructional Intent – The explicit intent of competency-based education is to facilitate student achievement of competencies specified in the program. Each instructor is obligated to provide a sufficient variety of learning experiences so that students will be afforded an opportunity to master a minimum set of competencies. (pp. 242-243)



While CBE has received some criticism, there have also been problems with traditional training. Blank (1982) listed the following issues with traditional education that he asserted were improved with CBE:

1. Very few trainees who begin training programs ever complete them. Drop-out rates in some formal programs run as high as 75%.
2. A small percentage of students (typically 10% or so) really master the training tasks at a high level of proficiency. Up to 90% of students graduating may be only minimally competent.
3. Heavy reliance on lectures (sometimes several hours long) as a teaching method leads to student dissatisfaction, absenteeism, and discipline problems.
4. There seems to be a lack of well developed, appropriate curriculum materials and instructional media in use today. Many instructors tend to teach “off the top” with little planning.
5. Students receive little or no immediate, periodic feedback throughout the learning process so they can correct their learning mistakes as they go. Often a final grade in a course or unit is a student’s only indication of how he or she is doing.
6. Many trainees who are only marginally competent but who show up regularly and stay out of trouble receive a certificate or diploma. As long as a “C” average or “satisfactory” progress is maintained, students remain in good standing and the next thing the instructor knows, the student graduates.
7. Employers have little indication of exactly what it is successful graduates can actually do. Transcripts and course titles are of little help.
8. There is an over emphasis on theory, memorizing facts and terms, nice-to-know knowledge and background information and not enough emphasis on learning how to actually perform tasks needed on the job.
9. There seem to be tremendous variations in quality from one program to the next-even in the same school or department. This quality seems to be determined primarily by the instructor. Efforts to improve quality many times meet with disappointing results.
10. Programs are many times unable to respond to the unique learning requirements of students with special needs such as the educationally disadvantaged, the handicapped, and others.
11. Many programs are somewhat rigid in their operation and fail to meet the real needs of students and the work of work. Most programs only allow enrollment once or

twice a year, may discourage or prohibit early exit, sometimes poorly match trainees with programs, and usually will not allow students to repeat portions of the program if needed.

12. In many programs, students are unable to test out of and receive credit for those competencies already mastered. Students must sit through instruction in those competencies just like everyone else. (pp. 9-10)

Blank (1982) also delineated seven principles on which CBE and CBT are based and that he asserted characterize or define this objectives-based mastery approach to education and training:

1. Any student in a training program can master most any task at a high level of mastery (95 to 100% proficiency) if provided with high quality instruction and sufficient time.
2. A student's ability for learning a task need not predict how well the student learns the task.
3. Individual student differences in levels of mastery of a task are caused primarily by errors in the training environment, not be characteristics of the students.
4. Rather than being fast or slow learners, or good or poor learners, most students become very similar to one another in learning ability, rate of learning, and motivation for further learning when provided with favorable learning condition.
5. We should focus more on differences in learning and less on differences in learners.
6. What is worth teaching is worth learning.
7. The most important element in the teaching-learning process is the kind and quality of instruction experienced by students. (pp. 12-16)

### Task/Job Analysis

In order to identify competencies on which to base CBE, a process known as task or job analysis is necessary. Jonassen, Tessmer and Hannum (1999) credited Robert Mager and Kenneth Beach with devising job task analysis. Mager and Beach became arguably the best-known advocates, practitioners, and theorists in the CBE and instructional objectives movement.

Their writings in this field have become classics in occupational training. Mager and Beach started with the systematic three step approach of:

1. Determine and describe what we want to achieve.
2. Do what is necessary to achieve the desired result.
3. Check to see that we have succeeded in doing what we set out to do.

They revised these three steps to focus on clear objectives and converted them to:

1. Derive and describe objectives.
2. Develop lessons and materials to meet these objectives.
3. Determine how well the objectives were achieved. (Mager & Beach, 1967, p. 2)

In order to design or assemble a competency-based program, each task to be mastered must be fully identified and analyzed. According to Mager (1997a) “one of our goals is to develop and deliver instruction that prepares people to perform in a useful manner in a ‘real world’ situation, whether that ‘real world’ happens to be a job or another course” (p. 55). The process of identifying and breaking down the tasks for which training is required is generally referred to as task or job analysis. Blank (1982) defined task analysis as “the process of identifying and writing down the specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes that distinguish someone who performs a task competently from someone who cannot perform the task at all (p. 94). Mager (1997a) defined task analysis as:

The name given to a collection of techniques used to help make the components of competent performance visible. It’s a set of ways to draw a picture of what competent people actually do, or should do, when performing a task. From this picture it is then possible to derive the skills that anyone would have to have before they, too, can perform the task competently. It is a way to visualize the steps and decisions involved in carrying out a procedure. (p.55)

Blank and Mager both make it clear that it is essential to determine what a person must *do* in order to accomplish the goal of defining competent performance. Task analysis is a method used to realize this.

Finch and Crunkilton (1989) added to the discussion of task analysis that basic steps should consist of "...reviewing literature, developing the occupational inventory, selecting a worker sample, administering the inventory, and analyzing the collected information" (p. 145). Lin (2006) reported that "Studies indicate that the use of task analysis has been broadened from task specialist such as ergonomists, task designers, and task analysts, to task-related workers such as operators, managers, supervisors, and incumbents" (p. 5). Lin (2006) also noted that "Examples of such application areas as safety, productivity, availability, allocation of function, personnel specification, staffing and job organization, task and interface design, skills and knowledge acquisition, and performance assurance" (p. 5). The research reported in the present study fits within the framework of these definitions and the context of skills assessment and curriculum development.

Blank (1982) identified five steps he viewed as helpful in analyzing tasks:

1. The "backbone" of the task analysis should be the actual steps performed by the worker on the job.
2. The task should be fully analyzed from start to finish.
3. Any technical knowledge essential to performing a step accurately should be listed together with the step.
4. A specialized instrument needed to perform just this task should be identified.
5. Related information, safety knowledge, and skill and critical attitudes that support the competent performance of the task should be listed. (p. 95)

Jonassen, Tessmer, and Hannum, (1999) supported the benefits of task analysis. They asserted, "Advantages of job task analysis are that they are easily done, they do not require

elaborate skills of training, they are appropriate for a lean form of analysis, and they are very job related” (p. 62). Jonassen, Tessmer and Hannum further elaborated on task analysis by stating:

When the intent of the instruction is to enable students to move directly into a specific job and perform adequately, job task analysis is an appropriate task analysis method to use. All of the training will be oriented toward the job, improving the chances that those who successfully complete the instruction will be successful on the job. There is little chance that unnecessary content will be included in the training, so there is little wasted training time. (p. 62)

Jonassen, Tessmer and Hannum (1999) also identified disadvantages to job task analysis, specifically being limited to observable behaviors; inappropriate for broader, educational goals; and failing to identify cognitive demands of tasks (p. 62). They explained in detail:

Job task analysis is very behaviorally oriented and may miss some of the essence of many jobs, the thinking required to complete the job tasks, and the decision making that occurs. Cognitively oriented task analysis approaches will uncover this; job task analysis won't. Job task analysis is not as appropriate for broader educational outcomes or more general outcomes. It is for use when you can identify tangible job tasks, and these tasks are all that is required for successful job performance. Content that might be supportive of specific job tasks will not be included in job task analysis but might facilitate the instruction if included. (Jonassen, Tessmer & Hannum, 1999, p. 62)

### Task Analysis Methodologies

According to Kirwan and Ainsworth (1992), “task analysis can be defined as the study of what an operator (or team of operators) is required to do, in terms of actions and/or cognitive processes, to achieve a system goal” (p. 1). A job description gives an outline of a job, but that isn't specific enough, so task analysis would be the next step (Mager & Beach, 1967, p. 10).

“Task analysis is therefore a methodology which is supported by a number of specific techniques to help the analyst collect information, organize it, and then use it to make various judgments or design decisions” (Kirwan & Ainsworth, 1992, p. 1). Two main methods of performing an occupational task analysis are DACUM and Delphi.

## DACUM

The DACUM process is a methodological approach that uses occupational experts to identify the skills and tasks (i.e., competencies) required of individuals in a particular occupation for the purpose of “curriculum development, curriculum review and revision, training needs assessments, competency test development, worker performance evaluations, job descriptions, process descriptions (ISO 9000), student recruitment, student counseling, student achievement records, training program review, curriculum articulation, tech prep program development, job modifications, and career development/planning” (Norton, 1997, p. 25).

According to Adams (1975):

DACUM was created initially in a joint effort by the Experimental Projects Branch, Canada Department of Manpower and Immigration, and General Learning Corporation of New York, which provided technical direction to the Women’s Job Corps program at Clinton, Iowa. Early efforts at Clinton were intended to produce a curriculum guide that would enhance trainee involvement in the training program and in planning for goal attainment. The result was a graphic presentation of the curriculum similar to a time bar chart. Following these early efforts, an experimental DACUM for a typical occupation was developed in Canada as a model for further application. It was introduced to the NewStart Corporations in 1968 during their planning stages. (p. 23)

“The DACUM movement continued to grow in Canada, but it was not until 1975 that Robert Norton, the person most associated with DACUM in the United States, learned about it” (Zanella, 1999, p. 2). Norton himself “credits Larry Coffin and Donald Glendenning of Holland College, Charlottetown, P.E. I., Canada with introducing him to their extensive and very successful use of the DACUM process” (Norton, 1997, p. v). Norton labeled the originator of the Canadian version of the DACUM process as Robert E. Adams, one of the early developers and writers about DACUM (Norton, 1997, p. v). Norton (1997) cites nine advantages to the DACUM process:

1. Group interaction – committee members freely share ideas and hitchhike on each others' contributions.
2. Brainstorming power energized – the brainstorming process is used several times to maximum advantage to identify all of the duties and tasks.
3. Group synergy – properly facilitated, members of the group motivate and empower each other to produce a high quality product.
4. Group consensus – members of the committee with the facilitator's guidance assess each contribution and refine it until agreement is reached.
5. Future-oriented – the committee is specifically asked to specify future occupational trends and concerns that are likely to change their job in the future.
6. Employee/Learner buy-in – once the employees and learners know that practicing expert workers identified the duties and tasks, support for the results of the analysis is greatly enhanced.
7. Comprehensive outcome – when 5-12 expert workers are motivated and guided for two days by a qualified facilitator all duties and tasks are usually identified along with the related general knowledge and skills, worker behaviors, tools and equipment, and future trends and concerns.
8. Superior quality – it's the combination of the features already mentioned plus the fact that whenever one committee member speaks, the other (4-11) members who are well qualified to do so, assess and modify contributions so as to maximize quality.
9. Low cost – because of the highly efficient procedures used, a DACUM analysis can usually be completed in two days rather than 25-30 days required by some methods, thus greatly reducing the overall cost. (pp. 3-4)

Adams (1975) reported that:

The idea of DACUM was adopted by Nova Scotia NewStart Inc. because of a number of circumstances that demanded a new approach to curriculum development. Because of the nature of the NewStart assignment, it was necessary to respond quickly to the needs of disadvantaged adults. This, in turn, created a need for immediate action in planning any training program and defining it in curricular form. (p. 23)

DACUM is an analysis of the occupation rather than a curriculum evolving from an analysis. The occupation is subdivided into General Areas of Competence. Each is then analyzed to identify each skill it contains. The result is independent specification of

each of the skills (behaviours) that collectively enable an individual to perform competently in the occupation. These skills are defined quite simply and are structured independently in small blocks on the chart. Each can serve as an independent goal for learning achievement. (p. 24)

Norton (1997) described the workshop environment in which a DACUM is typically conducted: “The DACUM analysis workshop involves a trained DACUM facilitator and a committee of 5-12 expert workers from the position, occupation, or other area of analysis” (p. 1).

He based the DACUM process on three premises:

1. Expert workers can describe and define their job/occupation more accurately than anyone else.
2. An effective way to define a job/occupation is to precisely describe the tasks that expert workers perform.
3. All tasks, in order to be performed correctly demand the use of certain knowledge, skills, tools, and positive worker behaviors. (pp. 1-2)

Norton (1997) described a task in a DACUM analysis as “a meaningful unit of work, generally performed on the job by one worker within some limited period of time. It is a purposeful job-oriented activity of a worker” (Appendix B, p. 1). He further explained that “In most instances, the performance of a task by a worker has a reasonably definite beginning and end, the whole activity requiring a mixture of decisions, perceptions, and/or physical actions serving a useful job purpose or a particular work assignment” (Appendix B, p.1).

Norton (1997) provided a description of the activities in a DACUM workshop:

A two-day DACUM workshop would include the following steps: (a) orient committee to DACUM process; (b) review the occupation; (c) identify the general duties; (d) identify the specific tasks performed in each duty area; (e) refine task and duty statements; (f) sequence task and duty statements; and (g) identify the critical knowledge, skills, and behaviors required of workers, and the tools, equipment, supplies and materials used by workers. (p. C-23)



Zanella (1999) applied the DACUM approach in identifying the actual duties and tasks performed by entry-level industrial technologists in electrical industries in Connecticut. A task verification questionnaire which consisted of the list of actual duties and tasks performed by the entry-level industrial technologists was mailed to 40 workers. Then, according to Zanella, “Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of each task and how frequently each is performed by entry-level workers using a three-point Likert scale (Essential = 5, Important = 3, and Not Important = 1)” (p. 3). Additionally, a mean rating was applied that was divided into five groups from essential to not important.

Kranz (2008) reported that Krystyna McLennan of Dofasco Inc. in Hamilton, Ontario uses the DACUM method as a training and performance tool by seeking knowledge from the employees that know their job best. According to Kranz, “McLennan avoids leading questions that might influence people’s responses. Instead, she leaves it entirely up to the roughly half-dozen to a dozen employees to outline their jobs” (p. 1). Kranz further elaborated on McLennan’s DAUM technique, reporting that “Each duty and its related tasks are listed on a huge wall chart, sometimes containing hundreds of items. What emerges is a baseline job profile from which Dofasco can begin structuring the necessary learning and development” (p. 1). Further, McLennan told Kranz “once we had the initial DACUM chart, we could identify which tasks were highly critical and difficult to learn, [as well as] how frequently they are performed” (p. 1).

Joyner (1995) summarized the DACUM technique and its relationship to competency-based education (CBE):

The DACUM technique and CBE are frequently referred to as one concept or process. It is important to distinguish between the various procedures and techniques commonly grouped under the titles of DACUM and CBE. In simple terms, the distinction between the two is that the DACUM technique identifies

what students should learn, while competency-based education describes how students should learn. The DACUM techniques for developing curricula and the application of competency-based education methodology are Canadian innovations now shared with many nations seeking solutions to the continuing challenge of providing education and training opportunities relevant to current social needs. Through twenty-five years of development, application, evaluation, and modification, the fundamental concepts and principles which focus on learner needs, personal goals, and career aspirations have remained unchanged. When effectively applied, the DACUM techniques and CBE methodology result in an efficient and flexible system of instruction, providing maximum accessibility to a broad spectrum of learners. (pp. 247-249)

### Delphi Methodology

Linstone and Turoff (1975) described the historical origin of Delphi methodology in U.S. military technology. They reported that “in the early 1950’s, ‘Project Delphi’ was the name given to an Air Force-sponsored Rand Corporation study concerning the use of expert opinion” (p. 10). This Delphi study solicited the opinion of experts of an optimal U. S. industrial target system and the estimation of the number of A-bombs required to reduce the munitions output by a prescribed amount. At the time, the alternative approach to solving this predictive problem was the costly use of data collections via computer systems. Linstone and Turoff concluded that:

Even if this alternative approach had been taken, a great many subjective estimates on Soviet intelligence and policies would still have dominated the results of the model. Therefore, the original justifications for this first Delphi study are still valid for many Delphi applications today, when accurate information is unavailable or expensive to obtain, or evaluation models require subjective inputs to the point where they become the dominating parameters. (p. 10)

Weaver (1971) provided the explanation that “Delphi operates on the principle that several heads are better than one in making subjective conjectures about the future ... and that experts will make conjectures based upon rational judgment rather than merely guessing, and will separate hope from likelihood in the process” (p. 268). Brown (1968) related Delphi to its brainstorming roots, pointing out that “For many years experts have been used in brainstorming

sessions and round-table discussion groups with the object of achieving a group opinion, a group solution to a problem or a group estimate of some unknown numerical quantity” (p. 2).

According to Ziglio (1996), “The Delphi method is based on a structured process for collecting and distilling knowledge from a group of experts by means of a series of questionnaires interspersed with controlled opinion feedback” (p. 3). Linstone and Turoff (1975) stated people label Delphi a forecasting procedure because of its significant use in that area. An early example of such a predictive Delphi was provided by Brown (1968):

A study was conducted within TRW, Inc. in an attempt to predict the operating environment of the company twenty years hence. The method used was to ask each member of a panel of 27 technologists to list events of a technical nature that were likely to occur within the next 20 years. Participants were from all working groups in the company and each man was expected to suggest events that might have substantial impact on potential product lines of his group. The lists of technological break-throughs were collected by mail. These were compiled and the completed document was returned to each panelist with the suggestion that he should edit freely in his own area of expertise. The TRW probe of the future resulted in a list of about 400 events with predicted dates of occurrence representing the judgment of responsible experts in several areas of research. The results constitute an information source for planners throughout the corporation. (p. 12)

However, Linstone and Turoff (1975) also pointed out that in addition to predictions, there is a surprising variety of other application areas for Delphi methodology. They listed the following among those already developed:

- Gathering current and historical data not accurately known or available,
- Examining the significance of historical events,
- Evaluating possible budget allocations,
- Exploring urban and regional planning options,
- Planning university campus and curriculum development,
- Putting together the structure of a model,

- Delineating the pros and cons associated with potential policy options,
- Developing causal relationships in complex economic or social phenomena,
- Distinguishing and clarifying real and perceived human motivations, and
- Exposing priorities of personal values, social goals. (p. 4)

Further, Linstone and Turoff (1975) stated that usually, one or more of the following properties of the application leads to the need for employing Delphi:

- The problem does not lend itself to precise analytical techniques but can benefit from subjective judgments on a collective basis.
- The individuals needed to contribute to the examination of a broad or complex problem have no history of adequate communication and may represent diverse backgrounds with respect to experience or expertise.
- More individuals are needed than can effectively interact in a face-to-face exchange.
- Time and cost make frequent group meetings not feasible.
- The efficiency of face-to-face meetings can be increased by a supplemental group communication process.
- Disagreements among individuals are so severe or politically unpalatable that the communication process must be refereed and/or anonymity assured.
- The heterogeneity of the participants must be preserved to assure validity of the results, i.e., avoidance of domination by quantity or by strength of personality (“bandwagon effect”). (p.4)

Hsu and Sandford (2007a) discussed the selection of Delphi participants. They explained, “Since the Delphi technique focuses on eliciting expert opinions over a short period of time, the selection of Delphi subjects is generally dependent upon the disciplinary areas of

expertise required by the specific issue” (p. 3). According to Brown (1968), “a man’s expertness might be judged by his status among his peers, by his years of professional experience, by his own self-appraisal of relative competence in different areas of inquiry, by the amount of relevant information to which he has access or by some combination of objective indices and a priori judgment factors” (pp. 3-4). With panel selection usually being the first step in Delphi methodology, Scheele (1975) asserted:

Three kinds of panelists are ingredients for creating a successful mix: stakeholders, those who are or will be directly affected; experts, those who have an applicable specialty or relevant experience; and facilitators, those who have skills in clarifying, organizing, synthesizing, stimulating... plus, when it seems appropriate, individuals who can supply alternative global views of the culture and society. The proportion of a panel from each category should be tailored for each application. (p. 65)

Brown (1968) addressed the Delphi as a non-face-to-face process, claiming that “Delphi replaces direct confrontation and debate by a carefully planned, orderly program of sequential individual interrogations usually conducted by questionnaires” (p. 3). A general overview of the questionnaire-based Delphi process was described by Wilhelm (1998) as follows:

The essence of the technique is straightforward. It comprises a series of questionnaires sent, either by mail, computer, or fax, to the expert panel members. These questionnaires are designed to elicit and to develop individual responses to the problems and/or questions posed and to enable the experts to refine their views as the group’s work progresses in accordance with the assigned task. In most application, the first questionnaire poses the problem(s) in broad terms and invites answers and comments. Replies are summarized and used to construct a second questionnaire. This second questionnaire presents the results of the first round questionnaire, and give the respondents an opportunity to re-evaluate their original answers in the light of comprehensive feedback on the response of the whole group. During this interactive process, which can be repeated as many times as are judged appropriate in the circumstances, issues can be clarified, areas of agreement and disagreement can be identified, and an understanding of the priorities can be developed. In the second phase it is common to ask the respondents to rank items and to establish preliminary priorities among them according to the instructions given. (p.27)

According to Hsu and Sandford (2007a), “Theoretically, the Delphi process can be iterated until consensus is determined to have been achieved” (p. 2). Ludwig (1994) maintained that “Three iterations are often sufficient to collect the needed information and to reach a consensus in most cases” (p. 2). Several Delphi specialists have described the methodology’s typical three-round process. In the first round, the Delphi process traditionally begins with an open-ended questionnaire that serves as the cornerstone of soliciting specific information about a content area from the Delphi subjects (Custer, Scarcella, & Stewart, 1999; Hsu & Sandford, 2007a). “This questionnaire is used as the survey instrument for the second round of data collection” (Hsu & Sandford, 2007a, p. 2).

According to Hsu and Sandford (2007a), “In the second round, each Delphi participant receives a second questionnaire and is asked to review the items summarized by the investigators based on the information provided in the first round” (p. 2). Brown (1968) added that in this round participants would also be asked to reconsider their responses and revise it if they wished. Delphi panelists may be asked in the second round to rate and rank-order items to establish preliminary priorities among items. As a result of round two, areas of disagreement and agreement are thus identified (Ludwig, 1994, pp. 54-55).

According to Hsu and Sandford (2007a) “In the third round, each Delphi panelist receives a questionnaire that includes the items and ratings summarized by the investigators in the previous round and are asked to revise his/her judgments” (p. 3). Wilhelm (2001) asserted regarding the third Delphi round:

At this phase in the Delphi process, the focus is on how the group views the separate arguments used to defend various positions and how each member’s view compares to other views on a relative basis. It is a time for reevaluating the options. Reevaluation is based upon the views of the underlying evidence and the assessment of its relevance to each position taken. In many Delphis attempting to reach consensus using ratings and rankings, the communication process has

reached a point of diminishing marginal returns beyond three iterations. All items have been introduced, explored, and reconsidered. At this iteration panelists are asked to make their final ratings, rankings, arguments, and comments. (p. 20)

The data analysis and final report from a Delphi should maintain the anonymity of individual panelist (Wilhelm, 2001). At this point, “Decision rules must be established to assemble and organize the judgments and insights provided by Delphi subjects” (Hsu & Sandford, 2007a, p. 4). Wilhelm pointed out that after three rounds, “Participants have put a lot of work into the Delphi study and deserve feedback. A final report should summarize the goals and the processes, as well as the results” (p. 21).

#### Summary and Conceptual Link to This Study

Current literature clearly indicates there is a great need to better equip entry level legal administrative staff personnel with the skills and abilities to perform in a highly professional and ethical manner. While there exist teaching programs and curricula that address the general nature of this profession, the literature has further indicated that the legal field requires *specialized* training in order to equip legal professionals with the development of highly sought after skills. The job market is experiencing shortages and is primed to embrace and employ prepared new professionals and to reward them significantly. The literature in competency-based education, instructional objectives, and job task analysis suggests this is the most appropriate approach for developing curricula to prepare entry level legal office professional for the workplace. Task analysis through Delphi methodology with a panel of legal industry experts was the basis of this study.

CHAPTER III  
METHODOLOGY  
Research Model

General Research Approach

This study collected the opinions of a panel of experts in the area of legal administration for the purpose of constructing a skills list to be used for curriculum development, office reconstruction, and job alignment. A descriptive research approach using a mixed methods design was used to gather, analyze, and interpret the data through a Delphi implementation strategy. Delphi was used in this study for two important reasons. First, Delphi preserved the intent, critical features, and outcomes of task analysis, and second, it accomplished this without the necessity of a face-to-face multi-day data input format that could have prevented some potential working industry experts from participating. By using Delphi, this study retained expert industry input, anonymity, and consensus building through multiple iterative rounds with unstructured original input followed by successive rounds of structured feedback and quantitative re-analysis. This was accomplished through online distribution technology, email, that eliminated the need for busy working professionals to take time off from their jobs, which can be impossible for some.

In summary, the Delphi method has been noted for its curriculum development ability and its ability to yield results from expert panelists while eliminating the need for gathering a committee and maintaining anonymity for the panelists in a face-to-face forum (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). The Delphi method was used to produce a well-defined list of job skills/competencies and tasks to guide industry-supported occupational curriculum.



### Specific Research Model: Delphi Method

Sackman (1995) explained that “The Delphi technique was started by an Air Force sponsored project with the RAND Corporation in the early 1950’s with related studies started as early as 1948” (p. 11). As defined by Ausburn (2003), “The technique uses a panel of experts and a facilitator to obtain, distill, and converge multiple inputs on a designated question or issue” (p. 84). A consensus of opinion from panel experts for the purpose of forecasting future events or possibilities was originally the expected results from the technique (Colding, Colwell, & Smith, 1977; Weaver, 1971). However, this has been extended through usage to incorporate a variety of decision-making purposes. The Delphi technique is also noted as having the ability “to educate the respondent group as to the diverse and interrelated aspects of the topic” (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975, p. 11).

In order to construct a consensus of opinion from a group of experts, the Delphi method uses multiple iterations. In describing a Delphi process, Ludwig (1994) reported:

Iterations refer to the feedback process. The process was viewed as a series of rounds; in each round every participant worked through a questionnaire which was returned to the researcher who collected, edited and returned to every participant a statement of the position of the whole group and the participant’s own position. A summation of comments made each participant aware of the range of opinions and the reasons underlying those opinions. (p. 55)

Linstone and Turoff (1975) noted that “What distinguishes the Delphi from an ordinary polling procedure is the feedback of the information gathered from the group and the opportunity of the individuals to modify or refine their judgments based upon their reaction to the collective views of the group” (p. 22). They asserted that three to four rounds are generally enough in order to bring clarity to the groups’ views (p. 86).

Rotondi and Gustafson (1996) noted the following advantages of the Delphi technique:

... ability to conduct a study in geographically dispersed locations without physically bringing the respondents together; time and cost-effectiveness; allows participants time to synthesize their ideas; allows participants to respond at their convenience; the anonymity of participants provides them with the opportunity to express opinions and positions freely; the process has proven to be effective in a variety of fields, problems, and situations. (p. 37)

Hsu and Sandford (2007a) stated that the listed advantages collectively serve as a controlled feedback mechanism for possible noisy group dynamics that could occur in a face-to-face communications environment. They cited Dalkey (1972) in reporting that “noise is that communication which occurs in a group process which both distorts the data and deals with group and/or individual interests rather than focusing on problem solving” (p. 2). With the anonymity of input element and the multiple input iterations, Delphi research is well equipped to interpret obtained statistical data and bring forth the consensus opinions of the panel members (Ausburn, 2003; Hsu & Sandford, 2007a; Linstone & Turoff, 1975).

While the Delphi technique has many advantages, Sackman (1975) noted some disadvantages for this methodology:

- The lack of opportunity for social-emotional reward in problem-solving leads to feeling of detachment from the problem-solving effort.
- The lack of opportunity for verbal clarification or comment on the feedback report creates communication and interpretation difficulties among respondents.
- Conflicting or incompatible ideas of the feedback report are handled by simply pooling and adding the votes of group respondents. Thus, while this majority rule procedure identifies group priorities, conflicts are not resolved.
- Reinforcing and institutionalizing premature closure of results; giving an exaggerated illusion of scientific precision.
- Developing a fallacy of the expert halo effect.
- Developing no serious critical literature to test basic assumptions and alternative hypotheses (pp. 35, 73-74).

These potential disadvantages of Delphi were recognized and acknowledged by the researcher. However, it was felt that the advantages presented by the Delphi outweighed its

disadvantages for this particular research and the disadvantages were accepted as limitations of the study's methodology.

### Mixed-Methods Research

The mixed method of approaching research is relatively new to the world of educational research. According to Creswell (1998), "The concept of mixing different methods probably originated in 1959, when Campbell and Fiske used multiple methods to study validity of psychological traits" (p.15). Campbell and Fiske's study prompted other researchers to try multiple research methods and the multiple methods helped to neutralize biases inherent in a single method (Creswell, 1998). Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in this Delphi study for data collection and analysis. The study used a qualitative/quantitative blend described by Brown (2007) as the *sequential exploratory approach* as its specific mixed methods model. The first Delphi round was qualitative; it elicited open-ended responses from the participants regarding important skills for entry-level legal office personnel. These data were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis and coding. The second and third rounds were quantitative, using structured responses based on rating and ranking techniques. This blend is shown in Figure 2 using Creswell's (2003) adapted notations and clarifications added by Brown (p. 50).

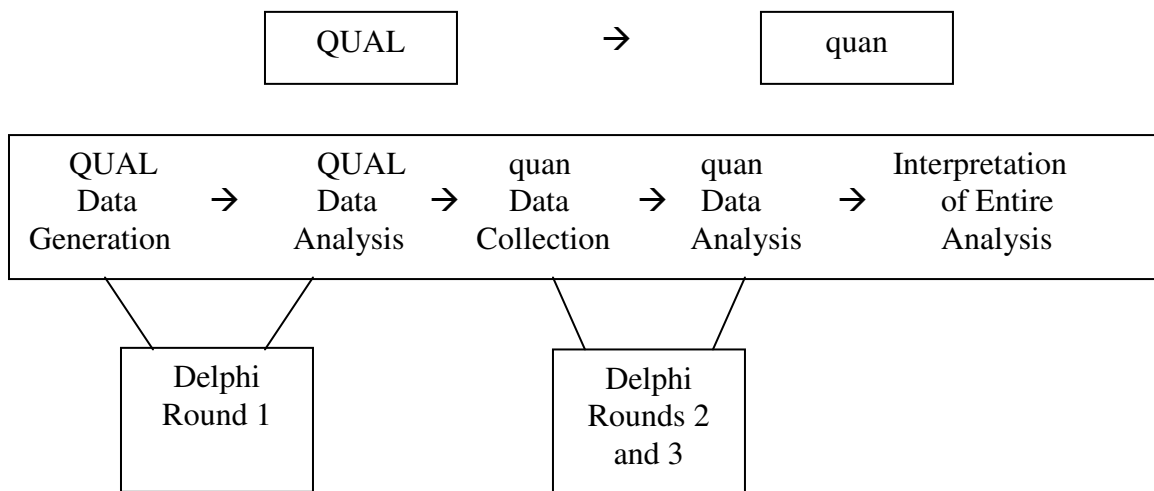


Figure 2. Sequential Exploratory Research Model. Note: From *Research Design* (p. 213), by John W. Creswell, 2003, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. Copyright 2003 by Sage Publications, Inc. Adapted with permission. Adaptations added by Brown (2007).

- QUAL Capitalization indicates a priority on qualitative data and analysis
- qual Lower case indicates a lesser priority
- An arrow indicates sequential data collection

Research Methodology for this Study: Three-Round Mixed-Methods Electronic Delphi

The specific research methodology for this study was a three-round Delphi as recommended by Linstone and Turoff (1975) and Ausburn (2003), conducted electronically using mixed-methods described by Brown (2007) in her study of skill standards in the aviation industry. A group of experienced legal administrators were solicited to participate as the Delphi panel for this study. The Delphi surveys were administered electronically via e-mail using Microsoft Word documents. For this reason, participants were required to have computer access with word processing capability, Internet access, and the skills necessary to input into an electronic form.

## The Delphi Panel

According to Delbecq *et al.* (1986), participants selected for the Delphi process needed to include the following:

...top management and decision makers who will utilize the outcomes of the study; professional staff members who are to support the outcomes; and the respondents to the Delphi question whose judgments are being sought as a part of the study. (p.85)

Linstone and Turoff (1975) felt that there was no general rule for selection of panel members but added that individuals who can be involved on the panel include the stakeholders, experts, and facilitators. Ausburn (2002) made it clear that “The focus in selecting participants is not so much their representativeness of a population, but their knowledge or expertise in the topic under examination” (p. 37).

One effective source of information to construct a skills list for entry-level legal office staff is personnel experts in the legal environment. It has been the researcher’s experience that in many law firms the legal administrator is responsible for hiring, training, and managing the legal personnel. Thus, this group of individuals was viewed as an appropriate group to petition for information regarding the necessary skill requirements or expectations of entry level legal support staff members. Therefore, members of this group of Oklahoma industry professionals was chosen as industry experts and Delphi panelists for this study.

The specific experienced industry participants in this study were legal administrators who had a minimum of 10 years of experience in their particular job and were presently employed in a legal office working in the same or similar capacity; were an active member of ALA; and possessed an undergraduate degree, legal certifications, or 10 hours of continuing learning education in the legal field. An e-mail (see Appendix A) was sent explaining why this particular individual was being solicited to participate in the Delphi and requesting his/her participation.

The individual was also asked to recommend others that possess the stated requirements, thus allowing the researcher to use a snow balling sampling technique to populate the panel.

This researcher solicited 10 panelists of which seven agreed to participate, but due to subject attrition, she ended up with six participants. Ausburn (2002) made it clear that “The focus in selecting participants is not so much their representativeness of a population, but their knowledge or expertise in the topic under examination” (p. 37). Brockhoff’s Delphi study (as cited in Linstone & Turoff, 1975) successfully “focused on short-range forecasting and small homogeneous groups with a varied group size of eleven to four participants” (p. 231). Six fell in the middle of Brockhoff’s range, so this researcher ended solicitation for the study with a small homogenous group.

Subject 1 was a 48 year old female with 10 years experience in the legal field. She possesses a bachelor in business administration and is certified by Society of Human Resource Management, the world’s largest professional association devoted to human resource management. Subject 2 was a 39 year old female with 15 years of experience in the legal field. She has a bachelor in business administration and has more than 20 hours of continuing education in the legal field. Subject 3 is a 52 year old female with 30 years of experience in the legal field, serving in all capacities except an attorney. She has over 50 hours of continuing education in the legal field. Subject 4 is a 58 year old female with 24 years of experience in the legal field, serving in all capacities except an attorney. She has an associate degree in business administration and is the only certified legal manager in the state of Oklahoma. Subject 5 is a female between the ages of 40 and 45 years with 10 years of experience. She has a bachelor in business administration and over 10 hours of continuing education in the legal field. Subject 6 is a 56 year old female with 33 years of experience in the legal field, serving in all capacities

except an attorney. She has a master of human resources and over 50 hours of continuing education in the legal field.

The panel is reflective of the professional population which is heavily female. The researcher did recruit 1 male in an effort to get a male point of view, but he was unable to participate.

### Procedures

This study used procedures and instruments adapted from a similar study by Brown (2007) of skill requirements for professional pilot training programs. These procedures and instruments are best understood by examining the actual instruments, which are presented in Appendices B through D.

The first round of this Delphi study began with a qualitative approach through the use of an open-ended questionnaire shown in Appendix B. The questionnaire asked participants to list critical skills or “indicators” for entry level legal office personnel in 14 categories. This questionnaire was delivered via e-mail to the participants.

This first round questionnaire was used as the survey instrument to obtain data from which to develop the second round of data collection, as suggested by Hsu and Sandford (2007a). The researcher analyzed and summarized the input from the first round and then conducted the second email round in which the participants were given feedback from the first-round survey instrument and were asked to prioritize the provided items by rating or ranking the items. After second round data analysis by the researcher, clarity began to form from the data with definite breaking points in ratings and rankings so that the researcher could prepare the participants for another round of rating and ranking. In the third email round, each Delphi panelist again received feedback from the second-round and a final questionnaire that included

the rated and ranked items summarized by the researcher in the previous round and was asked to revise her judgments. These procedures followed guidelines recommended by Ausburn (2002, 2003), Brown (2007), Pfeiffer (1968) and Hsu and Sandford (2007a). Data analysis by the researcher between each round were indicated on the Delphi questionnaires presented in Appendices B, C, and D. Examination of these Appendices will clarify the procedures used in this study.

### Instrumentation

The Delphi technique was used to conduct this research study. Three questionnaires were developed for use with the expert panelists. An open-ended questionnaire (Appendix B) was designed for round one and was emailed to the panelists upon receipt of their consent to participate (see Appendix A). Panelists were asked on the questionnaire to provide their perceptions regarding skills standards for entry level legal office support staff in urban Oklahoma. Categories were provided to stimulate the thought process but panelists were free to choose their input in each category. Upon receipt of round one, round two feedback (Appendix C) was compiled using analysis techniques described below and a new input form was provided to the panelists for rating and ranking. Upon receipt of round two, round three feedback (Appendix D), was compiled and provided to the panelists to complete final rating and ranking of the data. All instruments used in this study were adapted from those used by Brown (2007) in a similar study of program standards in the aviation industry.

### Data Analysis

Round one used open-ended responses and qualitative analysis methods. The researcher summarized the obtained open-ended data as shown on the Round Two questionnaire (Appendix B) and provided a feedback form to the panelists along with



Round Two input forms (Appendix C) which required rating and ranking of skill items. Round Three consisted of another feedback form reporting Round Two outcomes and again rating and ranking of the skill items by participants. After all rounds were completed, final sigma rank ( $\Sigma$ Rank) and sigma rank point ( $\Sigma$ RankPoint) scores as explained in the Delphi instruments in Appendices B, C, and D were calculated for all skill items to determine their final rank ordering and clustering. To facilitate interpretation of findings of the study, the statistical procedures employed in data analysis are presented along with the data tables in Chapter IV. Based on these calculations, items were ranked in each skill category then, following the procedures used by Brown (2007), tier analysis of the ranked items was conducted. “Tier analysis is ... performed to identify major break points or score clusters in the  $\Sigma$ Rank scores of categories and the point ranges within and between each tier level” (Brown, 2007, p. 63). Finally, specific skills (e.g. Tasks) identified by the Delphi rounds were organized by groups or Duty Areas to create a standard Duty Task List (DTL). Indication was included on the DTL of the ratings and ranking of individual tasks within the duty areas. Once the Delphi technique was complete, the Developing A Curriculum (DACUM) skill profile presentation method was used to display the data in the DTL format that is familiar and useful in the CareerTech technology centers and in the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education environment in the state.

### DACUM

According to Norton (1997), the DACUM process is a methodological approach that uses occupational experts to determine the skills and tasks (i.e., competencies) required of individuals in a particular occupation for the following purposes:

... curriculum development, curriculum review and revision, training needs assessments, competency test development, worker performance evaluations, job descriptions, process descriptions (ISO 9000), student recruitment, student counseling, student achievement records, training program review, curriculum articulation, tech prep program development, job modifications, and career development/planning. (p.25)

According to Finch and Crunkilton (1989), the presentation and workability of the results of the DACUM process is unique in that “a single-sheet skill profile is used to present the skills of an entire occupation, thus reducing the chance of treating one element of an occupation separately from the other” (p. 139). In reality, the DACUM skill profile is usually longer than a single sheet, but the interrelations among skill remains as important concept. In current practice, the DACUM product is a Duty-Task List (DTL) in which working on-job competencies are stated as performances called “tasks,” which are listed in related groupings called “duties” (Blank, 1982). The data from the task analysis in this study were pulled into a profile to produce the DTL using the format generally used by the Oklahoma Career Tech system.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the skills standards for competent entry level legal office support staff personnel. Specific research questions addressed were:

1. What skills and tasks do urban Oklahoma legal industry experts perceive to be critical for entry level legal office support staff?
2. How do the Oklahoma industry experts rate, rank, and cluster the identified skills and tasks?

With the assistance of a panel of six experts from the legal administration field, 13 pre-determined categories and one miscellaneous category, totaling 14 categories were established for the purpose of gathering perceived characteristics and skills of competent support staff personnel. These skills standards were predicted to be useful in determining personnel development needs and techniques in the administrative legal field. The study used a three-round electronic Delphi to identify skill standards and converge them into a traditional industry-validated Duty Task List (DTL).

#### Data Analysis and Findings

The Delphi panel of legal industry experts initially responded to the following instructions in the first Delphi round:

List your indicators within the categories below. These categories are provided to augment the thinking process, therefore, please do not let your responses be limited by these categories. Use additional space if needed.

1. Oral Communications
2. Written Communications
3. Client Assistance
4. Legal Procedures
5. Investigative Functions
6. Legal Research
7. Instrument and Document Preparation
8. Judicial/Trial Assistance
9. Office Functions
10. Education
11. Rational Abilities (getting along with others and having a good perception of self)
12. Emotional Maturity
13. Positive Attitude (of self, their work, and their co-workers)
14. Other/Miscellaneous

A three-round Delphi was used to converge the panel's input regarding critical skills and characteristics for legal support staff. Six panelists agreed to participate in this study and the six panelists provided input for all three rounds. In round one, the panelists provided an accumulation of 157 items within the 13 specific categories and the one miscellaneous category. The 157 items were collapsed to 118 items by providing the panelists with the top 10 items in

each category for rating and ranking. The top 10 items were not moved between categories, but were determined by industry experts through the use of their questionnaires.

In round two, the panelists were provided with a listing of the top items in each category (n=5 to 10) based on rating scores along with the frequency of selection as it pertained to each item as input by panelists in round one. Panelists were asked to rate each category and each item within each category in accordance with a five-point Likert-type scale as follows:

- 1 – not important
- 2 – somewhat important
- 3 – moderately important
- 4 – important
- 5 – very important

The panelists were then asked to rank order the categories and the items within each category in descending order for the purpose of obtaining a “sigma rank” score. The “sigma rank” or  $\Sigma$ Rank score was computed by summing the given ranks assigned to each category by the panelists. The panelists’ first choices were assigned rank 1 and the *n*th choice listed as rank *n*.

Round three included the top items in each category. The category item breakdown reflects ten items in categories 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 11 and 12; nine items in categories 4 and 13; eight items in category 6; seven items in category 14; six items in category 8; and five items in categories 5 and 6. “Rank points” were assigned to each item in each category as follows:

- Rank 1 = 10 points
- Rank 2 = 9 points
- Rank 3 = 8 points
- Rank 4 = 7 points
- Rank 5 = 6 points
- Rank 6 = 5 points
- Rank 7 = 4 points
- Rank 8 = 3 points
- Rank 9 = 2 points
- Rank 10 = 1 point
- Rank below 10 = 0 points

The “sigma rank points” or  $\Sigma$ RankPoint score were computed by summing the rank points earned by each item. Procedures used by Brown (2007) were followed: “Based on their  $\Sigma$ RankPoint scores, the items in each category were ranked from high to low and were assigned item numbers corresponding to the rankings of their scores. Thus, item number 1 became the item with highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoint score and the highest rank order (#1)” (Brown, p. 62). A mean rating of importance was calculated for the overall categories along with the  $\Sigma$ Rank and final ranking.

In this study, as in Brown’s study, “The  $\Sigma$ Rank and  $\Sigma$ RankPoint scores provided the clearest indicator of cluster rankings both in the category analysis and the analysis of items within categories” (Brown, 2007, p. 63). The mean importance rating score provided a secondary indicator in identifying clusters or tiers. The  $\Sigma$ Ranking points were considered the primary criteria because they represented perceived *relative* importance in a forced-choice decision by the panelists. To identify clusters within the skill categories, tier analysis was performed on the  $\Sigma$ Rank scores of the categories. In this analysis, point ranges within and between clusters were examined to identify tiers. A dotted line was used in tabled results to delineate the different tier levels identified.

All final rating and ranking analyses were performed on Round 3 data. The first analysis identified the relative importance of the skill categories as perceived by the participants. This final analysis began with panelists rating and ranking the 14 skill categories. Rating and ranking calculations were then performed as described previously. The results are shown in Table 1. Both Oral and Written Communications, along with Client Assistance, stood out as the top three categories to comprise the first tier group. Categories 2 and 3 had tied  $\Sigma$ RankPoints, but category 2 had a higher mean importance score. Five tiers of skill categories were identified.

Tier two was comprised of Investigative Functions, Legal Research, Judicial/Trial Assistance, Instrument and Document Preparation, and Legal Procedures. Tier three was comprised of Office Functions and Education. Tier four contained Rational Abilities (getting along with others and having a good perception of self), Emotional Maturity, and having a Positive Attitude (of self, work, and co-workers). The fifth tier contained Other/Miscellaneous category.

Table 1

Category Analysis: Mean Importance Ratings, Rankings, and Tiers of Criterion Skill Categories

Category	Mean Rating	$\Sigma$ Rank	Final Rank
Oral Communications	4.50	16	1
Written Communications	4.66	21	2
Client Assistance	4.33	21	3
.....			
Investigative Functions	3.83	28	4
Legal Research	4.33	31	5
Judicial/Trial Assistance	4.00	32	6
Instrument and Document Preparation	4.00	37	7
Legal Procedures	3.83	39	8
.....			
Office Functions	3.50	50	9
Education	3.00	62	10
.....			
Rational Abilities (getting along with others and having a good perception of self)	2.83	67	11
Emotional Maturity	3.16	68	12

Table 1 (continued)

*Category Analysis: Mean Importance Ratings, Rankings, and Tiers of Criterion Skill Categories*

Category	Mean Rating	$\Sigma$ Rank	Final Rank
Positive Attitude (of self, their work, and their co-workers)	3.00	75	13
.....			
Other/Miscellaneous	2.16	83	14

After rank-order and tier identification was completed for the skill categories, similar analysis was conducted for individual skills with each category. Tables 2 through 15 show the complete skill analysis of each category with the categories tabled in their final rank order. Major break points among the individual skills were identified with the use of tier analysis that clustered items within  $\Sigma$ RankPoint ranges.

Table 2

*Skills Analysis – Oral Communications (Category Ranking = 1, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Communicate in a clear/ distinctive manner	4.50	52	1
Communicate with attorneys, clients, supervisors, vendors, and co-workers	4.83	50	2
Communicate intelligently	4.33	46	3
.....			
Use proper grammar	4.00	33	4
Communicate in a tactful manner	4.33	32	5
.....			
Utilize proper usage of English language	4.33	28	6
Communicate in a positive manner	3.83	26	7



Table 2 (continued)

*Skills Analysis – Oral Communications (Category Ranking = 1, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Process thoughts before speaking	3.50	26	8
Refrain from abusive language	4.16	25	9
.....			
Utilize listening skills	3.66	12	10

The Oral Communications category (Table 2) ranked number 1 with 10 ranked items specifically related to communicating in a clear distinctive manner with attorneys, clients, supervisors, vendors, and co-workers; and communicating intelligently as the top indicators. The  $\Sigma$ RankPoint scores give the clearest indicator of tier rankings in the analysis of items, and the mean score provided a backup in this process. The level of importance as indicated by the mean score for this tier was also the highest received.

The first tier in the Oral Communications category gave a very good general indication of necessary communications skills, but the middle and lower tiers in the category gave more specific skills needed. Use of proper grammar, tactfulness, proper usage of the English language, positive communications, process of thought before speaking, refraining from abusive language, followed by listening skills were all noted. Items 7 and 8 received the same  $\Sigma$ RankPoint, but had slightly different mean scores of importance, therefore, item 7, the one with the higher mean score, received a higher ranking. Collectively, all of the items tended to give clear picture as to what skills are needed and what specific teaching content could be incorporated in the job preparation process.

Table 3

*Skills Analysis – Written Communications (Category Ranking = 2, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Use proper spelling	4.83	53	1
Use proper grammar	4.66	47	2
.....			
Read and comprehend simple correspondence	4.66	45	3
Proofread and edit correspondence	4.33	45	4
.....			
Communicate on multiple levels - attorneys, clients, and co-workers	4.33	38	5
Represent the firm positively and professionally	4.16	32	6
.....			
Write clearly	3.83	27	7
Use proper sentence structure	4.00	18	8
Write completely and reliably	3.83	13	9
Write in positive manner	3.83	10	10

The Written Communications category (Table 3) had 10 ranked items with items 3 and 4 having tied  $\Sigma$ RankPoints and with item 3 having a slightly higher mean importance score. Use of proper spelling and grammar comprised the top tier, followed by reading and comprehending simple correspondence; proofreading and editing correspondence; communicating on multiple levels, i.e., attorneys, clients, and co-workers; representing the firm positively and professionally; writing clearly; using proper sentence structure; writing completely and reliably; and writing in a positive manner.

Table 4

*Skills Analysis – Client Assistance (Category Ranking = 3, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Recognize urgent situations	4.66	45	1
Maintain confidences and remain discreet	4.83	43	2
Provide prompt and courteous responses to questions	4.00	43	3
.....			
Exhibit a customer service mentality	4.50	40	4
Exhibit professionalism	4.33	37	5
.....			
Use discretion (knowing boundaries regarding information)	4.00	33	6
Possess the awareness of importance of all clients	3.66	31	7
.....			
Follow through with assistance when requested	4.00	25	8
Exhibit tactfulness in all situations	3.83	25	9
.....			
Maintain a positive demeanor	3.66	8	10

The Client Assistance category (Table 4) had 10 ranked items with items 2 and 3 having tied  $\Sigma$ RankPoints and with item 2 having a higher mean importance score. The top tier is comprised of recognizing urgent situations; maintaining confidences and remaining discreet; and providing prompt and courteous responses to questions. The middle and lower tiers are comprised of exhibiting a customer service mentality; exhibiting professionalism; using discretion (knowing boundaries regarding information; possessing the awareness of importance

of all clients; following through with assistance when requested; and maintaining a positive demeanor.

Table 5

*Skills Analysis – Investigative Functions (Category Ranking = 4, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Discover best way possible to accomplish requested tasks	4.66	60	1
Locate process servers and follow through on service	3.33	48	2
Search for personal information (address, etc.) via Internet	3.83	47	3
Prepare and track certified mail receipts	3.33	44	4
Request help from mentor	3.16	41	5

The Investigative Functions category (Table 5) consisted of 5 items with no ties in  $\Sigma$ RankPoints. This category had one break in tier levels between discovery and action skills. Discovery of the best way possible to accomplish a requested task received the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoint and highest mean importance score, and the acts of completing investigative tasks followed. The second tier was comprised of  $\Sigma$ RankPoints scores 2 through 5: locating process servers and following through on the service; searches for personal information like addresses via the Internet; preparing and tracking certified mail receipts; and requesting help from your mentor.

Table 6

*Skills Analysis – Legal Research (Category Ranking = 5, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Efficient in Internet research	4.16	57	1
.....			
Understand sources and see clear points of view from sources	2.66	49	2
Familiar with research avenues (i.e. Westlaw, LexisNexis, etc.)	3.50	45	3
Research any kind of law	2.66	45	4
Utilize citations	3.16	44	5

The Legal Research category (Table 6) consisted of 5 items with items 3 and 4 having tied  $\Sigma$ RankPoints and with item 3 having a higher mean importance score. This category had one break in tier levels between Internet proficiency and knowledge of law research sources. Efficiency in Internet research received the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoint and highest mean score, and the familiarity of other law research forms and utilization of citations followed. The second tier was comprised of  $\Sigma$ RankPoints scores 2 through 5: understanding sources and seeing clear points of view from sources; familiar with research avenues like Westlaw, LexisNexis and other research based systems; researching any type of law; and using citations.

Tables 5 (Investigative Functions) and 6 (Legal Research) comprised the second tier of skill categories which this researcher would label discovery and research. This indicates that entry level personnel would need to develop the ability to acknowledge the best methods or practices for completing tasks and accomplishing research.

Table 7

*Skills Analysis – Judicial/Trial Assistance (Category Ranking = 6, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Display a good attitude	4.50	53	1
Perform whatever tasks are asked of them	4.50	51	2
.....			
Prepare trial notebooks	4.00	48	3
Organize materials and supplies needed for court	4.50	47	4
.....			
Arrange for courier to deliver exhibit boards	3.66	36	5
Make travel arrangements for out of town witnesses and experts	3.50	35	6

The Judicial/Trial Assistance category (Table 7) consisted of 6 items with no ties in  $\Sigma$ RankPoints. This category had three breaks in the tier levels. When preparing to go to trial, tension in the law office is typically very high, which may be why displaying a good attitude and performing whatever tasks are asked received the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoints and highest mean importance scores. Organizing materials and supplies needed for court ranked 4, but carried the same mean score of importance (M=4.50) as the first and second ranked items. Preparing trial notebooks fell in the second tier with item 4; the third tier comprised arranging for courier to deliver exhibit boards and making travel arrangements for out of town witnesses and experts.

Table 8

*Skills Analysis – Instrument and Document Preparation (Category Ranking = 7, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Ability to organize	4.33	51	1
Prepare correspondence and documents using Microsoft Word	4.50	48	2
.....			
Efficient in Microsoft applications (i.e. Word, Excel and PowerPoint)	4.00	38	3
Proofread prepared documents	4.66	35	4
Properly attach exhibits to pleadings	4.33	34	5
Ability to read, understand and implement client guidelines	4.00	33	6
Set up legal documents skillfully and correctly	3.83	30	7
.....			
Prepare tables, footnotes and indexes using Microsoft Word	3.66	24	8
Knowledge of various pleadings and motions and their styles	3.83	23	9
.....			
Knowledge of WordPerfect, Database source and legal bar	2.33	14	10

The Instrument and Document Preparation category (Table 8) consisted of 10 items with no ties in  $\Sigma$ RankPoints. This category had four breaks in the tier levels. The ability to organize and to prepare correspondence and documents using Microsoft Word received the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoints. The highest mean importance score came from the second tier, item 4, proofreading prepared documents. Efficiency with Microsoft applications (i.e. Word, Excel, and PowerPoint); properly attaching exhibits to pleadings; the ability to read, understand, and

implement client guidelines; and setting up legal documents skillfully and correctly completed items in the second tier.

The third tier included preparing tables, footnotes and indexes using Microsoft Word and attaining the knowledge of various pleadings, motions, and their styles. Having knowledge of WordPerfect, databases sources, and the legal bar rounds out this category and stand alone in tier four.

Table 9

*Skills Analysis – Legal Procedures (Category Ranking = 8, N=6)*

Item	Mean	ΣRankPoint	Final Rank
Ability to follow instructions	4.83	54	1
.....			
Recognize when to ask questions	4.33	49	2
.....			
Ability to learn quickly	3.83	43	3
.....			
Basic understanding of court systems (State, Federal and Supreme)	3.66	43	4
.....			
Understanding and usage of basic legal terminology	3.50	34	5
.....			
Manage docket calendar	3.50	31	6
.....			
Ability to take notes	3.16	27	7
.....			
Basic understanding of legal documentation	3.16	25	8
.....			
Index and maintain files	3.50	18	9

The Legal Procedures category (Table 9) consisted of 9 items with items 3 and 4 having tied ΣRankPoints and with item 3 having a higher mean importance score. It should also be



noted that items 3 and 4 are separated by tier groups because of the gap in the secondary indicator of mean importance score. This category had four breaks in the tier levels. The ability to follow instructions is the sole item in tier one with the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoints and the highest mean importance score. Tier two is comprised of items 2 and 3, recognizing when to ask questions and the ability to learn quickly, respectively. Tier three is comprised of items 4 through 8, basic understanding of court systems (State, Federal and Supreme); understanding and usage of basic legal terminology; managing the docket calendar; the ability to take notes; and having basic understanding of legal documentation. The ninth item, indexing and maintaining files falls into the fourth tier.

Table 10

*Skills Analysis – Office Functions (Category Ranking = 9, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Operate computer	5.00	58	1
Proficient in Microsoft Word	4.16	46	2
.....			
Comprehend, understand and meet deadlines	4.50	44	3
Operate email	4.16	44	4
Plan work, set priorities and budget time to ensure work is done in a timely manner	4.33	37	5
.....			
Type at least 60 wpm	3.50	22	6
Operate office copier	3.00	21	7
Operate document management software	3.50	20	8

Table 10 (continued)

*Skills Analysis – Office Functions (Category Ranking = 9, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Proficient with calendaring	3.33	20	9
Operate office telephones	3.66	18	10

The Legal Procedures category (Table 10) consisted of 10 items with items 3 and 4 having tied  $\Sigma$ RankPoints and with item 3 having a higher mean importance score and items 8 and 9 having tied  $\Sigma$ RankPoints, with item 8 having a higher mean importance score. This category had three breaks in the tier levels. Operating a computer and being proficient in Microsoft Word were respectively the top two items with the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoints and the highest mean importance scores. The panelists unanimously selected operation of the computer as the first of four most important items with a perfect 5.0 mean score. Tier two is comprised of items 3 through 5, comprehending, understanding and meeting deadlines; operating email; and planning work, setting priorities and budgeting time to ensure work is done in a timely manner. Tier three is comprised of items 6 through 1, typing at least 60 words per minute; operating the office copier; operating the document management software; being proficient with calendaring; and operating the phone system.

Table 11

*Skills Analysis – Education (Category Ranking = 10, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
High school graduate	5.00	59	1
On the job training at another law firm	4.00	54	2
Pursue some college	3.33	44	3
.....			
Take computer instruction class	2.66	37	4
Take law office procedures class	2.66	33	5
Take law document preparation class	2.66	30	6
Prefer at least an Associate's degree	2.66	28	7
Take law terminology class	2.50	27	8

Education category (Table 11) consisted of 8 items with no ties in  $\Sigma$ RankPoints. This category had two tier levels. The panelists unanimously selected being a high school graduate as the most important items with a perfect 5.0 in mean importance score. Being a high graduate also had the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoints in this category. On the job training and pursuit of some college completed the first tier. The second tier is comprised of taking computer instruction class; taking law office procedures class; taking law document preparation class; an associate's degree is preferred; and taking law terminology classes.

Table 12

*Skills Analysis – Rational Abilities (Category Ranking = 11, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Possess the ability to interact and get along with multiple personality types	4.50	52	1
Display ethical behavior	4.50	47	2
Display willingness to assume responsibilities without need to shirk responsibility	4.50	45	3
Display hard work	4.33	42	4
Manage multiple projects	4.00	36	5
.....			
Display recognition of communication and actions appropriate to level of person they're dealing with	3.83	32	6
Able to react to stressful situations in a calm manner	4.00	27	7
Refrain from gossip	4.00	25	8
.....			
Have a good perception of self	3.66	12	9.5
Display self directedness	3.66	12	9.5

The Rational Abilities category (Table 12) consisted of 10 items with items 9 and 10 having tied  $\Sigma$ RankPoints and mean importance scores. This category had three breaks in the tier levels. Possessing the ability to interact and get along with multiple personality types received the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoint and highest mean importance score. Items 2 through 5, displaying ethical behavior; displaying willingness to assume responsibilities without need to shirk responsibility; displaying hard work; and managing multiple projects followed in the first tier.

Items 6 through 8, displaying recognition of communication and actions appropriate to level of person they're dealing with; ability to react to stressful situations in a calm manner; and refrain from gossiping comprised tier two. Tier three was comprised of the two 9.5 rankings of having a good perception of self and displaying self directedness.

Table 13

*Skills Analysis – Emotional Maturity (Category Ranking = 12, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Follow rules and office procedures	4.83	57	1
Act professionally at all times (i.e. no drama in the presence of clients, attorneys and staff)	4.83	53	2
Take directions well	4.83	52	3
.....			
Display composure when dealing with mental or emotional stress	3.83	33	4.5
Respond positively to appropriate criticism or correction of errors	3.83	33	4.5
Handle short deadlines	4.00	28	6
Use discretion in use of email and Internet	3.83	28	7
.....			
Portray a level of confidence but never afraid to ask questions	4.00	19	8
Able to think independently	3.66	18	9
Be comfortable in an environment where every day is different	3.83	9	10

The Emotional Maturity category (Table 13) consisted of 10 items with items 4 and 5 having tied  $\Sigma$ RankPoints and means and items 6 and 7 having tied  $\Sigma$ RankPoints and with item 6

having a greater means score. This category had three breaks in the tier levels. Following rules and office procedures; acting professionally at all times (i.e. no drama in the presence of clients, attorneys and staff); and taking directions well received the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoints, respectively, and the highest mean importance scores. Tier two was comprised of items 4 through 7: displaying composure when dealing with mental or emotional stress; responding positively to appropriate criticism or correction of errors; handling short deadlines; using discretion in use of email and Internet. Tier three was comprised of items 8 through 10: portraying a level of confidences by never afraid to ask questions; ability to think independently; and being comfortable in an environment where every day is different.

Table 14

*Skills Analysis – Positive Attitude (Category Ranking = 13, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Exhibit trustworthiness and responsibility	5.00	59	1
Demonstrate ability to solve problems	4.00	49	2
Enjoy performing at a high standard	4.50	44	3
Take pride in work, personal appearance and appearance of work area	4.16	43	4
.....			
Create and maintain harmony among co-workers	3.50	33	5

Table 14 (continued)

*Skills Analysis – Positive Attitude (Category Ranking = 13, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Seeks assistance when necessary to complete an assignment	4.00	32	6
Exhibit positive and professional attitude in stressful situations	3.83	28	7
.....			
Enjoy working in a professional environment	3.83	19	8
Enjoy and promote teamwork	3.16	17	9

The Positive Attitude category (Table 14) consisted of 9 items with no ties in  $\Sigma$ RankPoints. This category had three breaks in the tier levels. The panelists unanimously selected exhibiting trustworthiness and responsibility as the most important items with a perfect 5.0 in mean importance score. This item also had the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoints in this category. Items 2 through 4 demonstrating ability to solve problems; enjoying performing at a high standard; and taking pride in work, personal appearance and appearance of work area completed tier one items. Tier two comprised creating and maintaining harmony among co-workers; seeking assistance when necessary to complete an assignment; and exhibiting positive and professional attitude in stressful situations. Tier three comprised enjoying working in a professional environment; and enjoying and promoting teamwork.

Table 15

*Skills Analysis – Miscellaneous (Category Ranking = 14, N=6)*

Item	Mean	$\Sigma$ RankPoint	Final Rank
Exhibit dependability	4.66	54	1
Handle confidentiality matters	5.00	53	2
Exhibit reliable attendance	4.66	50	3
Work individually and remain focused	4.16	40	4
.....			
Must be highly motivated	3.83	34	5
Must be punctual	4.00	33	6
Must interview well (i.e. bright, quick, confident, and appear to be eager to learn and progress)	3.83	26	7

The Miscellaneous category (Table 15) consisted of 7 items and served as a category to allow panelists to add any items that did not easily fit into any of the previously provided categories with two tier levels. The first two items are one point apart in  $\Sigma$ RankPoints with the second item, handling confidentiality items, being unanimously selected by the panelists as the most important item with a perfect 5.0 mean importance score. The first item which has the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoints is exhibiting dependability. Item 3, exhibiting reliable attendance and item 4, work individually and remain focused completes items in tier one. Tier two comprised must be highly motivated; must be punctual; and must interview well (i.e. bright, quick, confident, and appear to be eager to learn and progress).



## Summary and Integration of Findings

Based on the findings of this study, the rankings of the 14 criterion categories of skills are summarized in Table 16. The categories are displayed in descending order of perceived importance by the Delphi panel of experts. Dotted lines are used to delineate tier levels.  $\Sigma$ RankPoint scores within groupings were the primary criterion used to define the tiers because they represented perceived relative importance in forced-choice decisions. The more absolute mean importance rating score was the secondary criterion.

Table 16

*Categories in Descending Order of Perceived Importance by Delphi Panel (N=6)*

Category	Mean Rating	$\Sigma$ Rank Point	Final Rank
Oral Communications	4.50	74	1
Written Communications	4.66	69	2
Client Assistance	4.33	69	3
.....			
Investigative Functions	3.83	62	4
Legal Research	4.33	59	5
Judicial/Trial Assistance	4.00	58	6
.....			
Instrument and Document Preparation	4.00	53	7
Legal Procedures	3.83	51	8
Office Functions	3.50	40	9
.....			
Education	3.00	28	10
Rational Abilities (getting along with others and having a good perception of self)	2.83	23	11

Table 16 (continued)

*Categories in Descending Order of Perceived Importance by Delphi Panel (N=6)*

Category	Mean Rating	$\Sigma$ Rank Point	Final Rank
Emotional Maturity	3.16	22	12
Positive Attitude (of self, their work, and their co-workers)	3.00	15	13
.....			
Other/Miscellaneous	2.16	7	14

According to the  $\Sigma$ RankPoint totals, the six panelists perceive that Oral Communications was the most important category among the 14 categories. The first tier is comprised the first three categories, Oral and Written Communications (items 1 and 2, respectively), along with Client Assistance (item 3). These three items were deemed the most important and highest ranked categories across the entire gamut of the internal and external organization and work process. The internal organization encompassed everyone who was employed by the particular law firm involved and the external organization encompassed the clients, vendors, and anyone else who was not a direct employee of the law firm.

The panelists observed that communication extends beyond oral and written communications. The Client Assistance category covered communications and relationships with clients. The ability to recognize situations and take action promptly with total professionalism in both act and deed are noted. An overall awareness of customer service and privacy of matters within the law firm is expected.

Tier two was comprised of items 4 and 5, Investigative Functions and Legal Research. These items are somewhat similar in nature in that they cover the fact finding, research, and or discovery period within a law firm as it relates to a case or matter. The ability to discover the

best possible way to accomplish requested tasks and the ability to efficiently use Internet research gives a summary of this tier.

Tier three was comprised of items 6 through 10, Judicial/Trial Assistance, Instrument and Document Preparation, Legal Procedures, Office Functions, and Education. These categories equip an entry level person with trial and document production skills. The items with the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoints in these categories were to display a good attitude; have the ability to organize; have the ability to follow instructions; operate a computer; and to be a high school graduate. Two of the most important items with a perfect 5.0 in mean importance scores are a part of this tier, operating a computer and being a high school graduate.

Tier four was comprised of items 11 through 13, Rational Abilities, Emotional Maturity, and Positive Attitude. The items with the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoints in these categories were to possess the ability to interact and get along with multiple personality types, follow rules and office procedures, and to exhibit trustworthiness which also is perceived to be one of the most important items with a perfect 5.0 mean importance score.

The Miscellaneous category stood alone in the fifth tier with the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoints item being to exhibit dependability. The second item in this category, to handle confidentiality matters, was perceived to be one of the most important items with a perfect 5.0 mean importance score.

With a combination of soft skills from tiers one, four and five, and the hard skills from tiers two and three, the six panelists gave a clear picture of the skill set that entry level legal office support personnel should possess. While all the tiers have been rated and ranked as perceived by the panelists, they all provide a great amount of information with an overall sense of total importance. Collectively, all of the categories indicate what the panel perceived as the

skills that would ultimately assist the entry level legal office support personnel with the necessary skills to achieve success in this field.

#### Conversion of Results to Traditional Occupational Duty-Task List

For ease of interpretation and use in curriculum development, this researcher converted the Delphi findings to a traditional occupational Duty Task List (DTL) as used in the Oklahoma Career Tech system. Duty is defined as “a cluster of related tasks from a broad work area or general area of responsibility (area of competence)” (Norton, 1997, Appendix C, p. 2). Task is defined as “a work activity that is discrete, observable, performed within a limited period of time and that leads to a product, service or decision. Tasks are also frequently referred to as the competencies that students or trainees must obtain in order to be successful workers” (Norton, 1997, Appendix C, p. 4). For the purpose of the conversion from this Delphi study to DTL, this researcher equated Duty to skill categories and Tasks to individual skills within categories. The conversion process represented a nexus of traditional DACUM process with the Delphi research methodology used in this study. The DTL representation derived from the Delphi results is shown in Figure 3 (Appendix F, p. 115).

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to use expert input to identify and describe critical skills or competencies perceived by the legal industry to be required to train competent team members in the legal office environment. Specifically, this study focused on fulfilling this purpose in the context of urban Oklahoma, where a large number of legal office professionals are employed.

This study was conceptualized as an application of Delphi methodology to develop an industry-driven, occupationally-specific, and competency-based description of the job profile of new legal office professionals. The study used the input of industry experts to identify specific skills necessary for entry-level office support staff personnel in the legal industry. The participants or Delphi panel for the study were six legal administrators from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, each with a minimum of 10 years of experience in the legal office environment. This panel was identified as the industry experts to provide input for the study. The theoretical framework was based on the dual strands of *competency-based education* and a *task analysis approach* for generating industry-based skill standards or competencies.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What skills and tasks do urban Oklahoma legal industry experts perceive to be critical for entry level legal office support staff?
2. How do the Oklahoma industry experts rate, rank, and cluster the identified skills and tasks?

The Delphi technique was used to conduct this research study and gather task analysis data utilizing a mixed-methods design to gather, analyze, and interpret the data. Following

procedures successfully used in similar Delphi-based industry standards studies (e.g. Brown, 2007), three researcher-developed questionnaires were developed for use with the expert panelists consisting of legal administrators from the Oklahoma City urban area. Round one of the Delphi used an open-ended questionnaire based on broad categories, while rounds two and three used more structured rating and ranking responses to obtain and converge data.

### Summary of Findings

Using rating and ranking procedures, 14 categories of skills were divided into five tiers. The top or most important tier as indicated by the expert panel consisted of the skill categories Oral Communications, Written Communications, and Client Assistance. These categories received  $\Sigma$ RankPoint scores and mean importance scores, respectively in the order listed. The panel of experts perceived that internal and external communications with attorneys, clients, supervisors, vendors and co-workers in a clear distinctive manner ranked high on the list of needed skills. Use of proper grammar; proofreading and editing skills; recognizing urgent situations; maintain confidences; and exhibiting a customer service mentality were also highly ranked in these categories.

The second tier of skill categories consisted of Investigative Functions, Legal Research, and Judicial/Trial Assistance, receiving  $\Sigma$ RankPoint scores and mean importance scores in that order. The panel perceived that the ability to discover the best way to accomplish requested tasks; locating process servers and following through on the service; searching for personal information; efficiently conducting Internet research; understanding sources and seeing clear points of view from the sources; researching any kind of law, displaying a good attitude, performing whatever tasks are requested; and preparing trial notebooks were skills that ranked highest in these categories.

The third tier of skill categories consisted of Instrument and Document Preparation, Legal Procedures, and Office Functions, receiving  $\Sigma$ RankPoint scores and mean importance scores in that order. The panel perceived that the ability to organizing efficiently; preparing correspondence and document using Microsoft application tools; following instructions accurately; recognizing when to ask questions; learning quickly; operating a computer; and understanding and meeting deadlines were skills that ranked highest in these categories.

The fourth tier of skills categories consisted of Education, Rational Abilities (getting along with others and having a good perception of self), Emotional Maturity, and Positive Attitude (of self, their work, and their co-workers), receiving  $\Sigma$ RankPoint scores and mean importance scores in that order. The panel perceived that interacting and getting along with multiple personality types; displaying ethical behavior; displaying willingness to assume responsibilities; displaying work ethic; following rules and office procedures; acting professionally at all times; taking directions; displaying composure when dealing with mental or emotional stress; exhibiting trustworthiness; demonstrating ability to solve problems; enjoying performing at a high standard; and taking pride in work, personal appearance, and appearance of work area were skills that ranked highest in these categories.

The fifth tier consisted of the Miscellaneous category. The panel perceived exhibiting dependability; handling confidential matters; exhibiting reliable attendance; working individually; and remaining focused were skills that ranked highest in this category.

To facilitate use of this task analysis by industry professionals and curriculum developers, these findings were pulled into a standard Duty Task List (DTL) using a format generally used in the DACUM process and by the Oklahoma Career Tech system. In this DTL,

the skill categories were designated as the Duty areas, and Tasks were specific skills identified in each category.

### Conclusions and Discussion

The findings of this study suggest three major conclusions:

1. This panel of professionals in Oklahoma have a clear conceptualization of the skills new legal office support staff should have.
2. The Delphi method was an alternative to face-to-face DACUM procedure in eliciting and converging industry opinions.
3. The study produced a traditional DTL for the legal industry that can serve as a guide to develop targeted curriculum.

#### Conceptualization of Skills for Legal Office Professionals

The Delphi panelists gave a clear and precise five-tier picture of what a qualified entry-level legal administrative professional should be skillfully equipped with. Communications skills, both oral and written, coupled with the ability to provide excellent client assistance were a part of the first tier of skills accessed by the panelists. The legal professional's ability to speak clearly, use proper spelling and grammar, read and comprehend simple correspondence, listen skillfully, and exhibit customer service attributes to clients were clearly identified as important in the profile of the well-qualified entry-level legal administrative professional.

The ability to perform research tasks along with trial preparation skills comprised the second tier. Performing legal research via the Internet and professional investigative tools like LexisNexis and Westlaw were specifically noted as important. The ability to have a good attitude during a stressful trial period coupled with the ability to organize and prepare trial notebooks were determined to be essential skills.



Generating documents via word processors, spreadsheets, and presentation software, learning legal procedures and performing office tasks comprised the third tier. Proofreading, editing, and following the editing, preparation, and delivery rules of courts are required in this tier. Being a quick study will prove to be very helpful during this process.

The fourth tier of the profile identified by the legal industry experts incorporates education, rational and emotional state, along with a positive attitude. A high school education is all that was stated as being required as long as the legal professional has the ability to learn quickly. A highly self-motivated professional with computer skills, and an ethical behavior exhibiting trustworthiness and responsibility emerged as being extremely desirable.

The fifth tier yielded miscellaneous skills of being dependable, handling confidential matters and working independently. With a combination of all of the skills from the five tiers, a very clear picture of a qualified entry-level legal administrative employee evolved from the panel of industry experts who participated in this study.

#### Delphi as a Task Analysis Alternative to DACUM

According to Norton (1997), the DACUM process is a methodological approach that uses occupational experts to determine the skills and tasks (i.e., competencies) required of individuals in a particular occupation for the following purposes:

... curriculum development, curriculum review and revision, training needs assessments, competency test development, worker performance evaluations, job descriptions, process descriptions (ISO 9000), student recruitment, student counseling, student achievement records, training program review, curriculum articulation, tech prep program development, job modifications, and career development/planning. (p.25)

According to Finch and Crunkilton (1989), the presentation and workability of the results of the DACUM process is unique in that “a single-sheet skill profile is used to present the skills of an entire occupation, thus reducing the chance of treating one element of an occupation

separately from the other” (p. 139). In reality, the DACUM skill profile is usually longer than a single sheet, but the interrelations among skill remains as important concept. In current practice, the DACUM product is a Duty-Task List (DTL) in which working on-job competencies are stated as performances called “tasks,” which are listed in related groupings called “duties” (Blank, 1982). The data from the task analysis in this study were pulled into a profile to produce the DTL using the format generally used by the Oklahoma Career Tech system.

The Delphi Method is very similar to DACUM in that the Delphi Method can be used for the same purposes as DACUM as well as many other cross-industry program analyses. Adler and Ziglio (1995) described the Delphi Method as “a structured process for collecting and distilling knowledge from a group of experts by means of a series of questionnaires interspersed with controlled opinion feedback” (p. 5). While a DACUM session can be completed in two to four days, in many cases it can be difficult for experts to assemble for multiple days away from the office. The Delphi Method allows the versatility of being administered either face-to-face (F2F) or at distance which adds a level of anonymity for the experts in their reporting process. The distance use of the Delphi Method allows for participation via Internet and openness through anonymity, as well as easy participation by industry personnel without having to miss several days of work.

Both methods meet requirements for industry-driven task analysis. The intersection of DACUM and Delphi is a 3-round Internet Delphi which meets the theoretical requirements of CBE and task analysis while accomplishing accessibility by industry expert participants. For these reasons, this method was selected for this study. For this study, the theoretical and methodological foundations were interwoven in the study’s conceptualization.

As predicted by their similar theoretical and methodological foundations and by similar studies (e.g. Brown, 2007), the Delphi method proved to be a successful alternative to DACUM in this study. It resulted in the development of an occupationally-specific, industry-driven, and competency-based Duty Task List (DTL) in the same form that would have emerged from a F2F DACUM process. The Delphi methodology was successful because it accommodated the busy schedules of the legal administrators who served as the panel of industry experts. A two to three day interruption of work schedules for a DACUM meeting was unworkable from a managerial and an economic point view. Attempting to coordinate personal schedules along with personnel and court schedules was not possible. The Delphi method allowed for experts to prepare and work on their questionnaires during their available time. While the data collection took longer, the three-round Delphi yielded appropriate data to successfully complete the study and fully meet its outcome expectations and requirements.

#### Production of a Useful Duty Tasks List (DTL)

Instrumental to the task analysis process in competency-based education (CBE) is the traditional methodology of DTL development. Developing A Curriculum (DACUM) is a specialized method that has been traditionally used for developing an occupational analysis and an industry-based DTL for occupationally-specific CBE. The DACUM process is a methodological approach that utilizes occupational experts to identify the skills and tasks (i.e., competencies) required of individuals in a particular occupation for the purpose of “curriculum development, curriculum review and revision, training needs assessments, competency test development, worker performance evaluations, job descriptions, process descriptions (ISO 9000), student recruitment, student counseling, student achievement records, training program review, curriculum articulation, tech prep program development, job modifications, and career

development/planning” (Norton, 1997, p. 25). The DACUM committee functions as a group in a face-to-face (F2F) environment under the guidance of a trained facilitator over a time period of from two to four days (Blank, 1982; Finch & Crunkilton, 1989). In current practice, the DACUM product is a Duty-Task List (DTL) in which working on-job competencies are stated as performances called “tasks,” which are listed in related groupings called “duties” (Blank, 1982).

The researcher asserts that the DTL generated from this study through electronic Delphi methodology gives a clear presentation of duties and tasks that are necessary for entry-level administrative staff personnel. The DTL is identical to what would have emerged from a traditional F2F DACUM. Like any fully developed industry-driven DTL, the one that emerged from this study for entry-level legal office professionals can be useful in curriculum development and also in employment evaluation.

A sound DTL that is based on expert industry input and is occupationally-specific is typically the foundation for occupational curriculum and for employee evaluation and workforce development. The DTL derived from this study meets these requirements.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations are made based on the information obtained from this study and from conclusions drawn from the analysis:

1. Oral and written communications skills should be more intertwined in the training process of entry level legal administrative staff personnel. The top or most important tier as indicated by the expert panel consisted of the skill categories Oral Communications, Written Communications, and Client Assistance. This suggests

- that these skills may be lacking amongst entry-level legal administrative staff personnel and supports their emphasis in pre-service and in-service training.
2. Legal investigative skills should be included in the training process of entry level legal administrative staff personnel. The second tier of skill categories with the second highest tier scores of importance consisted of Investigative Functions, Legal Research, and Judicial/Trial Assistance. This suggests that these skills may be lacking amongst entry-level legal administrative staff personnel and supports their emphasis in pre-service and in-service training.
  3. On-the-job training or the development of an on-the-job simulation environment would be extremely useful in the training process. The expert panelists indicated that a high school diploma would be sufficient to function proficiently in this job capacity. If many new legal office professionals have only high school credentials, an internship or job simulation environment may be helpful in the training process. It would provide experiences and depth of understanding of the workplace environment and situations that are not likely in a high school level learning opportunities.

### Recommendations for Research

This study is a first attempt at identifying skills assessments of entry-level administrative staff personnel. Recommendations for future research are:

1. Extend this study to other urban areas.
2. Extend this study to rural areas.
3. Extend this study to other occupational areas.
4. Perform an FCDC (Frequency, Criticality, Difficulty, Complexity) study to help curriculum development for the duty task list.

5. Conduct qualitative interviews with legal industry professionals to probe deeper into their perceptions of skill requirements for their office personnel.
6. Replicate the study in specific types of law office practices.
7. Extend this study to government court personnel.
8. Conduct qualitative research to investigate the low ranking of strong interpersonal skills.
9. Use the duty task list to develop an industry specific curriculum for this industry.
10. Conduct a study to determine if skill categories (duties) or some tasks within duties are hierarchical.
11. Conduct qualitative interviews to determine if pre-requisites are needed to enter into this profession? Are some duties and/or tasks pre-requisites for others?

These extensions and replications to this study would allow for examinations of its potential for generalization, for notation of possible differences in skill requirements in various sectors of the legal profession, and for deeper understanding of the nature and improvement of critical skills in the industry workforce.

### Conclusion

The need for highly skilled workers in the legal community has and will continue to be a sought after commodity. Identifying skills for employees is one of the first steps in providing an educational base and level of service to this field. While many skills have been transferred to workers in the legal field through general office training programs, these programs have lacked specific skills required by legal administrative personnel. With the assistance of experts in the legal administrative management field, the full range of industry-specific critical skills have been identified in this study and can now be incorporated into training programs to prepare entry-level

administrative personnel and to help them acclimatize and integrate very quickly to the law firm environment, which in turn will make them productive employees in a shorter length of time. In addition, this study can serve as a guide for legal administrators and personnel agencies as they seek new employees, assess the needs of present employees, and evaluate their on-job performance.

While the DACUM/Delphi model requires considerably more time than a standard face-to-face DACUM model; it can be useful when facing the need of gathering useful data from busy industry professionals. Combining the practice of DACUM for curriculum development and the theory of Delphi as the research model, a facilitator can produce a duty task list for use across any particular industry. These two models unite very nicely to generate a functional instrument for curriculum development and personnel assessment.

In an industry that is characterized by high levels of performance, ethics, accountability, and public service, clear skill standards are critical for both pre-service training and in-service assessment and development. These standards have been to date inadequately identified and codified in a usable format to meet the needs of the legal profession. This study was a successful first step in addressing this problem and meeting the skilling needs of a critical and growing industry in Oklahoma and the nation.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION LETTER

Tonya Reese Ward

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From: "Tonya Reese Ward" [tmward@productlaw.com](mailto:tmward@productlaw.com)  
To: <PARTICIPANT>  
Sent: Monday, October 6, 2008 8:00 AM  
Attach: Informconsent.doc

Subject: Research Study – Identification of Skills Standards for Entry Level Legal Office Support Staff in Oklahoma

Dear <PARTICIPANT>:

As part of my doctoral program in Occupational Education Studies at Oklahoma State University, I am conducting research to identify skills standards for entry level legal office support staff in Oklahoma. The purpose of this study is to use expert input to identify and describe critical skills or competencies perceived by the legal industry to be required to train competent team members in the legal office environment. Specifically, this study will focus on fulfilling this purpose in the context of urban Oklahoma, where a large number of legal office professionals are employed. Because of your experience and expertise, you are being invited to be a participant in this research study in the capacity of expert in the legal administrative industry.

I will be conducting a Delphi study which utilizes a panel of experts to anonymously come to consensus on the topic at hand. You will be asked to respond to three questionnaires via electronic mail and online database. All participants will remain anonymous and all responses will be held in strict confidence.

Please read carefully the attached Consent Information Sheet. Then, if you are willing to participate in this research study, please retain the Consent Sheet for your records and call me at 405-664-7288 or email me at [tmward@productlaw.com](mailto:tmward@productlaw.com) to give me your consent and join the Delphi expert panel. You will be provided copies of the results upon completion of this research study. If you have any questions or problems, please contact me. I look forward to working with you in this unique research project.

Sincerely,

s/Tonya Reese Ward  
Tonya Reese Ward  
Doctoral Candidate  
Oklahoma State University

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

## **Identification of Skills Standards for Entry Level Legal Office Support Staff in Oklahoma**

### **Consent Information Sheet**

The purpose of this study is to use expert input to identify and describe critical skills or competencies perceived by the legal industry to be required to train competent office support staff personnel in the legal office environment. Specifically, this study will focus on fulfilling this purpose in the context of urban Oklahoma, where a large number of legal office professionals are employed. Because of your experience and expertise, you are invited to be a participant in this research study in the capacity of expert in the legal administrative industry.

Through your participation in this study, you will help training organizations to better understand how to plan and deliver education to students preparing to enter into the legal field. If you consent to participate in this study, your name will not be associated with this research in any way. It is very important that you realize that:

1. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no special incentives for your participation and there are no negative consequences for declining participation.
2. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time.
3. Your involvement in this project will involve completing electronically via email three (3) questionnaires that may require total of about 8-10 hours of your time. The questionnaires will require you to identify, rate and rank skills necessary for entry-level legal office professionals.
4. It is not anticipated that you will suffer any risks of discomfort or inconvenience from participation in this research beyond those encountered in daily life.
5. All information you provide on the questionnaires will be anonymous and treated with complete confidentiality. No one but the researcher will ever see or know your name or identity. Your name on returned questionnaires will be immediately by an ID number.
6. All information you provide will be secured at all times by the researcher in a locked cabinet in her personal residence. All hard copies of returned questionnaires will be destroyed after being copied to a password secured CD to be retained personally by the researcher for up to 5 years and then destroyed.
7. The data from this research will be used only for research reporting and curriculum development. Any data used in presentation or publication of professional literature and reports will be anonymous and reported only in aggregated and/in codes. No reference to your name or personal identity will be made at any time.
8. All records of this research will be kept solely by the researcher and will be maintained under locked security until destroyed as described above.

**To give your consent to participate in this research, please keep this consent information for your personal use and contact the researcher via email ([tmward@productlaw.com](mailto:tmward@productlaw.com)) or phone (405-664-7288) to receive instructions and begin your participation.**

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Tonya Reese Ward, who is the researcher and doctoral student at Oklahoma State University, at (405) 664-7288 or Dr. Lynna J. Ausburn, the faculty advisor for the study, at (405) 744-8322. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405) 744-1676 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

APPENDIX C

ROUND ONE QUESTIONNAIRE

**Identification of Skills Standards for Entry Level  
Legal Office Support Staff in Oklahoma: A Delphi Study**

**Tonya Reese Ward**

**INPUT FORM: ROUND 1**

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: Please be assured we will use your name ONLY to verify your participation. All input revealed by panelists in the Delphi rounds will be completely anonymous.

For this Delphi study, please focus on identifying skills standards for entry level legal office support staff.

Think carefully before you make your initial input. The quality of your input will determine the quality of the study. List specific skills you believe will be most applicable. Avoid generalizations and ill-defined “wish lists.” Give SPECIFIC skills – things that are indicative of competent entry level legal office support staff.

List your indicators within the categories below. These categories are provided to augment the thinking process, therefore, please do not let your responses be limited by these categories. Use additional space if needed.

Category 1. Oral Communications

Category 2. Written Communications

Category 3. Client Assistance

Category 4. Legal Procedures

Category 5. Investigative Functions

Category 6. Legal Research

Category 7. Instrument and Document Preparation

Category 8. Judicial/Trial Assistance

Category 9. Office Functions

Category 10. Education

Category 11. Rational Abilities (getting along with others and having a good perception of self)

Category 12. Emotional Maturity

Category 13. Positive Attitude (of self, their work, and their co-workers)

Category 14. Other/Miscellaneous



APPENDIX D

ROUND TWO QUESTIONNAIRE

**Identification of Skills Standards for Entry Level  
Legal Office Support Staff in Oklahoma: A Delphi Study**

**Tonya Reese Ward**

**FEEDBACK FORM: ROUND 1 AND INPUT FORM: ROUND 2**

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: Please be assured we will use your name ONLY to verify your participation. All input revealed to panelists in the Delphi rounds will be completely anonymous.

This round of our Delphi will require you to analyze and evaluate the comments made by the Delphi panel in round 1. After your thoughtful analysis, you will then make some choices from among the numerous ideas offered in Round 1 and rank order and rate your selections.

To make your Round 2 input, you should carefully study the feedback from Round 1. This is in the form of a list that summarizes the many responses you and the other panelists offered as quality indicators.

First, rate the categories and then items within the category using the following scale:

- 1 – not important
- 2 – somewhat important
- 3 – moderately important
- 4 – important
- 5 – very important

You MAY NOT introduce any new ideas at this point! However, you are encouraged to make comments to explain answers.

Second, rank order the categories and the items within the category in descending order, with your first choice listed as rank 1 and your nth choice listed as rank n.

Category Number and Title

Round 2:

Category Rating for Importance (1 – 5) (panelist provides)

Category Ranking for Importance (1 – 10) (panelist provides)

Item Number and Name (numbers <b>do not</b> imply rank order)	Frequency Listed by Panel (f) in Round 1	Item Rating for Importance within Category	Item Ranking for Importance within Category
1 <b>RESEARCHER</b>	<b>RESEARCHER</b>	<b>PANELIST</b>	<b>PANELIST</b>
2 <b>PROVIDES</b>	<b>PROVIDES</b>	<b>PROVIDES</b>	<b>PROVIDES</b>
3 <b>THIS</b>	<b>THIS</b>	<b>THIS</b>	<b>THIS</b>
4 <b>INFORMATION</b>	<b>INFORMATION</b>	<b>INFORMATION</b>	<b>INFORMATION</b>
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			

Comments:

APPENDIX E

ROUND THREE QUESTIONNAIRE

**Identification of Skills Standards for Entry Level  
Legal Office Support Staff in Oklahoma: A Delphi Study**

**Tonya Reese Ward**

**FEEDBACK FORM: ROUND 2 AND INPUT FORM: ROUND 3**

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: Please be assured we will use your name ONLY to verify your participation. All input revealed to panelists in the Delphi rounds will be completely anonymous.

This is the final round of the study. In Round 2, you and your fellow panelists rated and ranked recommendations for educators from the list generated by the panel. For each category a mean (average) rating of importance was calculated. Also calculated was a total of the category's rankings ( $\Sigma$ Rank) and its overall group ranking based on this total.

The tables below also show the panel's top ten (10) item selections in each category. The items were selected by assigning "rank points" to each item as follows:

- Rank 1 = 10 points
- Rank 2 = 9 points
- Rank 3 = 8 points
- Rank 4 = 7 points
- Rank 5 = 6 points
- Rank 6 = 5 points
- Rank 7 = 4 points
- Rank 8 = 3 points
- Rank 9 = 2 points
- Rank 10 = 1 point

The rank points earned by each item were summed, to compute a score called "sigma rank points" or  $\Sigma$ RankPoint. Also tabulated was the number of times each item was ranked 10 or above by a panelist regardless of ranking assigned, which was designated as the "frequency" ( $f$ ) score for the item.

Based on their  $\Sigma$ RankPoint scores, the items in each category were ranked from high to low and assigned item numbers corresponding to the rankings of their scores. Thus, item number 1 became the item with the highest  $\Sigma$ RankPoint score and the highest (#1) rank order. Items ranked below 10 eliminated from further analysis in this Delphi study.

The tables below show the Round 2 results, including category and item rankings,  $\Sigma$ Rank and  $\Sigma$ RankPoint scores, and frequencies ( $f$ ) for the items retained for further consideration in Round 3.

To make your input for round 3, study the results of Round 2 carefully. Then, for the final time, rate the categories and the items within each category using the following scale:

- 1 – not important
- 2 – somewhat important
- 3 – moderately important
- 4 – important
- 5 – very important

Second, rank order the categories and the items with each category in descending order, with your first choice listed as rank 1 and your  $n$ th choice listed as rank  $n$ .

Do NOT assign any tied ranks.

Category <Number and Title>

Round 2 Mean Importance Rating = <Researcher provides>

Round 2 Ranking Score ( $\Sigma$ Rank) = <Researcher provides>

Round 2 Overall Ranking = <Researcher provides>

Round 3:

Category Rating for Importance (1 – 5) (panelist provides)

Category Ranking for Importance (1 – 10) (panelist provides)

Item and Round 2 Overall Rank	Round 2 $\Sigma$ RankPoint	Round 2 Mean Rating for Importance	Round 2 Frequency ( <i>f</i> ) of Selection in Top 10 in Category	Round 3 Importance Rating (1 – 5)	Round 3 Ranking (1 – 10)
1 RESEARCHER	PROVIDES	THIS	INFORMATION	PANELIST PROVIDES	PANELIST PROVIDES
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					

Comments:

## APPENDIX F

FIGURE 3. TRADITIONAL DUTY TASK LIST (DTL)  
DERIVED FROM THIS STUDY'S DELPHI METHODOLOGY



DUTIES	TASKS				
<b>PERFORM ORAL COMMUNICATION TASKS</b> A	Communicate in a clear and distinctive manner A1	Communicate with attorneys, clients, supervisors, vendors, and co-workers A2	Communicate in fully understandable manner A3	Use proper grammar A4	Communicate in a tactful manner A5
<b>PERFORM WRITTEN COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS</b> B	Use proper spelling B1	Use proper grammar B2	Read and comprehend simple correspondence B3	Proofread and edit correspondence B4	Communicate on multiple levels with attorneys, clients, and co-workers B5
<b>PROVIDE CLIENT ASSISTANCE</b> C	Recognize urgent situations C1	Maintain confidences and remain discreet C2	Provide prompt and courteous responses to questions C3	Exhibit a customer service attitude C4	Exhibit professionalism C5
<b>PERFORM INVESTIGATIVE FUNCTIONS</b> D	Discover best way possible to accomplish requested tasks D1	Locate process servers and follow through on service D2	Search for personal information (address, etc.) D3	Prepare and track certified mail receipts D4	Request help from mentor D5
<b>PERFORM LEGAL RESEARCH</b> E	Conduct Internet research efficiently E1	Understand sources and see clear points of view from sources E2	Use various research avenues (i.e. Westlaw, LexisNexis, etc.) E3	Research any kind of law E4	Use citations E5
<b>PROVIDE JUDICIAL/TRIAL ASSISTANCE</b> F	Display a good attitude F1	Perform whatever tasks are requested F2	Prepare trial notebooks F3	Organize materials and supplies needed for court F4	Arrange for courier to deliver exhibit boards F5
<b>GENERATE INSTRUMENTS AND DOCUMENTS</b> G	Organize efficiently G1	Prepare correspondence and documents using Microsoft Word G2	Use Microsoft applications (i.e. Word, Excel and PowerPoint) efficiently G3	Proofread prepared documents G4	Properly attach exhibits to pleadings G5
<b>DUTIES</b>	<b>TASKS</b>				

Figure 3. Traditional Duty Task List (DTL) derived from this study's Delphi methodology.

DUTIES	TASKS				
<b>PERFORM ORAL COMMUNICATION TASKS A</b>	Use English language properly <b>A6</b>	Communicate in a positive manner <b>A7</b>	Process thoughts before speaking <b>A8</b>	Refrain from abusive language <b>A9</b>	Use listening skills <b>A10</b>
<b>PERFORM WRITTEN COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS B</b>	Represent the firm positively and professionally <b>B6</b>	Write clearly <b>B7</b>	Use proper sentence structure <b>B8</b>	Write completely and reliably <b>B9</b>	Write in positive manner <b>B10</b>
<b>PROVIDE CLIENT ASSISTANCE C</b>	Use discretion and recognize boundaries regarding informaion <b>C6</b>	Demonstrate awareness of importance of all clients <b>C7</b>	Follow through with assistance when requested <b>C8</b>	Exhibit tactfulness in all situations <b>C9</b>	Maintain a positive demeanor <b>C10</b>
<b>PERFORM INVESTIGATIVE FUNCTIONS D</b>					
<b>PERFORM LEGAL RESEARCH E</b>					
<b>PROVIDE JUDICIAL/TRIAL ASSISTANCE F</b>	Generate travel arrangements for out of town witnesses and experts <b>F6</b>				
<b>GENERATE INSTRUMENTS AND DOCUMENTS G</b>	Accurately read, understand and implement client guidelines <b>G6</b>	Set up legal documents skillfully and correctly <b>G7</b>	Prepare tables, footnotes and indexes using Microsoft Word <b>G8</b>	Undersatnd various pleadings and motions and their styles <b>G9</b>	Understand WordPerfect, database source, and legal bar <b>G10</b>
<b>DUTIES</b>	<b>TASKS</b>				

Figure 3. Traditional Duty Task List (DTL) derived from this study's Delphi methodology.

DUTIES	TASKS				
<b>LEARN LEGAL PROCEDURES</b> H	Follow instructions accurately <b>H1</b>	Recognize when to ask questions <b>H2</b>	Learn quickly <b>H3</b>	Understand court systems (State, Federal and Supreme) <b>H4</b>	Understand and use basic legal terminology <b>H5</b>
<b>PERFORM OFFICE FUNCTIONS</b> I	Operate computer <b>I1</b>	Use Microsoft Word proficiently <b>I2</b>	Understand and meet deadlines <b>I3</b>	Operate email <b>I4</b>	Plan work, set priorities and budget time to ensure work is done in a timely manner <b>I5</b>
<b>OBTAIN APPROPRIATE EDUCATION</b> J	Complete a high school education <b>J1</b>	Obtain on the job training at another law firm <b>J2</b>	Pursue some college <b>J3</b>	Take computer instruction class <b>J4</b>	Complete law document preparation class <b>J5</b>
<b>DISPLAY RATIONAL ABILITIES</b> K	Interact and get along with multiple personality types <b>K1</b>	Display ethical behavior <b>K2</b>	Display willingness to assume responsibilities <b>K3</b>	Display work ethic <b>K4</b>	Manage multiple projects <b>K5</b>
<b>DISPLAY EMOTIONAL MATURITY</b> L	Follow rules and office procedures <b>L1</b>	Act professionally at all times (i.e. avoid drama in the presence of clients, attorneys and staff) <b>L2</b>	Take directions well <b>L3</b>	Display composure when dealing with mental or emotional stress <b>L4</b>	Respond positively to appropriate criticism or correction of errors <b>L5</b>
<b>DISPLAY POSITIVE ATTITUDE</b> M	Exhibit trustworthiness and responsibility <b>M1</b>	Demonstrate ability to solve problems <b>M2</b>	Perform at a high standard <b>M3</b>	Show pride in work, personal appearance and appearance of work area <b>M4</b>	Create and maintain harmony among co-workers <b>M5</b>
<b>DEMONSTRATE MISCELLANEOUS SKILLS</b> N	Exhibit dependability <b>N1</b>	Handle confidential matters <b>N2</b>	Exhibit reliable attendance <b>N3</b>	Work individually and remain focused <b>N4</b>	Demonstrate high motivation level <b>N5</b>
<b>DUTIES</b>	<b>TASKS</b>				

Figure 3. Traditional Duty Task List (DTL) derived from this study's Delphi methodology.

DUTIES		TASKS			
<b>LEARN LEGAL PROCEDURES</b> <b>H</b>	Manage docket calendar <b>H6</b>	Generate accurate notes <b>H7</b>	Understand legal documentation <b>H8</b>	Manage Index and files <b>H9</b>	
<b>PERFORM OFFICE FUNCTIONS</b> <b>I</b>	Type at least 60 words per minute <b>I6</b>	Operate office copier <b>I7</b>	Operate document management software <b>I8</b>	Calendar proficiently <b>I9</b>	Operate office telephones <b>I10</b>
<b>OBTAIN APPROPRIATE EDUCATION</b> <b>J</b>	Obtain an Associate's degree <b>J6</b>	Complete law terminology class <b>J7</b>			
<b>DISPLAY RATIONAL ABILITIES</b> <b>K</b>	Demonstrate communication and actions appropriate to level of person being dealt with <b>K6</b>	React to stressful situations in a calm manner <b>K7</b>	Refrain from gossip <b>K8</b>	Demonstrate a good perception of self <b>K9</b>	Display self directedness <b>K10</b>
<b>DISPLAY EMOTIONAL MATURITY</b> <b>L</b>	Handle short deadlines <b>L6</b>	Use discretion in use of email and Internet <b>L7</b>	Portray a level of confidence but willingness to ask questions <b>L8</b>	Demonstrate ability to think independently <b>L9</b>	Show comfort in an environment where every day is different <b>L10</b>
<b>DISPLAY POSITIVE ATTITUDE</b> <b>M</b>	Seek assistance when necessary to complete an assignment <b>M6</b>	Exhibit positive and professional attitude in stressful situations <b>M7</b>	Work happily in a professional environment <b>M8</b>	Participate in and promote teamwork <b>M9</b>	
<b>DEMONSTRATE MISCELLANEOUS SKILLS</b> <b>N</b>	Be punctual <b>N6</b>	Interview skillfully (i.e. bright, quick, confident, and appear to be eager to learn and progress) <b>N7</b>			
DUTIES		TASKS			

Figure 3. Traditional Duty Task List (DTL) derived from this study's Delphi methodology.

APPENDIX G

IRB APPROVAL FORM

## Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Thursday, October 23, 2008  
IRB Application No ED08159  
Proposal Title: Identification of Skills Standards for Entry Level Legal Office Support Staff in Oklahoma: A Delphi Study  
Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 10/22/2009**

Principal Investigator(s):

Tonya M. Reese Ward	Lynna Ausburn
P.O. Box 587	257 Willard
Okla. City, OK 73101	Stillwater, OK 74078

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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, [beth.mcternan@okstate.edu](mailto:beth.mcternan@okstate.edu)).

Sincerely,



Sheila Kennison, Chair  
Institutional Review Board

## Identification of Skills Standards for Entry Level Legal Office Support Staff in Oklahoma

### Consent Information Sheet

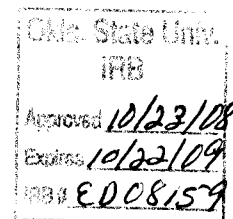
The purpose of this study is to use expert input to identify and describe critical skills or competencies perceived by the legal industry to be required to train competent office support staff personnel in the legal office environment. Specifically, this study will focus on fulfilling this purpose in the context of urban Oklahoma, where a large number of legal office professionals are employed. Because of your experience and expertise, you are invited to be a participant in this research study in the capacity of expert in the legal administrative industry.

Through your participation in this study, you will help training organizations to better understand how to plan and deliver education to students preparing to enter into the legal field. If you consent to participate in this study, your name will not be associated with this research in any way. It is very important that you realize that:

1. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no special incentives for your participation and there are no negative consequences for declining participation.
2. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time.
3. Your involvement in this project will involve completing electronically via email three (3) questionnaires that may require total of about 8-10 hours of your time. The questionnaires will require you to identify, rate and rank skills necessary for entry-level legal office professionals.
4. It is not anticipated that you will suffer any risks of discomfort or inconvenience from participation in this research beyond those encountered in daily life.
5. All information you provide on the questionnaires will be anonymous and treated with complete confidentiality. No one but the researcher will ever see or know your name or identity. Your name on returned questionnaires will be replaced immediately by an ID number.
6. All information you provide will be secured at all times by the researcher in a locked cabinet in her personal residence. All hard copies of returned questionnaires will be destroyed after being copied to a password secured CD to be retained personally by the researcher for up to 5 years and then destroyed.
7. The data from this research will be used only for research reporting and curriculum development. Any data used in presentation or publication of professional literature and reports will be anonymous and reported only in aggregated and/in codes. No reference to your name or personal identity will be made at any time.
8. All records of this research will be kept solely by the researcher and will be maintained under locked security until destroyed as described above.

**To give your consent to participate in this research, please keep this consent information for your personal use and contact the researcher via email ([tmward@productlaw.com](mailto:tmward@productlaw.com)) or phone (405-664-7288) to receive instructions and begin your participation.**

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Tonya Reese Ward, who is the researcher and doctoral student at Oklahoma State University, at (405) 664-7288 or Dr. Lynna J. Ausburn, the faculty advisor for the study, at (405) 744-8322. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405) 744-1676 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).



Tonya Reese Ward

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From: "Tonya Reese Ward" [tmward@productlaw.com](mailto:tmward@productlaw.com)  
To: <PARTICIPANT>  
Sent: Monday, October 6, 2008 8:00 AM  
Attach: Informconsent.doc

Subject: Research Study – Identification of Skills Standards for Entry Level Legal Office Support Staff in Oklahoma

Dear <PARTICIPANT>:

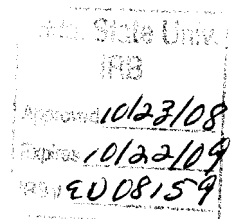
As part of my doctoral program in Occupational Education Studies at Oklahoma State University, I am conducting research to identify skills standards for entry level legal office support staff in Oklahoma. The purpose of this study is to use expert input to identify and describe critical skills or competencies perceived by the legal industry to be required to train competent team members in the legal office environment. Specifically, this study will focus on fulfilling this purpose in the context of urban Oklahoma, where a large number of legal office professionals are employed. Because of your experience and expertise, you are being invited to be a participant in this research study in the capacity of expert in the legal administrative industry.

I will be conducting a Delphi study which utilizes a panel of experts to anonymously come to consensus on the topic at hand. You will be asked to respond to three questionnaires via electronic mail and online database. All participants will remain anonymous and all responses will be held in strict confidence.

Please read carefully the attached Consent Information Sheet. Then, if you are willing to participate in this research study, please retain the Consent Sheet for your records and call me at 405-664-7288 or email me at [tmward@productlaw.com](mailto:tmward@productlaw.com) to give me your consent and join the Delphi expert panel. You will be provided copies of the results upon completion of this research study. If you have any questions or problems, please contact me. I look forward to working with you in this unique research project.

Sincerely,

*s/Tonya Reese Ward*  
Tonya Reese Ward  
Doctoral Candidate  
Oklahoma State University





## VITA

Tonya Maria Reese Ward

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

**Thesis: IDENTIFICATION OF SKILLS STANDARDS FOR ENTRY LEVEL LEGAL OFFICE SUPPORT STAFF IN URBAN OKLAHOMA: A DELPHI STUDY**

**Major Field: Occupational Education Studies**

**Biographical:**

**Education:** Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Occupational Education Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2010; Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Management at Southern Nazarene University, Bethany, Oklahoma in August, 2000; Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership at Southern Nazarene University, Bethany, Oklahoma in May, 1999; Graduated from Frederick A. Douglass High School, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in May, 1972.

**Experience:** Currently employed as executive administrator for The Law Office of Robert H. Alexander, Jr., p.c. in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, taught management information systems, database systems, strategic management and management seminar at Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Oklahoma; taught digital cities and the Internet, issues in networked information, and the spatial city at Langston University, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; employed as information technology manager at World Neighbors, Inc. in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; employed as director of education at DeMarge College in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; employed as international programmer at Hertz Corporation in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; employed as project manager at SolutionWare, Ltd. in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; employed as systems engineer and customer engineer at International Business Machines in Houston, Texas and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

**Professional Memberships:** Phi Kappa Phi; Omicron Tau Theta; Kappa Delta Pi; Delta Mu Delta; Golden Key International; Association for Career and Technical Education; Association of Legal Administrators; American Educational Research Association.

Name: Tonya Maria Reese Ward

Date of Degree: July, 2010

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: IDENTIFICATION OF SKILLS STANDARDS FOR ENTRY LEVEL  
LEGAL OFFICE SUPPORT STAFF IN URBAN OKLAHOMA:  
A DELPHI STUDY

Pages in Study: 125

Candidate for the Degree of Philosophy

Major Field: Occupational Education Studies

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to use industry experts to identify critical skills or competencies perceived by the legal profession to be required by competent team members in the legal office environment. Specifically, this study focused on fulfilling this purpose in the context of urban Oklahoma, where a large number of legal office professionals are employed. This study applied electronic Delphi methodology to replace the traditional face-to-face DACUM procedure to develop an industry-driven, occupationally-specific, and competency-based description of the job profile of new legal office professionals. The study used the input of industry experts to identify specific skills necessary for entry-level legal office support staff personnel. The participants or Delphi panel were six legal administrators from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, each with a minimum of 10 years of experience in the legal office environment. The theoretical framework was based on the dual strands of *competency-based education* and a *task analysis approach* for generating industry-based skill standards or competencies. The Delphi was conducted in three rounds using researcher-developed questionnaires. Round one of the Delphi used an open-ended questionnaire based broad skill categories, while rounds two and three used more structured rating and ranking responses to obtain data.

Findings and Conclusions: The study indicated that Delphi was a successful substitute for the DACUM process, allowing the industry panel to present a clear skill profile of competent entry-level legal office professionals. Using rating and ranking procedures, 14 categories of skills were divided into five tiers. The top or most important tier as indicated by the expert panel consisted of the skill categories Oral Communications, Written Communications, and Client Assistance. These categories received  $\Sigma$ RankPoint scores and mean importance scores, respectively in the order listed. The panel of experts perceived that internal and external communications with attorneys, clients, supervisors, vendors and co-workers in a clear distinctive manner ranked high on the list of needed skills. Use of proper grammar; proofreading and editing skills; recognizing urgent situations; maintain confidences; and exhibiting a customer service mentality were also highly ranked in these categories. The results of the Delphi profile were readily adapted into a traditional occupational Duty Task List for use in curriculum development.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Lynna J. Ausburn

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