

School of Accountancy (College of Business)
Utah State University Department Teaching Excellence Award (Pre-Proposal)

The USU School of Accountancy – Overview

The Utah State University School of Accountancy (SOA) is a professional accounting school housed in the College of Business. The School was admitted as a member of the Federation of Schools of Accountancy in 1983 (currently there are only 90 full members) and has special accounting accreditation by the AACSB International, the latest successful review having been conducted in 1997. The SOA is one of relatively few schools receiving on-campus recruiters from all of the Big Four accounting firms as well as governmental, corporate, and professional organizations of local, regional, and national stature. The School has consistently placed more than 90 percent of its graduates in accounting-related professional positions or in graduate schools. The learning culture in the SOA demands extensive student engagement both on and off campus. SOA's Beta Alpha Psi accounting honor fraternity, established in 1977, has maintained an unblemished streak of 26 consecutive "Superior Chapter" awards, the longest in the nation. USU students consistently compete successfully in regional and national student competitions sponsored by these and other organizations. In the fall of 2001, both USU undergraduate and graduate student tax teams placed among the top-ten teams in the nation in the Andersen Tax Challenge Case Competition sponsored by Andersen LLP. During the fall of 2002, the graduate tax team finished among the top six teams in the Tax Challenge (sponsored by Deloitte & Touche). The SOA also has appointed and meets semi-annually with an active Advisory Board comprised of professional accounting and business executives to review and advise the School on its programs.

Establishing a Culture of Learning

An accounting education at USU blends traditional classroom activities with professional interaction, community service, and real-world experience. Because it is a professional school, the SOA curriculum must not only be academically sound, but also demonstrate professional relevance to our constituents – the firms that hire our students. Faculty members not only meet the requisite academic qualifications, but also possess professional accounting certification. Of the 13 members of the faculty, 11 hold CPA certificates, one holds a CIA (certified internal auditor), and one is a lawyer. Several hold more than one certification such as the CMA (certified management accountant) and the CFP (certified financial planner). To remain certified, faculty members must meet rigorous continuing education requirements, in addition to keeping current in their academic disciplines. All faculty members also have strong practice backgrounds and bring many years of experience into the classroom. For example, Executive Professor Jay Price is a retired partner from Arthur Andersen with 30 years of public accounting experience. Lecturer Cassie Budd spent 12 years with Price Waterhouse. Students augment their studies with lectures from highly respected and experienced visiting professionals and participation in seminars such as the Intermountain Accounting Seminar, where they interact with some of the country's leading authorities in accounting.

Partnering and Engagement

The resources required to provide a quality education are immense. USU accounting students must be proficient in the technology and research sources needed to be successful in the complex world of accounting, financial reporting, information systems, and taxation. Accounting and taxation pedagogy demands that students analyze cases using state-of-the-art research technologies. Because these research technologies are so costly, it is imperative to develop educational alliances with key partners to make these products available in the classroom. Alliances developed by the School of Accountancy include MorningStar (taxation and financial planning), TTW (enterprise resource planning), Angoss (data mining), ACL (audit data extraction), PriceWaterhouseCoopers' Comperio (accounting standards), Peachtree (general ledger) and QuickBooks (general ledger). In addition to maintaining these relationships, SOA faculty spends significant time integrating these valuable tools into the classroom.

Example 1 - Developing a National Reputation in Taxation

As most knowledgeable taxpayers in the United States would agree, the tax laws of the United States are at times almost incomprehensible. The SOA faculty has long believed that it is essential for students not only to learn the current tax laws, understand the process through which they are created, and apply the laws in preparing tax returns, but also to develop the research skills for searching through the maze of dynamic tax

laws, regulations, rulings, and cases to answer complex tax questions. Because the tax rules are complicated, the tax courses are demanding. The word has spread that the tax courses are difficult, and most students enter the classes prepared to study diligently. All accounting majors are required to take Individual Income Taxation. It is the foundation course in which students learn broad tax concepts that apply to all entities, as well as many specific rules that apply to individual taxpayers. Students are also introduced to business taxation. The student requirements in this introductory tax class are practical and rigorous: completion of six tax returns, including three returns on the computer; six research projects, including at least three using online computer resources; and two tax planning projects. Corporate Taxation, which delves into the taxation of the formation of, operation of, distributions from, reorganization of, and dissolution of corporations, partnerships and other entities, is required for all graduate accounting students, and taken by most accounting majors. In this course, students are again expected to prepare tax returns and complete tax research projects.

In developing tax research skills, students use not only tax reference materials in the library, but also state-of-the-art, internet-based tax research tools. In the Tax Topics course, students research and present various tax topics that have not been studied in other courses. They also write papers on assigned topics and present them to the class. As they work on their papers, the students are organized into "CPA Firms" each with a partner, managers, etc. for purposes of review and feedback. The students present their papers only after peer review and rewriting of their papers. Finally, the course is used as a capstone course in which students pull together and present materials studied in their other tax courses. Many of the students supplement their tax courses with personal financial planning courses that have significant tax content, including Personal Financial Planning, Retirement Planning & Employee Benefits, and Estate Planning.

Employers who hire our graduates regularly commend us for the competency of our students in the field of taxation. In addition, the quality of our tax students has been independently and objectively supported through tax competitions sponsored by major CPA firms. In 2001, undergraduate and graduate teams of four students each competed in a national tax case competition sponsored by Arthur Andersen & Co. After success in regional competition at the University of Washington, each team was selected to participate at the national competition in St. Charles, Illinois, and was named one of the top 10 teams in the country. In 2002, Deloitte & Touche sponsored the tax competition. Our graduate team was selected as one of the top six teams in the country and participated in the national competition in Orlando, Florida.

Example 2 – Developing Mastery in Financial Accounting Research

The financial accounting faculty use cases and simulations extensively in their pedagogy to develop the analytical abilities of students and give them confidence in the use of advanced research technologies. Students learn a problem-solving methodology that enables them to frame the financial reporting question, identify the relevant issues, and apply the appropriate accounting standard to solve the problem. The teaching focus is on the ability to dynamically identify and apply relevant standards in problem solving, rather than simply to memorize accounting rules. Students are assigned Deloitte & Touche cases, challenging accounting cases from actual accounting practice. A student case team is selected each year from top SOA students and invited to the Trueblood Case Competition, where the team competes with universities throughout the state in solving comprehensive accounting cases.

Assessment - Evidence of Sustained Teaching Excellence

The SOA average scores for both course quality and instructor effectiveness on the student evaluations were at or above both the College of Business and University averages for 9 consecutive semesters (3 years) ending with Fall 2002. In addition to the University evaluations, students are surveyed annually to measure their satisfaction with instruction quality, subject area coverage, job skills coverage, and teaching methods. For a longitudinal perspective, employers and alumni are also surveyed every five years along the same dimensions.

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