

Job Opportunities for Accounting Majors



Your new degree in accounting provides you with a variety of opportunities. An accounting degree can qualify you for a career in virtually any industry, from the NFL to the FBI. Accounting graduates can choose traditional accounting careers or they can branch out to become appraisers, budget officers, loan officers, financial analysts and managers, actuaries, underwriters, tax collectors and revenue agents, securities sales representatives, and purchasing agents.

Today's accountant also can choose from a variety of career paths, including several that could easily land her or him in the CEO's or president's office, and a wide range and size of employers.

Money magazine has called accounting one of the 50 hottest jobs. And the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) says the accounting profession will witness a 10 to 20 percent increase in job openings by the year 2008.

The BLS also reports that accountants who have earned professional certification or licensure should have the best job prospects in the near future. Certified public accountants (CPAs), for example, and graduates with a master's degree in accounting, or a master's degree in business administration with a concentration in accounting, will have an edge in the job market. In addition, proficiency in accounting and auditing computer software and expertise in specialized areas, such as international business, specific industries, or current legislation, may open the door to other accounting and auditing opportunities.

Frank Minter, president of the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA) contends that by virtue of the difficult and demanding curriculum, accounting typically attracts bright, disciplined students. Today, accountants aren't restricted to number-crunching jobs, according to Minter, because the boundaries between accounting, finance, and information technology disciplines are blurry.

"The business community told us they need graduates with good oral and written communication skills who are also team-oriented and analytical," says Minter. "You'll find that these three things are part of any good accounting curriculum."

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Where will you go?

Accounting is a broad field. Many new graduates choose to work for a public accounting firm to get experience in several areas before choosing an area of specialization. Here are some of the jobs you can choose from:

- **Auditing**—reviewing accounting ledgers and financial statements within corporations and government. This is the bread-and-butter work of accounting, and if you have a degree in accounting and auditing computer software you can go far.

• **Budget Analysis**—developing and managing an organization's financial plans. This specialty requires you to have good people skills because constant negotiating is required.

• **Financial**—making financial decisions involving mergers and acquisitions, benefits/ERISA planning, and long-term financial projections. This job offers you a lot of variety.

• **Management Accounting**—developing capital budgets and analyzing costs and contracts. In this job, you would work alongside marketing and finance specialists to develop new business within the expense controls you set up. Demand for experienced management accountants continues to grow in traditional business and in e-commerce, because these workers have the skills, such as a sense of how to move businesses forward strategically, that put them on the leading edge of change.

• **Tax Management**—formulating tax strategies around all the business facets of the organization and preparing tax statements. You'll need to understand economics and the tax code as well as the legal aspects of the tax code.

Once you acquire a little experience, you can consider moving to a corporate, government, or educa-

tional setting. Or, you may want to set up your own firm.

What skills do you need?

The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) and state CPA groups studied political, economic, social, technological, and human resource changes occurring globally and looked at how these changes might affect the accounting profession. In 1998, the Institute developed the CPA Vision Project, which details how CPAs can leverage their skills and values to meet and define future work force demands and give the profession "a vibrant and viable future."

The CPA Vision Project (www.cpavision.org) reports that the work force requires less auditing and accounting from accountants and demands more consulting skills as a result of increasing specialization among CPAs and competition for work by non-CPAs to serve marketplace needs. The marketplace, it says, is being transformed by the impact of information technology on CPA services; the rise of a global, knowledge-based, information economy; and the marketplace's demand for expanded core competencies of CPAs.

To meet these demands, AICPA

says accounting graduates need a whole host of skills not demanded of previous generations. Among the skills are:

- Communications and leadership skills, to exchange information in a clear and thoughtful manner.

- Interpersonal skills, for influencing and motivating others.

- Strategic and critical-thinking skills, which help the accountant to link data and insight to offer advice for strategic decision-making and to anticipate and create new opportunities.

- Customer focus, to meet the changing needs of clients, employers, and markets.

- Ability to interpret complex information, enabling the accountant to give a broader context to information and knowledge.

- Technology skills, allowing the accountant to use and leverage technology in ways that give value to clients and employers.

Set out to acquire these skills as early as possible in your college career—before you talk to recruiters about job opportunities. *continued*

Resources

The CD-ROM *Room Zoom: The CPA SourceDisc*, helps students explore everything from the educational requirements for becoming a CPA in their state to what it takes to land a first accounting job. The CD is available for \$5 (plus shipping and handling) from the AICPA Member Satisfaction Team, Harborside Financial Center, 201 Plaza Three, Jersey City, NJ 07311-3881; 868/777-7077. (Specify product # 872514).

Uniform Certified Public Accountant Examination Candidate Brochure provides details on the CPA exam at www.aicpa.org/edu/candbrom.htm.

IMA student chapters give students special membership rates, scholarships, and awards. The IMA also has a web site where students can learn about certification requirements, competitions, and special opportunities. See IMA Students Online at <http://web.imanet.org/academia/>. Information on Certified Management Accountant and Certified in Financial Management programs can be viewed at the Certification section of www.imanet.org.

What Corporate America Wants in Entry-Level Accountants, by Gary Wiegel and James Sorensen, published jointly by the Institute of Management Accountants and the Financial Executives Institute. This document can be read online at www.imanet.org/content/Publications_and_Research/IMASudies/corparmer/entry1.htm.

The *Counting More, Counting Less: Transformations in the Management Accounting Profession* report can be viewed online at www.imanet.org/content/Publications_and_Research/IMASudies/mcreless.pdf.



Professional Certification

The CPA

Certified Public Accountant. If you want to practice as a CPA, you must complete 150 hours of study at an accredited college or university and pass a four-part exam prepared by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA). The exam is offered twice each year, in May and November, in every state. Certificates are issued by a state Board of Accountancy, and each state has formulated education and experience requirements that you must fulfill. For more information, visit the AICPA's web site at www.aicpa.org/edu/candbrom.htm.

The CMA

Certified Management Accountant. You can become a CMA by achieving specific educational standards, passing all part of a four-part exam, and having two years of professional experience in management accounting or financial management. The two-day exam is offered twice each year in June and December. For more information see the Certification section at www.imanet.org.

The CIA

Certified Internal Auditor. The Institute of Internal Auditors Inc., offers the CIA designation to graduates of accredited colleges and universities who complete two years of experience in internal auditing and pass a four-part exam. For more information, visit the IIA's web site at www.theiaa.org/ecm/iaa-cia.cfm?doc_id=3.



What salary can you expect?

Salary depends on a number of factors, including the type of position and company, the geographic location of the job, and your personal qualifications. Accounting graduates command an entry-level starting salary of approximately \$40,000, depending on the aforementioned factors. Some graduates will get offers that exceed that range while others will find their starting salary offer dips below that average.

Because of the "portability" of the accounting degree (you're not tied to one industry or one field), you will find that employers in many specialties seek accountants. For example, class of 2001 accounting grads were commonly pursued by accounting services companies, financial services firms, consulting firms, state and local government agencies, petroleum and coal product producers, and insurance companies as well as other employers. (Here's an example of how type of employer can affect your salary: Accounting services companies offered an average starting salary of nearly \$40,000, while state and local governments offered an average of about \$34,000.)

Some of the more common jobs 2001 accounting grads were offered include public and private accounting, public and private auditing, financial/treasury analysis, and consulting. Here's another example of how salary is dependent on the specific position. Salaries for consulting jobs offered to 2001 grads averaged nearly \$47,000 while financial/treasure analyst positions averaged about \$37,000.

Adding a new ingredient

Accounting graduates who also have an interest in and skills in information technology can add a new certification to their credentials, making them even more attractive to many employers.

To enhance accounting majors' employability, the AICPA has established an accreditation system that will identify experience and knowledge in IT management, IT strategy, IT audit, information security, networks and telecommunications, information systems, and IT planning and budgeting in new and experienced CPAs. Under the system, CPAs can earn points toward accreditation based on business experience and lifelong learning or can take an examination to prove their expertise. ■

Professional Organizations

American Institute of Certified Public Accountants

1211 Avenue of the Americas,
New York, NY 10036. 212/596-6200.
www.aicpa.org

Institute of Management Accountants

10 Paragon Dr., Montvale, NJ 07645
1718. 800/638-4427; www.imanet.org

National Society of Accountants and the Accreditation Council for Accountancy and Taxation

1010 North Fairfax St., Alexandria, VA
22314-1574. 888/289-7763;
www.acatcredentials.org

The Institute of Internal Auditors

249 Maitland Ave., Altamonte Spring
FL 32701-4201. 407/830-7600;
www.theiaa.org

American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business—

The International Association for Management Education
600 Emerson Road, Suite 300,
St. Louis, MO 63141. 314/872-8481;
www.aacsb.edu

Beta Alpha Psi: National Accounting Honorary Society

1211 Avenue of the Americas,
Sixth Floor, New York, NY 10036-
8775. 212/596-6090; www.bap.org