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Tech were 98.7% of our students earn a career. On this episode, we'll explore Chattahoochee Tech's paralegal program. We'll be talking with one of the instructors and students about the program and leave out the law and order jokes or references.

My name is Amy Ray Davis, and I am the lead instructor for the Paralegal Studies Program at Chattahoochee Tech. I call myself the accidental paralegal. I came into the legal field because my father was getting divorced and he had a friend who was an attorney, and he needed someone to basically pick up where his paralegal was not going to be able to. She was out on maternity leave, and I ended up doing all the typing and I kind of fell in love with the industry. And I continued working as a paralegal up until I decided to go to law school and got out of law school and then decided, you know what, I want to teach.

So what exactly is a paralegal?

So apparently you are someone who lies between the legal secretary and the attorney. I can give you like the technical stuff, which is where they're going to do like all the documentation and whatnot. But in reality, they're kind of like the backbone to any kind of case. They are the ones that are going to be putting together all of the research and they're going to be forward facing to the clients and they're going to be preparing all the documents and stuff like that. And I always tell them, I said basically, you know, you guys are the ones who are putting together what the attorneys are going to go into court and argue.

Why did you get into the program?

Criminal justice itself is something I've always been interested in. And I had originally started and criminal justice to go for forensic psychology. And then when I found out that Chattahoochee was doing the paralegal program, I had already been looking into it for quite some time at this point.

My name is Regina LaBelle, and I'm a staff member at Chattahoochee Technical College, and I've been there for 15 years now. I am now enrolling in a new program, paralegal studies. Well, actually, I'm enrolling in this paralegal studies program is for something that I've always wanted to do in law. And I know I didn't want to be an officer. So I thought there's other avenues of being in the law field. So I thought paralegal would be something that I would be. I like research, so that's something that I would like to do.

So, we have two different avenues for them to take, and it's either going to be the diploma program or it's going to be the associates program. Now, the first three semesters of the diploma program is going to directly mirror what's in the associates program. Just the associates will go a little further in the first three semesters. We're going to cover things like criminal law and criminal procedure, which is usually one of the favorites of people. We're going to cover the introduction to paralegal studies and particularly the ethics that they have to follow. There's a lot of things that you have to make sure that you pay attention to, like not getting into unauthorized practice of law and things like that. They probably will never even begin to guess how many times people are going to come to them and say, I have this problem. You know, can you tell me what this is? And it's going to be their family or their friends. And then you've got clients who are still going to come and go, okay, but what's the outcome that I can expect or what's next? And all of those things. They have to learn how to say no, you know, and how to bridge those gaps. In terms of other classes, we're going to do torts, which is like your personal injury, defamation, you know, things like that, battery trespass to your land. We're going to do contracts. The one thing that I will say, contracts almost made me drop out of law school. It was so hard, but it was because it's taught in a very

different way. And I didn't realize it until the very end because people kept saying, No, just stick it out, it's going to click and it did click. But the one thing I took away from that is that is hands down, like the most important class, I think, out of all of them, because contracts rule our lives.

What makes this program different.

Difference with that is also if they also don't want to take that long time, but also as well, you know, if you do decide to go to law school, even as you just told practice, actually what I learned as just the law school portion itself is three years. But if you start with the paralegal program and the way they've shaped it, not all of them, but the majority of your classes, especially once they get the accreditation, are transferable to law schools. There is one I was looking at most schools if you can justify like this class I took takes everything and has already taught everything that's on this person's syllabus. And you still have your syllabus from this class here. Most schools will do that.

Chattahoochee is a great college. We have a lot of great professors, have great instructors who invest in the students that come. In their classrooms. I believe we're one of the if not the biggest technical college in the state of Georgia. I like that the instructors invest in their students and help them to make great career choices.

What is going to, I think, make us different is the fact that I'm bringing into it a whole lot of research. I began in 2017. I started a paralegal students group on Facebook because I noticed that in some of the paralegal groups that I was in, a lot of people were getting frustrated with students coming in, going, I don't quite understand this. Can you help me with this? Because it was a place that, you know, the working paralegals were going to, you know, vent about their daily jobs or get advice about what kind of place they can look for for a document, things like that. But these students needed a place to be able to go as well. And so I created that. And it's now up to like 8500 students. And it's one of those things that it allowed me to kind of research what schools are doing right, what schools are doing wrong and allowed me to see, like what kind of assignments they were doing, all kinds of things. So I got to bring into this the perspective of what actually is going to translate better into the actual field. It also allowed me to create a lot of interesting contacts for paralegals as well. So one of the things that we'll also be doing is we'll be offering at some point we're going to put together some webinars on different topics, things like, you know, maybe how to even freelance and do things like that if they wanted to do things on their own, because there are opportunities that you can do outside of just the traditional law practice. They don't have to just stick with that. They can work for the courts. They can work for corporations that have, you know, in-house counsel. There's all kinds of opportunities for them to be able to be a paralegal and in not be just strictly in a law firm, but we'll be able to bring them like webinars and stuff like that with demonstrations from like law office management programs and stuff like that. I've already contacted them to make sure that, you know, they'll be able to come in and teach them a little something. Because that way when our students go out into the field, I want them to be able to say that they've had some exposure. I don't want them to be going out there just completely blank, like, okay, I've gotten my degree and that's it.

What I've learned so far is from our teacher, Miss Amy Davis is a paralegal, basically can do everything a lawyer does and has a full understanding of the law. The only thing they can't do is actually represent.

And court as looking at the curriculum. As far as the quality of the program, I believe that's going to be a great program. Not many of the core classes, but a lot of the paralegal classes that each student will have

e to take in order to get their diploma or their associate degree. The instructor that's coming in, I believe she's new, but she seems very eager and ready to go.

Who would make a good candidate for this program?

Really and truly someone who is detail oriented. But a lot of times I've also found that they don't necessarily know that they're detail oriented in the right ways yet, and it's kind of like shaping us. They just have to be willing to learn and go down a list because a lot of the stuff that we do is list based. When you do like intake, you have specific things that you have to ask and you have specific documents that have to be filed. And a lot of lawyers that I've worked with over the years, like they have these checklists and stuff. So they just have to be willing to pay attention to what it is that they're doing. Depending on the area of law, they might need a real, true element of compassion. I mean, like, if you're in like real estate law where you're just doing closings and stuff like that, it's very different than if you are working in, say, juvenile law, where your child is in foster care or you're in, you know, family law, where you have parents who are arguing over their children, things like that, or you're in criminal law and you have somebody whose life is on the line. You have to be willing to understand where that person is. You also have to be willing to kind of put aside the things that might bother you, because morally, our compasses don't always line up with our legal compasses, but we still have to do our parts and be able to be there for the clients. And since we are forward facing that element of compassion and understanding is absolutely necessary. Being a good listener to.

Specifically that, I want to do I want to learn more about how to do wills, power of attorneys and one detail that goes into that and when people go to court for doing. I want to learn a lot more about that.

What would you tell potential incoming students?

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I would tell students that Chattahoochee Tech is a great place to learn that this program will give them the opportunity to look at things on a different perspective as far as the law is concerned, and to help them maybe in life to move forward. It's going to teach you your writing skills. It's going to teach you more of your communication skills. So it be a great program, especially for a person that's maybe shy a little bit. It will probably bring them out of their shell just a little bit because they're going to have to present certain documents that is going to be needed.

Because I feel like it is like a lot of information just coming at you all at once. So once you get yourself organized and you get yourself like on a set schedule, it is more manageable because overall it's just it's going to be a lot of information up there is pretty amazing and anything you might need help on. She's always there. She'll break stuff down to make sure you understand it.

You're not the typical student, but do you have any advice for the younger students?

I would say to a student that's coming right out of high school, I believe that students should probably go to either a tech school or a junior college because you want to get acclimated into the college. The institution is different from being in high school because in college no one is going to really become check out for you as far as if you want to come to school, you come to school. If you don't want to come to school, you stay at home or you do whatever you want to do. But just know that your grade is going to reflect

t what you've done in class. So your grade is your pay. As far as you know, you're going out and getting a job and you want to get your wages when your grade is your wages.

So here's the important question that I think everybody out there wants to know what do paralegals make?

So, Robert, half is a major staffing agency for the legal industry and they are the ones who put out a legal guide for in regards to salaries and whatnot. And the average salary is anywhere from 31,000 all the way up to \$89,000, with the average being around 53, 54,000. A lot of that's going to also depend on where you're working. Are you working in a smaller office? Are you working in public interest? Because if you're working in public interest stuff, you're going to be, you know, working with lower budgets. A lot of times nonprofits are the public interest entities and they don't always have a lot of money for lawyers, let alone paralegals. But it's one of those things that's kind of a passion project that people, you know, they just feel compelled to do that work. And I commend them for that. They do actually really amazing things. You also have to factor in a lot of other things, too, like you have depending on where you work. It's like any other job where you're going to have perks that are involved. Some bigger firms are going to have a lot more perks with more vacation or more for one K. That's one of the things that I've been kind of looking at as well in terms of like what jobs the students that have been in my groups have been getting and I have noticed that it does run the gamut of getting just paid to I'm getting paid with medical or with a week's vacation or whatever too. So those perks, I think, always definitely factor in and make your your pay a little bit better.

For more information about the paralegal program at Chattahoochee Tech, visit Chattahoochee.edu. Thanks for listening to 98 seven Chattahoochee tech for 98.7% of our students earn a career.