

Student Outreach - Reaching Out to the Future: Views from a Practitioner and an Educator

by *Kel-Ann S. Eyler, Ph.D. and Nancy Geery, CPA*

Did you know that the Georgia Society of CPAs (GSCPA) now has approximately 1,435 (yes, 1,435!) student members? This is a tremendous increase over the last several years. It is likely due to many factors, including the efforts made by practitioners, educators, GSCPA staff and others who are dedicated to getting the word out to the “best and the brightest” students about opportunities in accounting and the advantages of becoming a CPA. The Society’s College Outreach Task Force (COTF) spearheads the majority of student outreach efforts.

The COTF had approximately 30 members during the 2010-11 year, many who have been contributing to student outreach for several years or more! With the large number of members, the COTF worked efficiently and effectively by forming subcommittees to handle specific initiatives. The major efforts resulted in outreach activities including the College2Career (C2C) Conference for students held annually for the past three years in the fall, a greater number of student courses, the CPA Exam Survival Guide and the GSCPA Campus Representatives program.

While these efforts related to student outreach are critically important, it is only the beginning point of the life-long commitment to the profession. Student outreach focuses on efforts to attract qualified students to the profession of accounting during their school years; once they finish their education preparation, students will need further mentoring and learning opportunities through effective

and high quality internship opportunities and employment as accountants. This is why recruiting and mentoring by accounting practitioners is of paramount importance.

How can practitioners, educators and others help in these efforts? The Society needs YOUR help, and EVERYONE’s help to support these initiatives. In turn, the profession will benefit as we help build for the future with our efforts TODAY!

As you read through a brief description of the student outreach efforts below, perhaps you will find various ways to contribute, or continue to contribute, to the programs, or even contribute with new ideas for outreach!

College Outreach Task Force Initiatives

GSCPA College2Career Annual Student Conference

This state-wide conference has been successfully held the last three years, and it continues to grow in attendance each year. Students and educators attend from all over the state of Georgia, as well as neighboring states. This conference is offered to Society student members only. Sponsors and exhibitors of the conference, in addition to the Society, help provide this program at a very reasonable cost to students. Sessions have included topics related to the CPA exam, interviewing skills, various accounting career paths, young professionals’ advice, resume reviews and other topics determined to be timely and valuable for students.

The next College2Career Conference will be held **Friday, September 9, 2011** at the Georgia International Convention



Center near Hartsfield-Jackson Airport in Atlanta. In addition to the career fair, which offers students networking and recruiting information as well as information on graduate accounting programs and CPA Exam review programs, the students will hear speakers and panel discussions on many aspects of pursuing accounting careers and the CPA certification.

How can practitioners and educators help with these efforts? First and foremost, the conference needs exhibitors and sponsors. Many opportunities exist for interested individuals, firms and businesses to provide needed funds while at the same time having a great opportunity to market themselves and their services to students.

Student Courses

A new initiative this past year, the task force provided courses to students at the GSCPA offices in Atlanta, in other locations in the state and via webcasts. Several classes were successfully developed and offered for a modest fee to student members this past year, and have included classes related to business etiquette, volunteering and the CPA Exam. As a result of the information gathered for and during these classes, students have seen added value in their membership. The Society will gain continued insights to develop effective and interesting programs for students in the future.

CPA Exam Survival Guide

This program was undertaken this past year to address students' and CPA candidates' need for clear and concise information about the CPA Exam and the CPA Exam review courses in one convenient place. The Survival Guide is available to members only on the GSCPA web site. Feedback from students and educators indicates that this is a very valuable resource.

GSCPA Campus Representatives

This new initiative was undertaken on a pilot study basis to explore the efficacy of student and faculty representatives on college campuses offering accounting programs. Six campuses participated in spring 2011 and three more campuses will be included in fall 2011. It is the intention of the COTF that the program will be expanded to include many more campuses. The student and faculty representatives orchestrate and participate in various programs designed to provide information to potential and current accounting students about the advantages of a GSCPA student membership and the benefits of becoming a CPA.

Internships

The internship experience plays a critical role in the academic career of an accounting student. Through their internship, students apply concepts learned in the classroom and obtain a solid foundation in tax, audit or other areas of specialization. Firms identify prospective students (as interns) early in their academic career to hire the best and

brightest for full time positions. Career fairs, professor recommendations, information sessions, small group dinners and larger company events allow a wide range of opportunities to get to know students on a deeper level. In turn, well-informed students begin their internship search early researching organizations that match their interests and long term goals.

The more time a company takes to interact with students on the front end, the higher the probability of making a strong match in an internship and subsequent permanent hire. Events like the GSCPA College2Career Annual Student Conference provide an invaluable opportunity for both student and employer to get introduced and share information that eventually leads to successful long term hires and employment.

How Can You Help and Benefit?

As a professional in the workforce or educator, your contribution of time and financial resources is critical for the future success of our profession. How do you benefit? As a practitioner, you or your firm/company will be associated with good will and financial support that can assist you in having the opportunity to recruit very bright and talented students in the future. As an educator, your involvement will help encourage strong students into your classes and programs, and will be an indication of your service commitment to your college and the profession.

All in all, it is a win-win situation. Remember the people who invested in you during your college years (perhaps through a scholarship or a favorite professor or advisor) and in your early careers (perhaps a mentor at your firm or a favorite partner who took the time to help guide you)? Now is the time to pay it forward and help those who will be following you; with your guidance and support, the accounting profession and future CPAs will continue to attract the best and brightest students of today and tomorrow!

Kel-Ann S. Eyler, Ph.D. is an associate professor of accounting at Wesleyan College in Macon, Ga. She was the chair of the GSCPA's College Outreach Task Force for 2010-11. She would like to thank the subcommittee chairs of the COTF who made tremendous contributions during the year, including Martha Merritt, Lowell Mooney, Chris Griner, Ian Waller and Cathy Iconis. She would also like to thank her Co-Chair, Lydia Rosencrantz, and all members of the COTF for their contributions. Special thanks are due to the incredible support and efforts by GSCPA staff member, Nikelle Hamada, who was invaluable to the COTF.

Nancy Geery is the director of recruiting for Habif, Arogeti & Wynne, LLP in Atlanta. She has worked as a professional recruiter since 1992, spending the last ten years in human resources and recruitment in public accounting firms. Nancy is a graduate of the University of Connecticut where she majored in English.