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## Education

# Accounting Education in 1933

## Has It Changed In 50 Years?

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It might be interesting to examine some of the aspects of accounting education in 1933, and the way teaching methodologies have developed. As might be expected, accounting education has changed in many ways over the past half century. On the other hand, there is still some similarity in a few areas. For example, one of the "hot" topics of 1933 was how to incorporate mechanical devices into the accounting curriculum. Adding machines, mechanical calculators, and bookkeeping machines, although not exactly new, were starting to become common enough in business establishments that it warranted inclusion of instruction in the use of these machines in the accounting curriculum. It was interesting to note that a biographical sketch accompanying an article in *The Accounting Review* of 1933 by University of Chicago (and later University of North Carolina) professor Willard J. Graham cited Professor Graham as an authority on mechanical devices and their application to accounting. This would indicate that most accounting professors did

not have a great deal of expertise with respect to the use of accounting machines.

Now, of course, accounting educators are facing the same problem of determining the best ways of including computerized instruction in the classroom. The only thing that has changed is the phrase "mechanical devices" to "electronic devices."

Some of the leaders in the accounting profession in 1933 included William A. Paton (University of Michigan), A.C. Littleton (University of Illinois), J.B. Heckert (Ohio State University), Perry Mason (Antioch College), Howard S. Noble (UCLA), and R. Emmett Taylor (University of Cincinnati). These gentlemen all published articles in *The Accounting Review* in 1933, and that was at a time when *The Accounting Review* was still readable. The president of the American Accounting Association (then called the American Association of University Instructors in Accounting) in 1933 was George H. Newlove (University of Texas). The 1932 president had been Howard Greer of the University of Chicago.

## Impact of the Depression

The year 1933 was at the very depths of the Great Depression. The effect of the depression on accounting education was discussed in an article authored by Howard Greer in *The Accounting Review* in 1933.<sup>1</sup> Greer related the fact that there had been a phenomenal growth in the teaching of accounting in colleges during the decade of the 1920's. Although very few schools even offered an accounting course in 1915, the growth had been such that hundreds of colleges offered accounting programs by 1933.

To determine what effect the depression was having on accounting education, Greer conducted a survey of the seventeen largest accounting programs in the country. On the average, the colleges surveyed lost about eight percent of their students between 1929 and 1933. In business, however, student registrations were down 15 percent. In accounting, the number of registrations was down 12 percent. Thus, accounting education was seemingly hurt worse than enrollment at universities as a whole, but not as badly as the entire business program. Interestingly, some of the colleges had experienced increases in enrollment, while others had large decreases. Greer found that those schools with large night programs were hurt the most by the depression. Schools which had only daytime accounting programs actually had more students in 1933 than in 1929.

With respect to the number of professors, there was a decline of three percent between 1929 and 1933. All of this decline occurred in 1933 since there were actually increases in the number of faculty positions in the three preceding years. Salaries paid to accounting professors declined one percent between 1929 and 1933. However, many schools had reduced salaries by as much as ten percent, while others had continued to give salary increases.

Greer summarized the impact of the depression on accounting education by stating how positive he felt toward the stability displayed by accountancy instruction when compared to other segments of the economy. Accounting educators had experienced almost no decline in employment and very little decrease in salaries. Also, productivity, in terms of number of students, was

down only about 12 percent. In the industrial segment of the economy, however, productivity had declined by over 50 percent and employment had declined by 40 percent. Wage levels of those still employed were down about 30 percent. Thus, in comparison, accounting education held up well during the rough years of the depression.

## Educational Questions

The article previously referred to by Howard Greer, who was a past-president of the American Accounting Association, included a section on the most important problem facing accounting educators. According to Greer, the most important problem was the need for a brief course in the fundamentals of accounting for general business majors. Such a course should emphasize the fundamentals of double-entry as a principle and not as a mechanical procedure. Greer felt that the emphasis on working problems was not beneficial to an individual who was not going to be an accountant. However, there was a great deal of accounting knowledge that general business majors did need. The question was how to educate these people in accounting, but do so without emphasizing procedural details. Educators of today can certainly relate to this problem as it still exists, at least to some extent.

Greer also recognized the problem of the dichotomy between teaching and research. He stated that professors were supposed to perform both activities, but most emphasized teaching over research. This emphasis on teaching resulted in accounting principles which were based on experience rather than on reasoning. Greer felt that it was the goal of every instructor to bring about higher conceptions of principle and higher ideals of practice. Again, the lack of emphasis on research is a criticism often heard today.

## The Typical Curriculum

The curriculum of instruction in accounting was not too much different from that of today, although the titles of the courses did vary slightly from those in modern-day catalogs. There was more emphasis in 1933 on preparing students to sit for the CPA examination. For example, the courses offered at the University of Mississippi in 1933 included the following:

Accountancy, Retailing  
Accountancy, Wholesaling  
Accountancy, Corporations  
Accountancy, Costs  
Auditing  
State and Federal Income Tax  
Accounting  
CPA Problems and Practice — I  
CPA Problems and Practice — II

The first three courses above consisted of financial accounting and would have been comparable to today's offerings of principles and intermediate accounting. For all but the last three of the above courses, the instruction methodology included two days per week of lecture sessions and two days of lab sessions. Of course the lab sessions consisted of working problems. Practice sets were used in the first three courses. The catalog description of the auditing course stated that it included a short course in banking, including bank bookkeeping and Burroughs and Sundstrand mechanical bookkeeping and listing.

One oddity of the program at Ole Miss was the requirement for proficiency in typing. The catalog stated that any accounting student who had entered the University after 1929 was required to do a minimum of forty words per minute in typing. Students could take a course in typing to achieve this proficiency, but no credit was given for the course. How many accounting students graduating today can type forty words per minute? Such a requirement might be appropriate again today given the large role that microcomputers are assuming in most businesses.

At Louisiana State University, the course titles were even more similar to the courses typical of today. According to an article in *The Accounting Review* by Earl Saliers, the LSU curriculum included the following:<sup>2</sup>

Freshman year — Elementary Accounting, six credit hours.

Sophomore year — Intermediate Accounting, six credit hours.

Junior year — Cost Accounting, three credit hours.

Junior year — Auditing, three semester hours.

Senior year — Income Tax, three credit hours.

Senior year — CPA Problems, three credit hours.

Graduate School — Research Problems, six credit hours.

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In many respects accounting education is little different today from what it was a half century ago.

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Saliers stated that all of the courses were problem oriented and that professors spent a great deal of time trying to find suitable problems for classroom use. It was noted that instructors needed a sufficient number of problems as to be able to use different problems from one year to the next. This was necessary to discourage students from preserving solutions for the benefit of next year's classes. Some things never change.

## Activities of the AACSB

The American Association (now Assembly) of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) was a viable accrediting organization in 1933, just as it is today. The president of the AACSB in 1933 was Russell A. Stevenson, an accounting professor from the University of Minnesota. Stevenson had been the president of the American Association of University Instructors in Accounting in 1931.

The AACSB made one important decision in 1933 that is of significance to women. The Executive Committee of AACSB received a petition from Gamma Epsilon Pi for recognition by the Association as the official honor society for women in member schools. The Committee vetoed the petition with the following comments:

*The Committee feels that the Association is committed to a policy of encouraging the development of one honor society in the field of business administration, and to this end hopes that the two existing honor organizations Beta Gamma Sigma and Gamma Epsilon Pi, will negotiate a plan that will result in one honor society admitting both men and women.<sup>3</sup>*

Such a philosophy of equality among business administration deans is almost unbelievable given the fact that almost all business students — even secretarial majors — were men in 1933.

## Summary

Accounting education has changed in many ways over the past half century. However, many of the changes are more cosmetic than real. The undergraduate curriculum has not changed too much. Of course, today there is much more emphasis on graduate programs in accounting. Seemingly, the underlying principles are still the same, but more courses are needed to teach the exceptions to the basic rules.

Even the problems of accounting education are still the same. Accounting majors are still intermixed with general business majors in the principles courses at most schools. And, professors are still wondering about the best ways of teaching accounting principles to nonmajors. Even the subject of business machines is still a question facing most accounting faculties. In 1933, the question was how to introduce adding machines and book-keeping machines into the accounting curriculum. Today, the same question is being asked about computers.

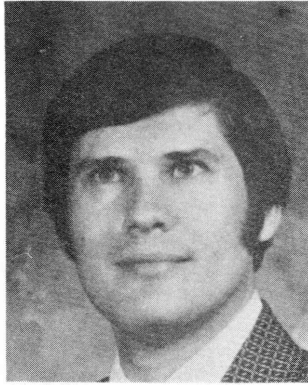
A study of an earlier age is always interesting — probably because we are intrigued by the changes and puzzled by the lack of changes. In many respects, accounting education is little different today from what it was a half century ago.  $\Omega$

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Howard C. Greer, "The Present Status of Accounting Teaching," *The Accounting Review*, March, 1933, pp. 62-66.

<sup>2</sup>Earl A. Saliers, "An Accounting Curriculum," *The Accounting Review*, June, 1933, pp. 159-160.

<sup>3</sup>Charles J. Dirksen and Arthur Kroeger, "Summary of the Major Events of the Association from 1916-1966," in *The American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business, 1916-1966* (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1966), p. 198.



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