

# Ask Pat

*Dear Pat,*

I would like to encourage a talented paralegal at my firm to attend law school. She has two young children and is concerned about balancing the demands of law school and supporting a family. How can I encourage her to apply?

*Signed,*

*An Encouraging Attorney*

*Dear Encouraging Attorney,*

While law school is demanding of a student's time and financial resources, many students also have families to support at home. A working mother should not abandon the prospect of attending law school merely because she is unsure how she would balance her responsibilities as a mother with the academic and financial responsibilities of being a student. In order to respond to your inquiry, I visited the University of New Mexico's School of Law and spoke with a first-year student who had previously been a paralegal. She had several suggestions that could be helpful for you.

First, the UNM School of Law will offer a Flexible Time Program beginning in the fall semester of 2008. While UNM does not have a traditional part-time program, the Flexible Time Program will be available for students who want a lightened class load. First-year students enrolled in the Flexible Time Program will be required to take 10 credit hours per semester. The traditional full-time program requires 15 credit hours in the fall semester and 13 credit hours in the spring semester. For both the full-time and the Flexible Time programs, the School of Law will determine the student's schedule and classes, with first-year classes scheduled in the morning and early afternoon. After the first year, students in the Flexible Time Program may take a minimum of eight credit hours per semester; whereas students in the traditional full-time program are required to take 12 credit hours per semester after the first year. While a student in the traditional full-time program can expect to graduate in three years, a student in the Flexible Time Program must graduate within five years.

While financial aid is available by completing an application for federal aid (FAFSA), students often need more money to support their families while in school. More information on scholarship, need-based and merit grants can be found on the School of Law Web site (<http://lawschool.unm.edu/>) or by contacting the admissions office at (505) 277-0958. Another option is to continue working during law school. A student participating in the Flexible Time Program will have no restriction on the number of hours worked. Students in the traditional full-time program may work up to 15 hours per week during their first year and up to 20 hours per week during their second and third years.

The process of applying for law school can be intimidating and overwhelming. Take a personal interest in the application process and let your paralegal know you are available to help. Offering to write a recommendation or review drafts of her personal statement will show her that you believe she is capable of succeeding in law school.

*Dear Readers,*

In response to one of my previous columns on breast pumping and returning to work after giving birth, a reader informed me that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District Court has a private breastfeeding/pumping room available to staff, attorneys and litigants. It is located in the Court Clinic on the second floor and is marked with the breastfeeding friendly sign from *Mothering Magazine*. I appreciate the feedback I received from the reader who made me aware of this resource.

*Sincerely,  
Pat*

Finally, allow a prospective student time off from work to visit the law school. The administration can arrange for a guest to sit in on a first-year class. It may be encouraging for your paralegal to observe that the students in the classroom represent a variety of age groups. Your paralegal might also want to inquire about UNM's student organization for older and/or wiser law students called "O.W.L.S." The organization provides support, networking, and social events for older or otherwise non-traditional law students. Finally, encourage your paralegal to attend one of the open house events for prospective law students, which is a great opportunity for her to meet students in situations similar to hers.

Balancing a professional and family life is never easy. I hope the foregoing advice will help your paralegal evaluate the resources available to her and consider the benefits of a legal education.

*Sincerely,  
Pat*

*Ask Pat, provided by the Committee on Women and the Legal Profession, will answer questions about gender bias in the legal profession. Letters are loosely based on real events. Send comments or letters to "Ask Pat," State Bar of New Mexico, PO Box 92860, Albuquerque, NM 87199-2860.*