

Legal field must change to fit times

The field of law in the State of Alaska, must undergo a "tremendous change" if it is to meet the State's legal and business needs of the near future, according to Ray Pastorino, Assistant Professor-LawS at the University of Alaska-Juneau (UAJ).

Pastorino teaches the Legal Assistant/ParaLegal Program at the UAJ and he sees the changes stemming from the "new ways to wed legal services to the increasingly available, flexible and interactive communication technologies."

He contends that the present legal services "industry" is a "single product, single market industry" with a "labor-intensive, low-productivity service system."

This is the area destined for change, Pastorino predicts, stating, "The arenas where non-lawyers with legal skills can practice will increase as alternative methods of settling disputes outside the formal judicial system increases.

There will be a great need

for personnel who can function in limited legal roles, possessing some legal skills plus a specialized knowledge of some field of law."

Instead of the "single market" aspect of the legal "industry," Pastorino says, "The merging of the appropriate technologies with the legal system will produce a variety of markets serviced by an equal number of suppliers — not all of whom will be lawyers."

Para-professional legal assistant instructional programs in Alaska vary from certificate programs to AA and BA programs focusing on a law enforcement emphasis.

The UAJ LawS Program is unique in its blend of general substantive law and its practical application to all legal areas of interest. By such an approach, the UAJ appeals to a wide range of interest groups which include both pre-law students per se and a variety of business and government students.

Pastorino would like to see the UAJ incorporate the LawS Program as a (legal administration) emphasis area under the BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration) degree program and to also offer a curriculum for an AAS (Associate of Applied Science) degree. Doing so would broaden the base of the UAJ LawS Program, Pastorino says, allowing growth and specialization in other traditional areas of legal studies.

"Right now those legal assistants or paralegals working in the state function in narrow capacities," says Pastorino. "As technological developments come in time, the demand for added skills will be required in areas such as computer management and the administration of such.

"In the next five years, legal assistants will be among the top five professions in demand. Unless we start preparing for that demand by offering a workable training program, in the next five years

it'll be the same old story — local people taking a back seat while an imported, skilled labor force fills a critical gap in Alaska's job market."

"There is one stigma attached to legal assistants and paralegals," Pastorino adds, "and that is the assumption that he or she is working under the direct supervision of an attorney." Pastorino emphasizes the need to dispel the assumption, stating, "There are so many areas of employment that could benefit from the services of a trained paralegal, not only in terms of substantive and technical knowledge but in terms of helping identify areas that require the presence of an attorney."

Just prior to printing, the Tribal News learned that the UAJ has adopted the AAS and Legal Administration emphasis in the BBA (LawS) for this Fall. Anyone interested in more information about the UAJ's LawS Program, call Ray Pastorino at the University of Alaska —(907) 789-4402.