Introducing Albertans to the CPA Profession

Fall 2025

capitalize

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A CPA

CPA CHARTERED PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS ALBERTA

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

Contents

"It really does come down to your reputation and people trusting that you're going to do right by them and by their organizations."
—Michael Stuart CPA

capitalize

Publisher
Krista Strome
kstrome@cpaalberta.ca

Editor
Sarah Maludzinski
smaludzinski@cpaalberta.ca

Contributors
Alan Aburto CPA, CIA
Labonneau Dey
Caroline Pulford
Sheryar Qaiser
Kevin Spila

Graphic Designer
Roxane Brisson
rbrisson@cpaalberta.ca

Photographers
HarderLee Photography
Laughing Dog Photography
Ramsey Kunkel Photography

Capitalize **is a semi-annual magazine that introduces students and others to the accounting profession in Alberta.**

Visit capitalize.cpaalberta.ca for even more *Capitalize*!

To learn more about becoming a CPA:
cpaalberta.ca/BecomeACPA
T: 587.390.1877
Toll-free: 1.844.454.1245
Email: recruitment@cpaalberta.ca

To advertise in a future issue of Capitalize:
CapitalizeMag@cpaalberta.ca

Chartered Professional Accountants of Alberta

Chief Executive Officer
Rachel Miller FCPA, FCA

Edmonton
1900-10088 102 Avenue NW
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 2Z1
T: 780.424.7391 | 1.800.232.9406

Calgary
800-444 7 Avenue SW
Calgary, Alberta T2P 0X8
T: 403.299.1300 | 1.800.232.9406

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Rachel Miller FCPA, FCA
CEO, CPA Alberta

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Dear Alberta students:

As you begin a brand-new school year, you're making decisions that shape your future: what to study, where to focus, what kind of impact you want to make in the real world one day.

In this issue of *Capitalize*, we explore the role Chartered Professional Accountants (CPAs) play in protecting the public and contributing to the greater good. It's a side of the profession you might not always hear about, but it's at the heart of what being a CPA means.

From helping to mitigate wildfire risk to helping businesses understand the story behind their numbers, from leading non-profits to safeguarding your hard-earned savings—the work of a CPA goes far beyond spreadsheets and calculations. The trust placed in a CPA is hard-earned and deeply rooted in the profession's commitment to integrity, objectivity, and the public interest.

If you're thinking about your next steps or have questions about the profession, don't hesitate to reach out to our student recruitment team at **recruitment@cpaalberta.ca.** I hope you enjoy this issue of *Capitalize*, and I look forward to supporting your student experience and CPA journey.

Rachel Miller FCPA, FCA
CEO, CPA Alberta

P.S. *Capitalize* is now an award-winning magazine! The team behind the pages took home a 2025 International Association of Business Communicators Capital Award for its creative approach to introducing Albertans to the CPA profession.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE LAND WE CALL ALBERTA

We acknowledge that the land we call Alberta is the traditional and ancestral territory of many Indigenous peoples, who have lived on and taken care of these lands since time immemorial. We are honoured and grateful to share this land.

The CPA Alberta office in Amiskwacîwâskahikan (the Cree word for the area known as Edmonton) is on the traditional lands of many First Nations, including the Nêhiyawak, Anishinaabe, Niitsitapi, Dene, and Nakota Sioux. It is also within the Métis Nation's North Saskatchewan River Territory and Treaty 6 Territory.

The CPA Alberta office in Moh'kinsstis (the Blackfoot word for the area known as Calgary) is on the traditional lands of many First Nations, including the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani), the Îyâxe Nakoda (Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney), and Tsuut'ina. It is also within the Métis Nation's Battle River Territory and Treaty 7 Territory.

In the spirit of reconciliation and respect, we acknowledge all the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit whose footsteps have marked these lands for millennia and who have faced many barriers in the CPA profession. CPA Alberta is committed to building a profession where Indigenous peoples and their voices and experiences are heard, valued, respected, and celebrated.

WHY DO WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE LAND?

Land acknowledgments are traditional protocol used to show gratitude and pay respect to the land upon which you are a visitor.

When used by non-Indigenous people, they can be a necessary reminder of the historical narrative that previously erased Indigenous voices and their presence. When part of a thoughtful, intentional process that includes ongoing education and action, land acknowledgments can move beyond a performative gesture and become a starting point on the journey of truth and reconciliation.

LEARNING MOMENT
EVERY CHILD MATTERS

Note: The content on this page touches on residential schools, the death and disappearance of children, child abuse, genocide, and intergenerational trauma.

Between 1831 and 1997, more than 150,000 Indigenous children were forcefully taken from their families, communities, and homes to attend residential schools, which were funded by the federal government and administered by various Christian churches.

The schools were often underfunded and overcrowded. The quality of education was substandard. Children were harshly punished for speaking their own languages or celebrating their cultures. Many children never returned home.

Orange Shirt Day—observed on September 30 every year—honours both the children who were lost and the adults who are still healing today.

The day is a legacy of the St. Joseph Mission Residential School (1891-1981) Commemoration Project and Reunion. As a spokesperson for part of the project, Phyllis (Jack) Webstad, a survivor, shared the story of her first day at a residential school at just six years old. Her brand-new orange shirt, bought by her grandmother with what little money they had, was taken from her and never seen again.

As of 2021, September 30 is a federally recognized day of memorial—National Day for Truth and Reconciliation—as a response to a Truth and Reconciliation Commission call to action. This date was chosen to coincide with the already established Orange Shirt Day.

By wearing an orange shirt on September 30, we all commit to the enduring truth that EVERY CHILD MATTERS. Every day. Everywhere.

LEARN MORE

Orange Shirt Day

Residential School History

ARE YOU A FUTURE CPA?

Are you looking for a co-op, internship, or other work experience to complete the CPA program?
Come to Meet Your Employer!

This career fair connects hundreds of post-secondary students and recent grads with key employer partners across Alberta.

Register today at cpaalberta.ca/MeetYourEmployer →

CALGARY
September 5
Calgary TELUS Convention Centre

EDMONTON
September 9
Edmonton Convention Centre

MEET YOUR EMPLOYER

CPA ALBERTA

CPA CAMPUS AMBASSADORS 2025 2026

Reach out to your CPA Campus Ambassador!

The 2025/26 CPA Campus Ambassador team is here to assist you on the path toward the Chartered Professional Accountant (CPA) designation. CPA Campus Ambassadors are your primary connection to CPA Alberta on campus. They share information about important CPA-related events and activities, answer your questions about the path to becoming a CPA, and bring *Capitalize* to your campus every term.

UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE

Gabriele Young

gyoung@cpaalberta.ca

Where is your favourite spot to study on campus?

My favourite study spot, as cliche as it sounds, is the library. Sometimes I'll go to the pool for a change of scenery. I'm be on the lookout for more interesting spots!

Mannatpreet Kaur

mkaur@cpaalberta.ca

What area of accounting are you most interested in?

I'm most interested in auditing because it gives me the chance to work closely with clients and really understand how different businesses operate. I enjoy being in a customer-facing role, where I can ask questions, learn how things work on the ground, and see the bigger picture beyond just the numbers. It's a great way to keep learning, build strong communication skills, and gain insight into real-world business practices.

UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE • CALGARY

SAIT

Aesheka Capuno

acapuno@cpaalberta.ca

What is something people might be surprised to learn about you?

People may be surprised to learn that I play the piano, guitar, and drums. It's a creative outlet that helps me balance the structured side of accounting.

CPA CAMPUS AMBASSADORS 2025•26

Kartik Bharti

kbharti@cpaalberta.ca

What drinks or snacks do you recommend as study fuel?

As a coffee enthusiast, I would recommend making coffee your go-to study fuel because it is honestly the best companion for long hours and tough deadlines. If coffee were a stock, I would be a billionaire by now. It is the CEO of my study routine, powering my focus and creativity. For snacks, I keep it simple and smart. Almonds and dark chocolate are my favourites. They are easy to grab, give a quick boost, and pair perfectly with coffee.

SAIT

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Ivan Tan

itan@cpaalberta.ca

How are you using AI in your daily life?

I use AI to help me grow, whether it's for studying, learning something new, or just making things easier to understand. I also use it for fun stuff like finding recipe ideas or brainstorming team names for sports. It's like a creative assistant I always have on hand in every area of my life.

Stephanie Tan

stan@cpaalberta.ca

Why did you want to become a CPA Campus Ambassador?

I want to be a CPA Campus Ambassador because I am passionate about building connections and creating opportunities for my peers! I love being involved with campus life at Haskayne, and I would like to further contribute to the student community.

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY

Nimrat Toor

ntoor@cpaalberta.ca

What's a great book that you read recently?

A great book I read recently was *Atomic Habits* by James Clear. It has changed the way I think about progress and productivity. The idea that small, consistent changes can lead to big results has stuck with me, and it is something I am trying to consistently apply in life.

MACEWAN UNIVERSITY

Chevy Halvorson

chalvorson@cpaalberta.ca

Tell us about a CPA who inspires you.

I am incredibly inspired by Janet Morhart CPA, CMA, a CPA and accounting expert specializing in television and film accounting. Watching movies has been my favourite pastime since I was a child and being involved in the television and film industry would be a dream come true for me. Once I obtain my CPA designation, I want to focus on production accounting to leverage my skills in the television and film industry.

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY OF EDMONTON

Bintu Karmara

bkarmara@cpaalberta.ca

What snacks or drinks do you recommend for studying?

Smoothies! I can't get enough of them. I like to add loads of mangoes and pineapples.

NAIT

Dev Vodehra

dvodehra@cpaalberta.ca

What's your favorite study spot on campus?

The Productivity Innovation Centre (PIC) building at NAIT is one of my favourite spots on campus to study. It is a very new building and not a lot of students know about it—either that or they're not willing to walk that far. Hence it is a very quiet area where I can concentrate better than anywhere else on campus.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Diya Duggal

dduggal@cpaalberta.ca

How do you incorporate AI into your daily routine?

As part of a generation growing up with technology, AI has become a regular part of my day. I use AI tools to stay informed, verify information, and enhance my productivity—whether it's reviewing concepts, staying updated with current events, or managing study schedules. I view AI as a valuable support tool in both academic and personal contexts.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Henry Nguyen

hnguyen@cpaalberta.ca

What motivated you to become a CPA Campus Ambassador?

As an accounting student going into my third year, I wanted to take a more active role in the CPA community. Being a CPA Campus Ambassador allows me to inspire and share valuable resources with other students while building meaningful connections with professionals and mentors in the accounting industry. C

FIGURE IT OUT

Alejandra Horvath says communication, curiosity, and perseverance have all been keys to unlocking her success

By Sarah Maludzinski

Laughing Dog Photography

"Grow or don't; the choice is yours," says **Alejandra Horvath CPA, CGA**, a content creator and presenter. "I definitely wanted to have my designation because I knew that was going to open doors for me."

The freedom that came with having her designation has been a true career highlight and has allowed her to dip her toe into many different waters. "I have seen that, without your designation, your options are more limited, and it's harder to move around," Alejandra says. "For me to have that credential in my pocket gives me opportunities."

Tell the story

"You can have a designation, but if you don't have communication skills, it's going to be very hard for you to show others what you are able to do," says Alejandra.

Communication, Alejandra says, is how you get your message across and tell the story your technical skills have already figured out. Good communication can help you be a better employee and a better coworker; it can help improve both working and personal relationships; it can help you build a bigger and better network.

"It's important you know how to translate your financial knowledge to any audience, not just to accountants," she says. "Always read the audience, read who you're talking to, and think about telling the story of those numbers to that person or group of people."

Alejandra underlines the importance of being able to share knowledge with your audience in a way they understand. She explains: "We're not saying, 'This is the debit. This is the credit.' We say, 'This is what happened, and this is what will help you make a business decision.... These are the options I see, and these are the pros and cons of each of them.'"

Never stop learning

Obtaining her designation was a dream come true for Alejandra, but the learning did not stop once she had that shiny piece of paper in hand.

It continued with simply wanting to learn more about Excel and Power Query and to share what she'd learned—but not everyone was interested in the content. So she found a new audience: YouTube.

Alejandra started sharing her knowledge on her YouTube channel and attending free learning events. "As I was attending [these events,] people started asking me if I gave presentations," she says with a laugh. "I told them I just have my channel, but they kept asking!"

Eventually, Alejandra said yes, and has since presented to audiences all over the world, from Saudi Arabia to Mexico, from Latin America to Africa. "Learning is important, but I think teaching is just as important," she says. "If you don't teach what you know, sometimes you forget it...and you also don't receive feedback and questions that make you wonder and make you want to investigate more.

"For me, teaching has been key in learning."

One unexpected learning from this journey was how to overcome mistakes. How do you deal with a mix-up when you're presenting live to people around the world? How do you regain your footing after a flubbed demonstration or a misspoken word? "The only way to come back is by trying and showing your vulnerability," Alejandra says. "You can say, 'I don't know why it's giving an error, but we will figure it out.'"

And that figure-it-out attitude has served Alejandra well. "That has been key, and I think it's a skill or trait that helps you anywhere—curiosity, that attitude of saying, 'I don't know, but I will try,'" she says. "And more often than not, you will figure it out!"

Keep it simple

Alejandra knows lifelong learning, increasing your skills, and advancing professionally don't have to be complicated. She suggests LinkedIn Learning, your local library, and of course, YouTube as great resources. She also commends the age-old advice of staying connected.

"When you start your journey, put some time into networking," she says. "It's not just going to an event to enjoy some drinks or food. Networking is to go to events, meet people, and start relationships that might last a long time."

A different way of remaining connected is to find a mentor, which Alejandra says doesn't need to be an "official" mentor. It can be someone you admire or want to be like. Study what they've done to get to where you'd like to be and emulate it with your own style. It's obviously working for them, so maybe it can for you too!

"Don't find excuses," says Alejandra. "Find solutions. Keep learning and keep on top of the tools that will make you successful."

> **More often than not, you will figure it out!**

feature

The ripple effect

They may not be jumping into phone booths to don their capes, but CPAS are doing their part to protect your interests

BY LABONNEAU DEY HARDERLEE PHOTOGRAPHY

When a juicy financial fraud case hits the headlines, it's not shocking to learn a CPA helped with the investigation. After all, you'd be hard pressed to find an accountant who doesn't love—or at least have a talent for—working with numbers.

But did you know CPAs also play a role in mitigating wildfire risks? Or helping protect your savings so you can accomplish that goal of buying a new vehicle? Or influencing how waste disposal is handled in your neighborhood? Although the classic portrait of a CPA might inspire visions of an accountant typing furiously at a calculator, protecting the public is a large part of a CPA's job, and it's not a responsibility that's taken lightly.

"When we make day-to-day decisions or do our everyday duties, we're ensuring that the investments people make with their hard-earned money are taken care of and are on the straight and narrow," says **Michael Stuart CPA**, Manager of Finance and Legal at Trojan Industries Inc.

As a CPA and a practicing lawyer, Michael knows all too well the role ethics plays for accountants. "In the CPA profession, not unlike law, so much of what we do is intangible," he says. "It really does come down to your reputation and people trusting that you're going to do right by them and by their organizations."

And, according to the Government of Alberta, it's the law. CPAs are part of a regulated profession under provincial legislation, which ensures all their number-crunching (and other) talents are used fairly, professionally, and with a high degree of transparency and accountability.

> ***"Our work can affect Alberta as a whole. A fair, efficient, and transparent capital market promotes investment in our province and fosters innovation."***
> *—Danielle Bertrand CPA*

Holding others accountable

The work CPAs do extends further than an Excel document or the four walls of a cushy boardroom. "There's a trickle-down effect to the work we do," says **Nadine Niba CPA**, Alberta Regional Practice Leader, Risk Advisory Services, at BDO Canada.

With a background in enterprise risk management—including internal audit and business and technology risk—Nadine has analyzed the accuracy and representation of the financial statements in a number of different sectors. "Environmental sustainability and governance are part of the reporting metrics on the financial statements that serve to hold companies responsible," she says. "For example, an oil and gas company that is mining and drilling will be held accountable for where they dump their waste, which affects everybody living in that area."

For some CPAs, protecting the public has a much more direct and immediate effect on the population. "Our work can affect Alberta as a whole," says **Danielle Bertrand CPA**, a forensic accountant with the Alberta Securities Commission (ASC), the regulatory agency that administers the province's securities laws. "A fair, efficient, and transparent capital market promotes investment in our province and fosters innovation. It's good for business expansion, which overall improves Alberta's economic growth and strengthens the economy."

When securities laws have been violated, the ASC may impose sanctions on the respondents, which can include administrative penalties, disgorgement of profits, market bans, suspensions or terminations of registrations, and other restrictions from capital market activities. Investigating wrongdoings and protecting the public from improper, misleading, or fraudulent practices not only requires a high degree of professional conduct and expertise, but also stamina: the ASC received 728 complaints in 2024 alone! ▷

For Danielle, this number is motivating rather than daunting. “Every day is different. There’s never a dull moment,” she says. “I work in the enforcement division, so when there’s an issue that’s been identified—whether that’s from a public complaint or an internal referral—I’m part of a team responsible for gathering evidence to help prove the misconduct,” she explains. “Once a case has enough evidence, it moves on to the litigation team.”

Once upon a time, Danielle planned to pursue a career in law, and she says working at the ASC marries the best of both the legal and accounting worlds. For example, in cases involving alleged unauthorized diversion of funds—or fraud—forensic accountants, like Danielle, are tasked with finding the missing pieces of the puzzle. “We gather evidence through interviews and by tracing investor funds through bank accounts to figure out where the money ended up and if it aligned with the stated purpose of the investment,” she says.

High standards for a high-stakes career

Learning to navigate a strict code of ethics requires a deep commitment to hard work, professionalism, and objectivity, all of which is hammered home in the CPA program. Although Nadine began her accounting studies at the age of nine (which is the standard for education in Cameroon, where she grew up), she was blown away by what it means to be a CPA in Canada. “The CPA program is, flat-out, the most rigorous program I’ve gone through in my entire life,” she says. “And I have two bachelors and an MBA!

“It completely transformed the way I think about and see things. I learned to look at problems through more than one lens at once.”

This ability has proven to be equally invaluable to **Mandeep Sandhu CPA, CA**, Director of Internal Audit and Enterprise Risk Management at AltaLink, Alberta’s largest regulated electricity transmission provider.

“The CPA program is, flat-out, the most rigorous program I’ve gone through in my entire life. And I have two bachelors and an MBA!”
—Nadine Niba CPA

"When you have a reputation for making objective, ethical decisions, you get called in to a lot of different spaces," she says. "Our profession has definitely raised the bar for what we get called upon in terms of providing input or sitting at tables where our opinion is highly regarded."

The pressure can be great, but for Mandeep, protecting the public is the foundation upon which she balances the expectations and goals of others, including stakeholders, executives, and government bodies. "When you feel caught in the middle, it makes it hard sometimes to make the right decision, especially when you've been trained to understand different points of views and perspectives," she says. "But then you remember that your job is to mitigate risk, stay objective, and make ethical decisions."

Mandeep's decision-making extends to all pockets of the business. "A part of my team's work is looking at what we do internally to mitigate risk in terms of maintaining our equipment and the work we do on and around our lines, which affects the safety of our utility workers and the surrounding environment.

"Protecting our communities and keeping them safe from things like wildfire risk are always top priorities," she says.

Whether it's looking out for someone's family member installing electrical lines, ensuring an organization's carbon footprint doesn't wreak havoc on future generations, or holding a charity accountable for their funds, CPAs have a far-reaching impact on social good. "Regardless of your role, you're maintaining financial integrity, you're preventing fraud, and you're ensuring compliance," Danielle says.

"Protecting our communities and keeping them safe from things like wildfire risk are always top priorities."
—Mandeep Sandhu CPA, CA

These industry-specific terms may feel alienating to the average Joe, but they hit closer to home than you might realize. "When people are building their life savings to save for retirement or buy a car or save for a house, they want to have confidence that their money is going to be protected in some way," Michael says. "What we're doing as CPAs ripples beyond where you think it might. And that adds to the weight of that ethical obligation we have to the public."

HAVE YOU HEARD?

Recruitment season is now also in the spring!

Ah, recruitment season. Historically, job postings, interviews, career fairs, and more were only in the fall. Not this year! Welcome to spring recruitment.

RECRUITMENT =

organizations seeking accounting and business post-secondary students and new grads to fill a variety of positions

+

accounting and business post-secondary students and new grads trying to find co-ops or opportunities to fulfill practical experience requirements

Through research and networking, students and organizations can each find their perfect solution!

THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

YEAR BY YEAR

Every student's journey is different, but here's what you can expect to focus on in your post-secondary years.

YOUR FIRST YEAR

- ✔ Completing introductory courses
- ✔ Attending a CPA Alberta information session (can also do this again in later years!)

YOUR MIDDLE YEARS

- ✔ Completing courses
- ✔ Networking (at school events, CPA Alberta events, and more)
- ✔ Applying for internships and co-ops

YOUR LAST YEAR

- ✔ Finishing up your bachelor's degree
- ✔ Enrolling in the CPA Professional Education Program (very end!)

MONTH BY MONTH*

MARCH–MAY
→ Positions posted

APRIL–JUNE
→ Interviews

MAY–JUNE
→ Jobs offered and accepted

FOLLOWING YEAR
→ Jobs start (you read that right: up to a YEAR AND A HALF later)

But don't worry! If you miss this spring recruitment, this cycle starts over in the fall!

*Not every organization will follow this exactly, but this is a rough timeline!

HOW TO STAND OUT, *stay curious & succeed*

Career advice from Alberta CPAs and employers

By Sheryar Qaiser

Whether you're eyeing your first internship or prepping for your CPA journey, starting in the accounting world can feel overwhelming. Four experts in that area—**Jason Wong CPA, CMA**, entrepreneur, investor, and member of the University of Alberta Board of Governors; **Sarah Brausen CPA**, Talent Attraction Manager, Tax & Audit Experienced Hire at KPMG; and **Jill Miller-Barone CPA** and **Blake Wuhr**, recruitment leaders from TELUS—share their honest, practical advice to help you thrive in school, at networking events, and in the workplace.

What's your #1 tip for networking events like Meet Your Employer?

Jason: Don't just collect business cards and run. And don't cling to your friend group either. The sweet spot is having a real conversation—one where the person actually remembers you. Even if they're not the most exciting person to talk to, be curious. Ask, "How did you get where you are?" or "What's it like working at your company?" That genuine interest sticks.

Jill: Firm handshake, eye contact, and confidence. You'd be surprised how much that matters. And don't monopolize the table. Make your point, ask a couple thoughtful questions, then step aside so others can engage too. It shows respect, professionalism, and self-awareness—all traits we remember.

Blake: Have a few go-to questions ready before you walk up to someone. That preparation makes things less awkward and shows you're serious. Even simple questions like, "What does a typical day look like for you?" can lead to a great conversation.

Sarah: Dress the part and do your homework. Research the companies attending, identify the ones that align with your values or interests, and come with tailored, meaningful questions. Think about what matters to you in a workplace—culture, growth, mentorship—and ask about that. You don't always need to talk about work, either. A genuine conversation can leave a strong impression. And no matter how brief the chat is, always thank the recruiter for their time before moving on.

What makes a student stand out to employers?

Jason: Involvement. If I'm comparing two resumes—one with a 3.8 GPA and nothing else, and one with a 3.4 GPA plus case comps, club roles, and volunteer work—I'll pick the second one every time. It tells me you're not just book smart; you're engaged and balanced and can handle competing priorities.

Blake: Curiosity. The best candidates go beyond doing tasks—they ask why. Why does this matter? How does it fit into the bigger picture? That mindset makes for a great hire and a future leader.

Sarah: Being well-rounded goes a long way—solid academics, work experience, and involvement in extracurriculars all help you stand out. But what really elevates an application is personalization. If you reference a meaningful conversation from a networking event or show that you've done your homework on our company, I'll remember that. Putting a face to a name makes your application more impactful.

What's the biggest misconception students have about the CPA designation?

Jason: That it's all about taxes and audit. It's not. I've never worked in tax or audit, and I've used my CPA in everything from recruiting to operations to data analysis. The designation is a launchpad—it opens doors to so many different paths.

Blake: A lot of students think public practice is the only route. It's not. In industry, you can do everything from corporate development to treasury to strategic finance. The opportunities are broader than you might think.

How can students show their potential when they don't have much experience?

Jason: Use what you've got. Played on a sports team? That shows discipline and teamwork. Worked retail? That's communication and customer service. You don't need a finance internship to prove your value—pull out the transferable skills. Confidence grows with experience, but it starts with recognizing what you already bring to the table.

Jill: Be authentic. Don't recite your resume—share what genuinely excites you. And don't overlook the power of following up. A quick message that references your conversation with us shows thoughtfulness and initiative.

Sarah: Show your eagerness to learn. A positive attitude, strong work ethic, and being a team player will take you far. Students aren't expected to know everything. What matters is how you approach challenges, how you ask questions, and how willing you are to grow.

What advice would you give a student who's feeling imposter syndrome?

Jason: You're not alone—everyone feels it. The key is to keep showing up. Be early. Do the work. Ask questions. That consistency builds trust and confidence.

Jill: Remember—you earned your spot. Take a deep breath and show up with courage. We've all been there.

Blake: Don't underestimate yourself. What people remember isn't whether you had all the answers—it's how you engaged, how you carried yourself. We're not looking for perfection. We're looking for people who care.

Sarah: You don't have to be an expert on day one. Focus on asking questions, learning from those around you, and mastering the basics. That foundational knowledge will support everything else. And remember—strong communication and interpersonal skills matter just as much as technical ones.

Q: Any final advice for students?

Jason: Keep an open mind. Say yes to things you didn't expect to like. I found my path in data and recruiting that way—you never know what might click.

Jill: Don't obsess over the "perfect" choice. There's no wrong move if you're learning, growing, and staying curious.

Blake: Take chances—even if it feels scary. That's how you grow and find out what you're capable of.

Sarah: Think of yourself as a sponge. Absorb as much as you can—whether from colleagues, mentors, or new experiences. Be proactive in how you ask questions: show that you've thought about the problem first. And never underestimate the power of soft skills. Your ability to build relationships will define your success as much as your technical expertise.

Clare Birks CPA (left) and Susan Simpson CPA, CA

CPAs on CPAs:

Called to serve

Clare Birks and Susan Simpson interview each other on what it's like to be a CPA in a non-profit

As told to Caroline Pulford
Ramsey Kunkel Photography

Clare Birks CPA, CFO of the Calgary Food Bank, and Susan Simpson CPA, CA, CFO of the Alex Community Health Centre, each found their professional purpose in the non-profit world. The two finance leaders discuss their paths into the sector, the critical role CPAs play in non-profits, and how their work differs from public practice and industry.

Clare: How long have you worked in the non-profit sector, Susan?

Susan: Just three and a half years. The Alex is my first venture into working in non-profits. I had sat on boards of non-profits as the audit and finance chair for a long time before that. Back in the day, I used to be an auditor, and I did audit a number of non-profits as well. So there's always been an interest there. How about yourself?

Clare: I have worked in the non-profit sector for about 20 years now. I started my career in hospitality, did a little bit of time in oil and gas, and then really just fell into non-profit and loved it. I previously worked at the YWCA as a controller and then moved to Theatre Calgary. When I got the call about the Food Bank, it sparked that interest in returning to social services, where you can really be part of the frontline work you're supporting.

Susan: I was looking for a change of scenery when this opportunity came up. I was blown away by how much the Alex does. I liked the opportunity to not just look after finance… but to have the opportunity to broaden my horizons.

Clare: Yeah, I agree. That's part of what I love about my role as well—big picture thinking. As a CPA in a non-profit, I think I'm incredibly lucky to be able to get involved in so many different sides of the organization.

The Food Bank is 100 per cent donor-driven. We rely on Calgary as a community to be able to do what we do, and that's quite humbling.

Susan: We are almost the opposite; we're about 85 per cent funded by various levels of government, so we're not as heavily reliant on fund development.

What would you say is the biggest challenge for you working for a non-profit in general?

Clare: Getting organizations and non-profits to understand that we really should operate as a business with the right controls and the right governance.

Susan: I think that ties in with what I see as one of our big challenges. ▹

People in non-profits care so much, and that's what I love about it.
—Susan Simpson CPA, CA

I think some staff are not super happy that we're investing in a CFO with a designation, thinking that money could be better used elsewhere, but there is a value to it.

Clare: Absolutely, I see that as well. I've heard before that "we're getting too corporate." But we need to run like a business so that we can continue to provide the support and services to our clients into the future.

Susan: The stewardship piece is super important. People trust us with their money. Whether it's donor or government money, it's still taxpayer money, and you are responsible for that.

Clare: In a lot of businesses, a stakeholder gives the cash because they're buying something, and then they're the customer at the end. In our world, cash comes from one side, but the customer is another side. That's an interesting dynamic.

Susan: And I think this is the difference: frontline staff are very much focused on one side, and admin staff are focused on the other.

Clare: And I still think non-profits struggle to get funders to understand that there is a need to fund administration costs. If I remember correctly, getting admin costs into a grant contract is incredibly difficult.

This learning is on the board side as well. I've seen boards...starting to learn that maybe we do need to invest in properly trained people. I think that's really great.

Is there a difference in culture between non-profit and corporate?

Susan: Absolutely. People in non-profits care so much, and that's what I love about it. One of our values is that we have grit, and I think that's super important because you can't do the work we do without a lot of grit.

Clare: One of ours is we have each other's backs. We've got to have an awful lot of determination to get things done. That is really what has led me to stay in the non-profit sector for so many years—that absolute joy of working with people who truly want to be where they are, doing what they're doing.

Susan: We did a staff satisfaction survey recently, and the highest score was people's alignment with the vision and mission. You're here because you want to be—because what you're doing speaks to you. That's what makes going to work great. I love the people I work with. I love the opportunity to learn new things...and to bring in some levels of controls that weren't there before.

I love that I get this glimpse into the things that I wouldn't have done if I were just in that finance lane all the time.
—Clare Birks CPA

Clare: I agree. I love working with my team. I love that I get this glimpse into the things that I wouldn't have done if I were just in that finance lane all the time. And it blows my mind that the Calgary Food Bank feeds 800 families every day. Our main warehouse and distribution centre are over the road from our administration offices, so whenever I can, I like to walk over there and be reminded of exactly what I'm doing and why I'm doing it.

Susan: If I have a day when I'm wondering, "What am I doing?"—I wander down to our front reception, and there are always people there, waiting to see a physician or access mental health support or going to the kitchen for food. It's incredible.

Clare: What advice would you give CPAs considering moving into the non-profit sector?

Susan: Do it. I think maybe even coming in straight from school is good, but getting experience in the corporate world first isn't a bad thing either because it gives you a different perspective to bring into the organization.

People used to think non-profit work meant low pay, and sure, you might make more money elsewhere, but the rewarding part of the work is what makes it worthwhile.

Clare: I agree. It might not always pay as much as the other sectors, but for me, the work satisfaction far outweighs that.

That sense of value, of making an impact—that's everything. I go home feeling like I've done something that matters.

CPAs on CPAs features candid conversations between two CPAs on a specific topic related to the profession and/or the business world. Some quotes have been cut or edited for length or clarity, but all thoughts and opinions belong to the CPAs.

The language of business

What do morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics have to do with accounting?

By **Alan Aburto** CPA, CIA

It may not be the kind of language you'll find on Duolingo, but if you want to understand how business really works, there's no better way than to become fluent in accounting.

Let's break down the language of business like a linguistics class—but with less verb conjugation and more spreadsheets.

> FINANCIAL STATEMENTS ARE NOT JUST SOME BORING CHECKLIST.

Form

We'll skip the phonetics since accounting isn't exactly known for being an out-loud profession, so let's talk about morphology—the building blocks of a language. Traditionally, it's letters forming words. In accounting, it's transactions forming accounts. A purchase here, a payment there. Alone, they're meaningless. But with double-entry accounting—debits and credits that balance like well-paired socks—they start to take shape into fully formed accounts.

Then comes syntax. Just like a sentence needs structure, accounting needs organized statements. The income statement, balance sheet, cash flow statement—these are the sentences of business. They aren't just piles of numbers; they're structured narratives showing where money's coming from, where it's going, and what's left over.

Content

Next is semantics—the meaning behind it all. Reading financials isn't about memorizing numbers; it's about interpreting the story. Is the company profitable? Struggling? Positioned for growth? Trends and risks pop out when you know how the accounts interact with each other, when you can analyze ratios and year-over-year trends, and when you know what to look for; the numbers start to speak!

Use

Finally, we have pragmatics—how we use financial statements in the real world. This part is huge. Investors use them to decide where to put their money. Lenders use them to decide if a business is worth lending to. Governments use them to ensure compliance. Startups use them to pitch their next big idea.

Public companies are required to release their financials so anyone—including you—can understand how they're doing. Want to spot the next big tech breakout or avoid an investing disaster? Financial statements are your guide.

But these statements impact everyone, not just those in business. They influence stock markets, job creation, product pricing, and public policy. They're how companies earn trust and how we hold them accountable.

Though they may seem like it at first glance, financial statements are not just some boring checklist. They're not just numbers. They're storytelling with consequences.

Mastering this language and learning how to tell that story as a CPA don't just make you smarter; they make you relevant.

Alan Aburto CPA, CIA crunches numbers like a pro—because he is one. A Chartered Professional Accountant with more than 10 years of experience in external audit and senior management, Alan's navigated the financial waters of multiple industries without breaking a sweat. Now serving as the Director of Finance at CPA Alberta, he keeps the books balanced and the profession on point—proof that not all superheroes wear capes...some just carry calculators.

LEVELLING UP

WITH AI

HOW CURIOSITY—AND A GAMER'S MINDSET—LED STAN KORSOUNTSEV TO LEVEL UP HIS ACCOUNTING EXPERTISE THROUGH THE POWER OF AI

By Caroline Pulford
Laughing Dog Photography

Stan Korsountsev CPA didn't set out to work in artificial intelligence (AI). He began his career in Deloitte's audit department after earning a Bachelor of Commerce from MacEwan University—a classic first step for many aspiring CPAs.

While tackling repetitive audit tasks, he began to ask: Can this be done faster? Smarter? Can it be automated? What might have seemed like looking for shortcuts was actually an instinct for efficiency. His curiosity led him to tools like Tableau and Power BI, opening the door to data analytics and process automation—and, eventually, a career in AI.

> "IT'S NOT AI THAT'S GOING TO REPLACE PEOPLE. IT'S PEOPLE USING AI WHO WILL REPLACE THOSE WHO AREN'T."

As Stan was wrapping up his CPA education, Deloitte launched a new AI and data team and sought curious, tech-savvy minds to join. Stan raised his hand, and his career leapt into the future.

From money to data

Stan's first thought: What does a CPA even do in the world of AI?

"I don't know how to code. Sure, I'm very nerdy, and I like to learn things on my own, but I don't see the exact value that I can provide," he thought.

A mentor reframed it for him. "Accountants use established procedures to manage money securely—processes for tracking, detailed understanding of movement, and clear rules for approval," says Stan. "These same robust accounting principles and practices can be directly translated to data. The act of replacing 'money' with 'data' allows an accountant to apply their existing expertise in a new domain, making them highly valuable as a data governance expert."

Instead of trying to become a full-stack developer overnight, Stan leaned into his CPA foundation. "You can always learn the tech stuff," he says. "But having a foundation in business gives you a massive advantage."

For Stan, the future of accounting will be applying traditional skills in new ways. "That's the massive opportunity for future CPAs," he says. "Find what matters to you. Innovation happens in every field—sustainability, construction, and even gaming—but you still need someone to explain all the nuances to businesspeople. That's the power of the CPA designation."

Today, as a leader in AI and data delivery at Deloitte Canada, he works with clients across industries to implement generative AI—all from his home office in Edmonton, often within reach of a virtual reality headset or gaming console.

Gaming, curiosity, and agility

Stan's passion for tech started young. "Growing up, I was the video game nerd...but I didn't see a way to make a job of it," he says.

He followed his curiosity and developed what he now sees as the most critical trait for CPAs entering the AI age: his ability to adapt, learn, and unlearn in constantly changing times, what he calls the agility quotient (AQ). In Stan's view, AQ is becoming the new EQ: an essential skillset for navigating disruption and staying future ready.

Stan sums up AI's impact with the 80/20 rule: "We've always spent 80 per cent of our time gathering information or preparing things so we can provide 20 per cent of the value."

AI flips that equation. Suddenly, the prep work is automated, and you can focus on thinking, analyzing, and making decisions. "That's the real value an accounting designation provides," Stan says.

And, of course, the question on everyone's mind: will AI replace accounting jobs? Stan doesn't think so. "It's not AI that's going to replace people," he says. "It's people using AI who will replace those who aren't.... You have to embrace the scary moments, and if you do, there's a lot of really exciting stuff that comes out of it."

AI isn't about replacing CPAs, it's about redefining what it means to be one. By combining tech-savviness with strong business judgment, CPAs are uniquely positioned to lead through uncertainty.

"I don't call myself lazy anymore. I've been coached out of that," Stan says with a laugh. "I call myself efficient now."

How to build your tech muscles

If you're wondering how to start building AI and tech skills without learning how to code, Stan's advice is to keep it **SAFE:**

Stay curious: Use AI in your everyday life. Ask ChatGPT for recipe ideas. Get Google Gemini to help write a party invitation. It's low stakes, so you learn without pressure.

Ask questions: If you don't understand it, someone else probably doesn't either.

Find balance: Don't default to high tech. Sometimes the old-school way still works better and brings out your authentic self.

Embrace discomfort: Be okay with messing up. Change is hard. Learning is awkward. That's part of the process.

THE CPA CERTIFICATION PROGRAM: WHAT STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW

The CPA Certification Program—which consists of education, practical experience, and a final examination—is designed to provide future Chartered Professional Accountants (CPAs) with the knowledge and skills to succeed in business.

DEGREE AND PREREQUISITES

An undergraduate degree (in any discipline) from a recognized post-secondary institution is required for admission to the CPA Professional Education Program (CPA PEP). In addition to an undergraduate degree, prerequisite courses must be successfully completed.

A transfer credit guide for Alberta post-secondary institutions is available online at **cpaalberta.ca/Become-a-CPA/Transfer-Credit-Guide**.

CPA PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

The CPA Professional Education Program (CPA PEP) is a graduate-level program delivered part-time over two years. The program includes six modules designed to develop six technical competencies and five enabling competencies. In Alberta, the national CPA PEP is delivered by the CPA Western School of Business (CPAWSB). CPAWSB delivers CPA PEP to all candidates in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut who are pursuing their CPA.

Candidates will take CPA PEP while working in a relevant position. For candidates, their CPA PEP education, coupled with practical experience, will complement the development of CPA competencies.

CPA PEP uses a variety of learning methods to help students develop their skills. The program combines online learning, self-study, classroom learning, and teamwork to help CPA candidates develop the competencies expected of Canada's pre-eminent professional accountants.

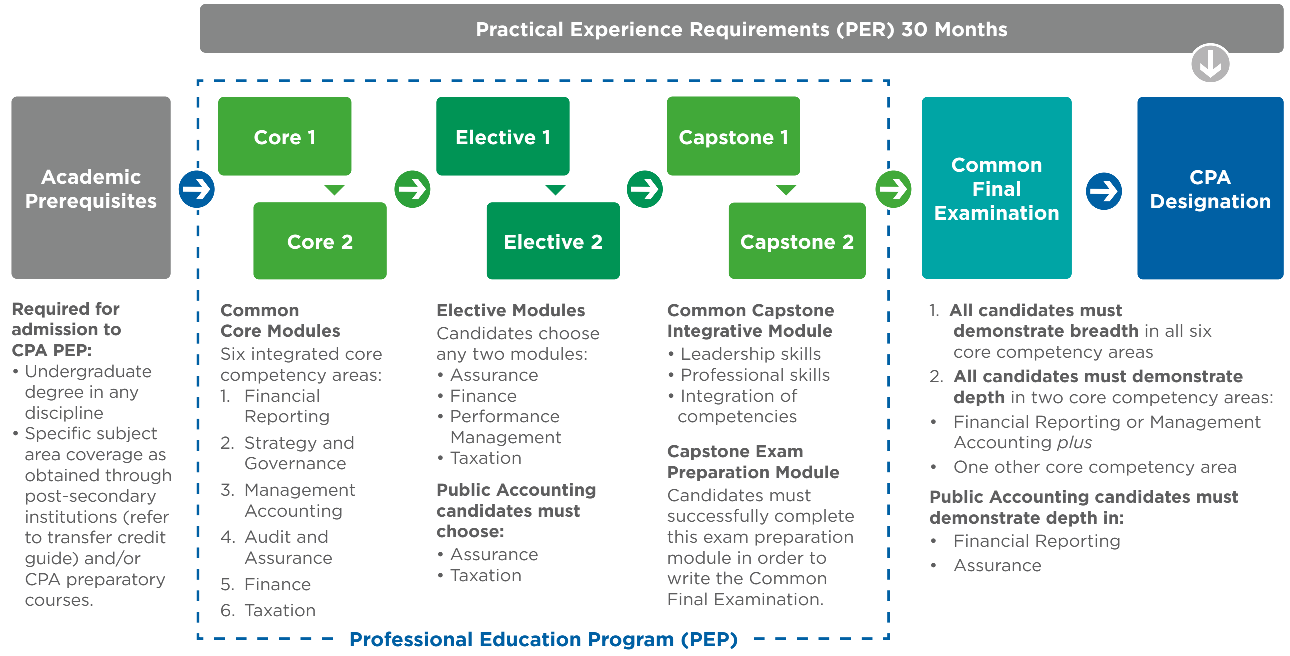
Modules

Six modules comprise CPA PEP. The program begins with two core modules that are common to all CPA candidates, followed by two elective modules (of which there are four options). Upon completion of these four modules, all candidates are required to complete the two "capstone" modules.

The modules are:

- Two common core modules, which all CPA candidates must take, focusing on the development of competencies in management and financial accounting, and the integration of the six core technical competency areas.
- Two elective modules, which allow CPA candidates to develop deeper skills in their areas of career interest. Four electives are offered: assurance, performance management, tax, and finance. All candidates must choose two of the electives; candidates pursuing careers in public accounting must choose assurance and tax.

CPA PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM OVERVIEW



- A capstone integrative module that focuses on the development of the enabling competencies, such as leadership and professional skills, and the integration of core competencies.
- A capstone examination preparation module, which prepares CPA candidates for the Common Final Examination (CFE).

REGISTRATION INTO THE CPA PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Students are encouraged to apply for conditional acceptance into the CPA Professional Education Program (CPA PEP) prior to the completion of their required courses and degree. Registration as a CPA candidate is required prior to registering for specific modules; however, candidates are encouraged to register for modules once they've submitted their application.

Once a student has applied for CPA PEP, there is a registration validation period in which transcript assessment, verification of degree, and verification of prerequisites will occur. After verification, the student may then participate in Core One.

Module registration deadlines are typically six to eight weeks in advance of the module start date. Please refer to the CPA Western School of Business (CPAWSB) website for key module registration deadlines: **cpawsb.ca/current-learners/cpa-pep/schedules**.

For more information about becoming a CPA, please visit cpaalberta.ca; call CPA Alberta at 1-800-232-9406 (toll-free); or email **recruitment@cpaalberta.ca**.

To inquire about your eligibility for CPA PEP and admission support, please visit cpawsb.ca; call CPAWSB at 1-855-306-9390 (toll-free); or email **cpaapplication@cpawsb.ca**.

ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE CPA PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Bridging into the CPA Professional Education Program

For students who have completed their degrees but have not obtained the necessary prerequisite courses for the CPA Professional Education Program (CPA PEP), or for students who do not have a degree,* there are two options:

1. CPA preparatory courses

CPA preparatory courses are a suite of 14 courses that provide all knowledge requirements for admission to CPA PEP. These courses are available in an accelerated format and are delivered part-time, with options for self-study, online, and classroom learning. Students complete only the courses they require. ▹

Students are eligible for enrolment if they have successfully completed one year (30 credit hours) of post-secondary studies or three years of relevant work experience.

**Students are still required to complete a degree before admission to CPA PEP.*

Please contact CPA Alberta at 1-800-232-9406 or email **recruitment@cpaalberta.ca** to learn more about preparatory courses.

2. Prerequisites through a post-secondary institution
Students can register for the business and accounting courses they are missing through a post-secondary institution approved by the CPA Western School of Business (CPAWSB). A transfer credit guide is available online at **cpaalberta.ca/Become-a-CPA/Transfer-Credit-Guide**. Students will only take the courses they need for entrance into CPA PEP.

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

In addition to formal education, candidates are required to complete a term of relevant practical experience. The knowledge and competencies gained through practical experience complement those developed through CPA PEP. To develop as a professional accountant, CPA candidates must gain relevant, paid employment that is progressively challenging. For the period of practical experience to begin, individuals need to be registered with the CPA Western School of Business (CPAWSB) as a CPA candidate, be employed in a qualifying position, and have a mentor.

There are two routes to obtain practical experience requirements:

- **The Pre-approved Program Route (PPR)** in which future CPAs gain relevant experience by choosing a position from a wide range of employers pre-approved by the profession.
- **The Experience Verification Route (EVR)** in which future CPAs demonstrate competence and gain relevant experience at a chosen employer.

Future CPAs can gain experience through either route or a combination of both. The profession may accept up to one year of experience earned prior to registering with the profession. The minimum practical experience requirement for both routes is 30 months; this includes an allowance of up to 20 weeks of time away from work (including vacation time).

There are five common elements that support both routes:

1. Candidates gain relevant experience and develop as a professional accountant in a minimum of 30 months.*
2. Candidates' experience must be appropriately supervised.
3. Candidates must record detailed reports at regular intervals.
4. Candidates must meet and discuss their progress at least semi-annually with a CPA mentor.
5. Candidates' experience is assessed by the CPA profession.

**Practical experience requirements for public accounting practice and professional accounting practice are recognized separately from practical experience requirements for certification.*

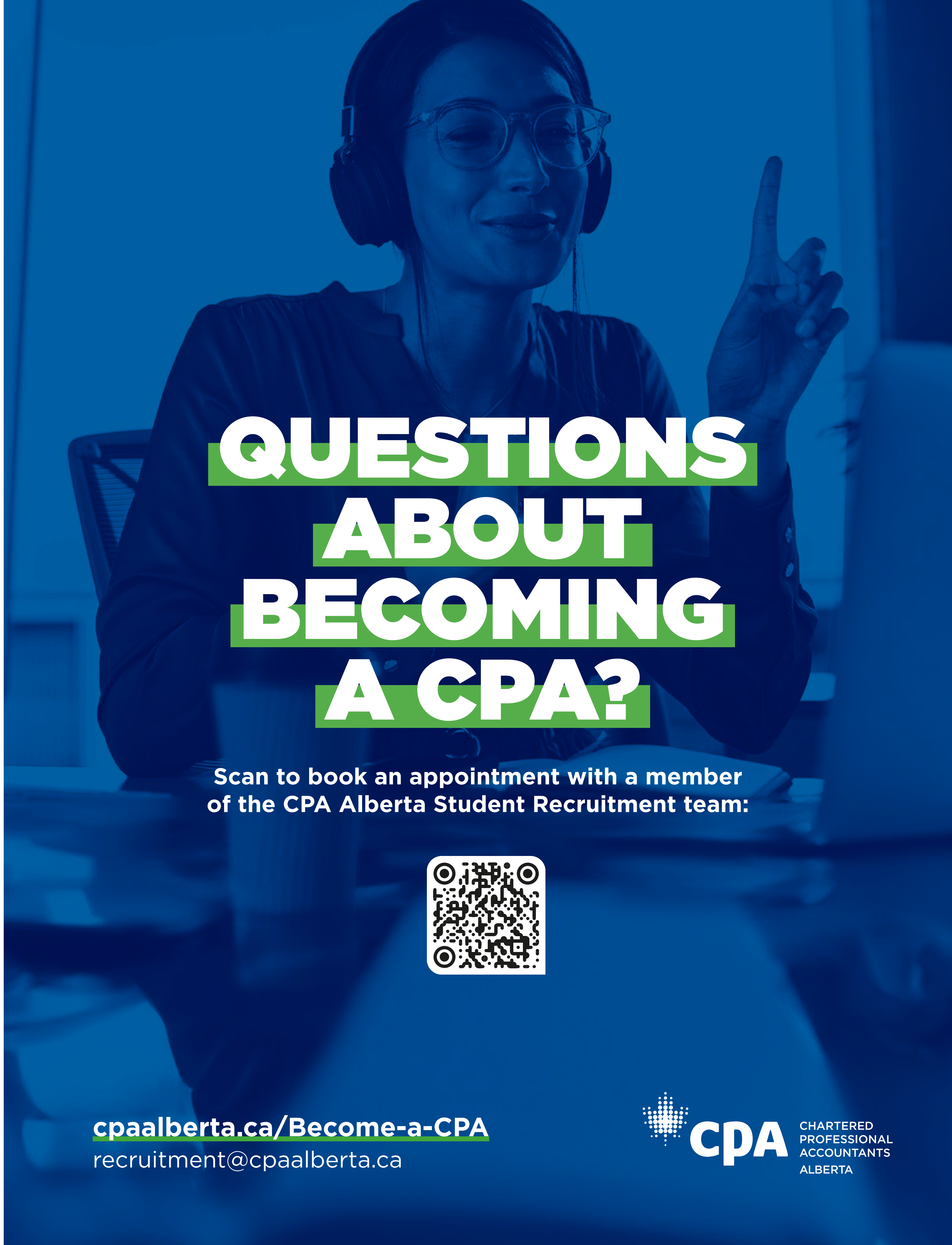
CPA PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

This tool is intended for individuals who have not yet had their experience assessed by a provincial/regional body but want to understand how their current or prospective position might align with the CPA technical competency requirements for purposes of the experience verification route. To access this self-assessment tool, visit **pert.cpa-services.org/student/TrialAssessment**.

CPA MENTORSHIP

Mentorship is a mandatory component of the CPA Practical Experience Requirements (PER). The focus of the CPA mentorship program is to help future CPAs achieve their enabling competencies. CPA candidates who work in the Pre-approved Program Route (PPR) will be matched with a CPA mentor by the organization that offers the program. CPA candidates who choose the Experience Verification Route (EVR) are required to seek out their own CPA mentor in order to find a successful fit. Recognition may be given for a total of up to 12 months of experience earned prior to registering with the profession. After that time, the qualifying period of practical experience cannot begin until CPA candidates have a CPA mentor. CPA Canada has developed a number of valuable resources to assist CPA candidates in finding a mentor.

Please visit **cpacanada.ca/practicalexperience** for more information.



EARN WHILE YOU LEARN

Why you should apply for a CPA Education Foundation scholarship or internship

BY KEVIN SPILA

You've likely heard of—and have been encouraged to apply for—scholarships. And probably internships too. But did you know the CPA Education Foundation offers both?

It's true! The Foundation funds more than $200,000 for 80-plus scholarships and awards every year. Many of the awards are offered through specific post-secondary institutions, but several are offered directly by the Foundation.

There are also multiple paid internship positions available for high school and post-secondary students through the CPA Education Foundation's Sparking Great Careers initiative. This initiative was developed to spark an interest in the accounting profession among those who have a nose for business but didn't have any direct ties to the CPA profession.

"That's all very interesting, but why should I apply?" you may ask.

Good question. And there are several good reasons! Read on, and when you're ready to apply, visit cpaalberta.ca/scholarships

Why apply ?

Scholarships	Sparking Great Careers internships
Free money: use it where you need it (living expenses, books, tuition, etc.)	Get paid while you learn: while some internships are volunteer, these are paid positions
Worry-free study: spend more time studying and less time worrying about money	Work alongside real CPAs doing real accounting work: you won't just be filing papers, you'll be doing real accounting work
Debt reduction: never repay scholarships, unlike student loans	Learn what CPAs do: think you know what accountants do? Think again with opportunities across a variety of industries, workplaces, niches that showcase the breadth of possibility that comes with a CPA
Resume cachet: show off your hard work and achievements to future employers	Gain valuable work experience: enjoy water cooler small talk in a real office!
New opportunities: access educational opportunities and free up your time for extracurricular activities	Build your network: meet new people, learn from their experience and insight, and who knows where it will take you and what doors may open

For more information on the CPA Education Foundation's scholarships and internship opportunities, including how to apply, visit cpaalberta.ca/scholarships

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Catching up with Isra Tanweer, a past CPA Campus Ambassador

Name: Isra Tanweer
University: University of Lethbridge
Years since being an ambassador: 6

What have you been up to the last six years?

Six years ago, I began my bachelor's degree at the University of Lethbridge, geared to start my CPA journey. During my studies, I had the opportunity to complete a co-op term in the Internal Audit department at Imperial Oil, where I acquired invaluable skills and industry exposure. After graduating, I joined Deloitte Calgary full time in the Audit practice. The knowledge and experience I gained there, along with the resources and support, were instrumental in my success in the CPA program.

Along the way, I formed lifelong friendships with fellow CPA candidates and benefited from exceptional mentorship.

Currently, I am a Senior Consultant in Deloitte's financial crime practice.

How did being a CPA Campus Ambassador influence where you are today?

I assumed the role of CPA ambassador during COVID, addressing the challenges of maintaining campus presence during lockdowns. This role eased me onto the CPA career path and enabled me to answer students' questions effectively. As my initial formal engagement with the profession, it provided a comprehensive understanding of the varied opportunities for CPAs, reinforcing my commitment to pursue the designation—dreaming a big dream!

Do you have any advice for future CPAs?

First and foremost, be proud of your CPA journey, whether you're still completing preparatory courses, in CPA PEP, or have successfully passed the CFE. It takes significant hard work and determination to reach each step of the journey. Remember, you are in control of your career. Obtaining your CPA designation is a powerful step that diversifies your options and goals, opening a range of opportunities. Stay focused and continue to leverage your skills and knowledge for future success. Additionally, don't hesitate to reach out to others with questions or for opportunities that interest you—networking is essential for securing your dream job.

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