

The Bedford Report

Future Accounting Education: Preparing For The Expanding Profession

Part II: The Current State of Accounting Education

The Curriculum

Although curriculum content varies, a typical undergraduate accounting program, consisting of a total of 120 semester hours, requires approximately 30 semester hours of accounting. This pattern seems to have been determined many years ago and generally has not changed significantly. A foundation of courses in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, together with a common body of knowledge for business, are also generally required. The structure and sequencing of accounting courses along the lines of elementary, intermediate, cost, auditing, and tax are fairly standard, with information systems a recent addition in many programs.

A recent trend in the structure of accounting education has been the growth in the number of post-baccalaureate programs. Such programs include the masters of accountancy programs, which typically require 30 semester hours of courses beyond the bachelors degree in accounting, and MBA programs with a designated concentration in accounting. A survey of 329 accounting program administrators indicated that seventy programs were added from 1970 to 1982 that met the recommended post-baccalaureate education requirement in the AICPA Model Accountancy Bill. Fifty-five of these programs were started between 1975 and 1982. Although the content of graduate accounting programs varies, the typical program requires about 50 percent of the graduate hours to be taken in accounting. Within these additional accounting hours, some programs offer specialization in specific areas, while others build a generalized track based primarily on the undergraduate accounting core.

Even with graduate programs, the expanding body of knowledge required for accounting practice has increased so extensively that the percentage of that knowledge covered in the curriculum has been reduced significantly. This situation is not only true for accounting content but also holds for supporting fields as well. The coverage of generally accepted accounting principles is an increasingly complex dilemma. Some educators feel that reasonably complete coverage is necessary, while others believe that students should learn primarily how to find such information, with details left for post-university learning. Overall, however, additional tax courses, second- and third-level auditing courses, and systems courses increasingly have been included in recent years in graduate programs. Many graduate accounting programs have also increased requirements in written and oral communication, and the use of computers is receiving more attention.