



CPA

CHARTERED
PROFESSIONAL
ACCOUNTANTS
ALBERTA



CPA

A **world** of opportunities

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For many internationally trained professionals, deciding on where to start or take your career path in Canada can seem daunting at first. But there is good news: the CPA designation can be your passport to a world of fulfilling career opportunities.

The CPA designation is Canada's globally-recognized accounting and business credential that provides professionals with the skills and acumen to be leaders, decision makers, analysts, managers, controllers, consultants, entrepreneurs, and more. Simply put, becoming a CPA qualifies you for a variety of exciting opportunities in any role, niche, and sector—both nationally and abroad.

Alberta CPAs come from all around the world. From Africa to Asia, South America to Europe and beyond, many of them grew up, studied, and worked abroad before moving to Canada.

The *CPA: A World of Opportunities* publication highlights the inspiring experiences of five of these CPAs. While their individual stories are unique, they each leveraged their existing qualifications to pursue the CPA designation after moving to Alberta. Today, they use that valuable combination of skills to positively contribute to organizations across the province and credit their CPA designation as a key component to their success.

Their stories emphasize the value of having a mentor; provide tips on how to juggle family and career responsibilities; and prove that it is possible to overcome a language barrier and enjoy career success in a new country. The stories also showcase a valuable perspective on how to adapt to the Canadian culture and provide insight into how the CPA designation complements other skillsets.

Despite their different experiences, the CPAs featured in the pages of this publication all agree on one thing: pursuing the CPA designation was challenging, yet well worth it.

Their stories are a testament to the fact that, as an internationally trained professional, you do not have to start from scratch. In combination with your previous, hard-earned credentials, the CPA designation is a springboard to a world of rewarding career opportunities that offer stability, growth, and excellent compensation. So, consider taking your career in Canada to the next step by pursuing a CPA designation—it's a surefire way to "travel" to a new professional destination!



BALANCING FAMILY AND CAREER

Kemi Awoniyi Ige shares how reuniting her family led to new learning opportunities and connections

By Sharon Ruyter | Photography by Trudie Lee Photography



“
My tip is to connect with your cultural community because there are a lot of networks there. Reach out and find people with similar interests and backgrounds.”

Financial reporting. Working with auditors. Reconciliation. This is a typical day in the professional life of Kemi Awoniyi Ige CPA, CGA, FCCA, Senior Financial Analyst at Canlin Energy. But life did not always look that way.

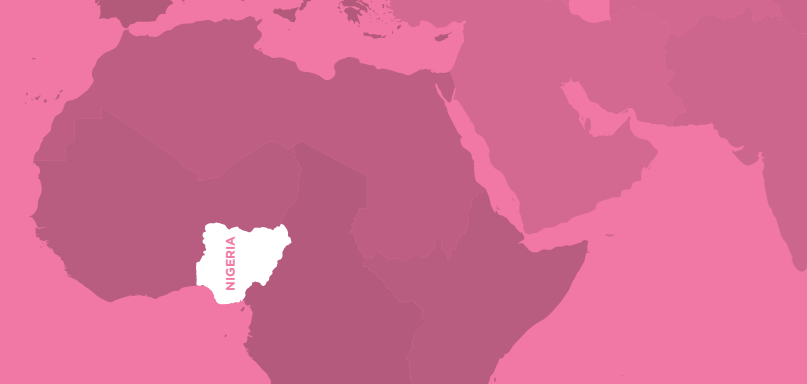
When Kemi moved to Houston, Texas, from Nigeria to pursue her Master's in Management Information Systems, she never imagined she would end up in Canada. However, in 2007 (at the height of one of Alberta's economic booms), Kemi's husband found a job opportunity in Calgary, and she relocated with their children to be with him.

Young children have a remarkable ability to adapt and make friends. But integrating into a new community, especially in a new country, can be more challenging for parents. Kemi also started pursuing her CPA designation after the move and admits that juggling family responsibilities and her studies wasn't easy. "At that time, I had to make sacrifices. It was hard when my kids were younger because I didn't have a lot of time," says Kemi.

While studying, Kemi made a point to form study groups with her classmates and ask for help from those around her. She credits the support of her workplace, community, and family as essential to her success and encourages other internationally trained professionals to rely on supportive connections. "My tip is to connect with your cultural community because there are a lot of networks there. Reach out and find people with similar interests and backgrounds," says Kemi.

Kemi believes her designation has set her apart in an evolving and competitive job market. "In the past few years, there has been a downturn in the economy. I believe people who have their designation have more job security because there is legitimacy that comes with having those letters behind your name," she says.

Kemi's days of balancing studies and childcare may be over, but the experience remains fresh in her mind. "That is why I love being a mentor; I want to give someone the supportive experience I had."



BEING IN THE MIDDLE OF TWO CULTURES

How do you find your place when you feel like you don't belong to your new—or old—home?

By Sarah Maludzinski | Photography by Laughing Dog Photography



“

I'm not a chef, but after I moved to Canada, I learned, and I brought with me the culture of cooking traditional Mexican dishes.”

When **Carlos Bautista CPA, CA, CPC (MEXICO)**, and **Silvia Perez CPA, CA, CPC (MEXICO)** moved to Edmonton in 2006, they knew exactly one person in this city of approximately then-730,000—an old co-worker from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in Mexico City.

After visiting Canada in 2005, Carlos and Silvia fell in love with the beauty of the country. Accepting job offers with PwC in Edmonton was a natural next step in fulfilling their new dream of moving to Canada.

Now almost 15 years later, Carlos, Manager of Financial Reporting at ATCO Gas, reminisces on the move and a big difference he noticed right away: “People take care of each other here.

“In Mexico, people are friendly, but it's a different kind of friendly,” he says. “We were part of the community as soon as we moved here, even though my English was not as good as it is right now.”

For the first year and a half, Carlos and his wife were in the “honeymoon phase” of moving to Canada. And then the doubts started to set in as they watched their peers in Mexico get promotions while their careers remained steady.

But Carlos says the hardest part was feeling like he didn't belong anywhere. “You feel like you don't belong to Canada. At the same time, you feel like you don't

belong to Mexico either. You're in the middle of two cultures.”

Around the third year, things changed, and Carlos knew Canada was home. By then he had opportunities to attend a controllership program, connect with a professional coach (who also happens to be an accountant), and work with CPAs from other cultures who were succeeding. Carlos asked himself: “If they can do it, why can't I?”

The biggest thing that helped, though? Carlos brought part of his culture with him to Canada. Or, rather, he learned more about his own culture after moving to Canada. “I'm not a chef,” he says, “but after I moved to Canada, I learned, and I brought with me the culture of cooking traditional Mexican dishes.

“Back in Mexico, you don't need to know how to cook Mexican food because you can go and buy it. Here, it was shocking because the food does not taste the same.”

So Carlos called up his grandma and learned how to cook his favourite Mexican dishes. Now, he loves cooking real Mexican food when he and his wife entertain friends.

“It does take time to adapt,” says Carlos. “But one day, you feel like you're doing it, and it's not a sacrifice anymore.”

Carlos Bautista CPA, CA, CPC (MEXICO)



BREAKING DOWN LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Viviana Quintero-Browne compares learning a new language to eating—you take one bite at a time

By Quinta Iticka | Photography by Trudie Lee Photography





COLOMBIA

It takes patience, courage, and resilience to move to a new country, learn a new language, and pursue a career in that language.

Viviana Quintero-Browne CPA, CMA is fluent in Spanish and English. She has enjoyed a long, successful career in the oil and gas and agriculture industries. In many of her professional roles, she has reported directly to VPs and CEOs. But she readily admits that despite being technically strong in accounting and finance, learning English was challenging.

"In Colombia, Spanish is the predominant language. Then I moved to Western Canada where English is spoken 24 hours a day. Nothing prepared me for it," says Viviana.

Similarities exist between English and Spanish. Both languages use the Roman alphabet, which helps build a phonological foundation. English-Spanish cognates—words that look, sound, and have a similar meaning in both languages—can also serve as a good starting point for a Spanish-speaking person learning English.

Yet, Viviana says there are significant differences between the two languages. At first glance, some Spanish words are deceptively familiar. "Exito," for example, looks like "exit" but actually means "success." And "pie" means "foot" in Spanish.

"There aren't many Spanish words that end with a consonant," says Viviana. "Spanish speakers have a hard time pronouncing the ending of words, like the *d* in 'hard' and the *g* in 'thing.' This was a big struggle for me. I still drop the ending of words when I get excited and need to get my point across."

When Viviana first moved to Canada over 20 years ago, she studied English by translating everyday vocabulary and technical accounting terms to Spanish. That proved overwhelming, so she made a conscious decision to fully understand concepts in English before cross-referencing and translating them into Spanish.

"At the time, my written English was very good but my pronunciation wasn't. So most of my communication at work, including presentations, was done in writing. I thought, even if I mispronounce a word, they can read it," says Viviana. "But as the presentations got bigger and included Q&As, it became impossible to write everything. I had to practice, practice, practice."

Currently a Project Manager of Finance at United Farmers of Alberta, Viviana has no issues communicating with her team. She feels fortunate to be bilingual, an added advantage that many CPAs with international credentials have. Their bilingualism (or multilingualism, in some cases), combined with their CPA skills, sets them apart and helps them succeed, especially in today's diverse workforce.



IT ALL ADDS UP

The CPA designation + your international credentials = success!

The CPA Certification Program—which consists of the CPA Professional Education Program (CPA PEP), practical experience, and the Common Final Examination (CFE)—is designed to provide future CPAs with the knowledge and skills to succeed in any role they take on.

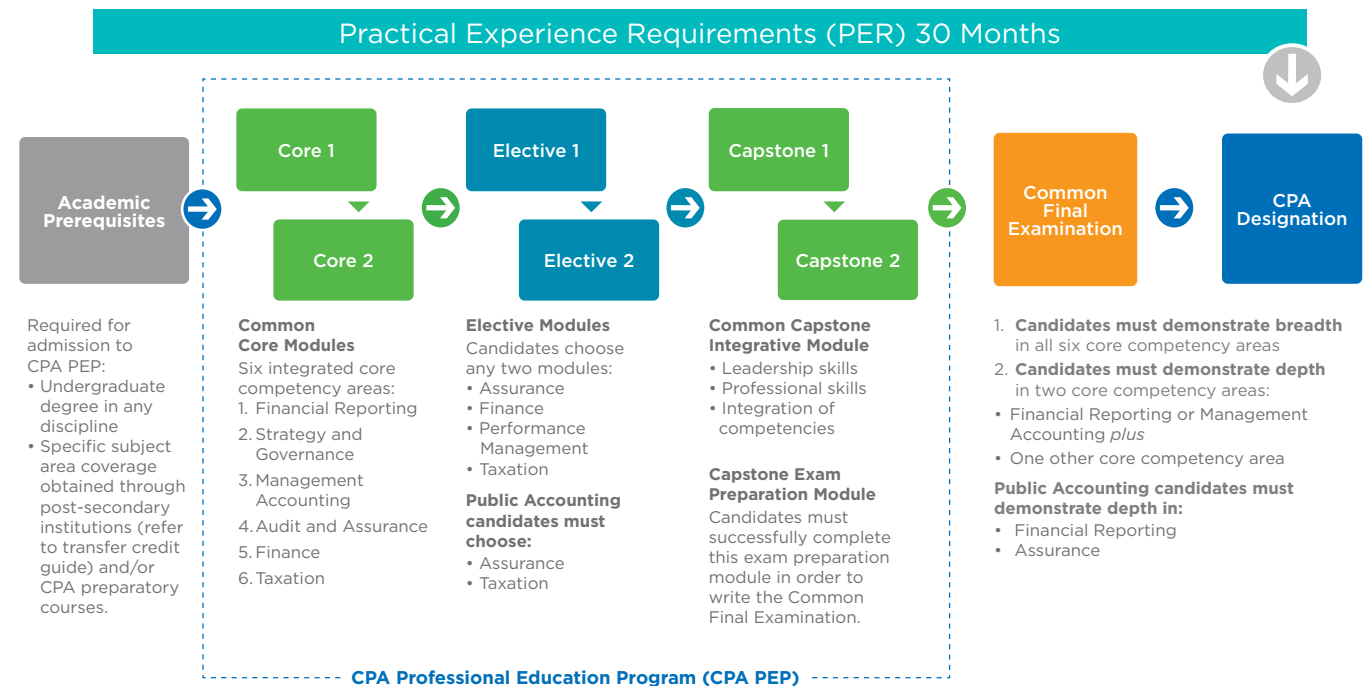
CPA PEP is a part-time, two-year, post-graduate program consisting of six modules. The modules are delivered through a blend of online and classroom learning, and self-study. The CPA Western School of Business (CPAWSB) delivers the program in Western Canada.

To determine if your international credentials meet the entrance requirements into CPA PEP, you must first create a profile at my.cpaweb.ca, and request and pay for a transcript assessment by CPAWSB. The next step is to submit a third-party verification. To do this, contact World Education Services Canada and request a course-by-course International Credential Advantage Package (WES ICAP). Indicate that it is for the CPA Western School of Business for educational purposes. If you submit a third-party verification that is not a WES ICAP, CPAWSB will need to also receive your official transcripts directly from the issuing institutions or organizations. (Note: If you have a Canadian degree, you may not need a third-party assessment for your international credentials.)

Based on the third-party report and official transcripts, CPAWSB determines if you are eligible to enroll in CPA PEP. CPAWSB also indicates any outstanding academic prerequisites you might need to fulfill through CPA preparatory courses or at a post-secondary institution.

For more information on how to get started, visit www.cpaweb.ca/students-and-candidates/international-applicants.

PATH TO BECOMING A CPA



BRIDGING THE PROFES- SIONAL GAP

An IT professional with an engineering background explains how the CPA designation complements diverse skillsets

By Quinta Iticka | Photography by Laughing Dog Photography



I see engineering and accounting as complementary skillsets. CPAs are the financial engineers of businesses.”

The CPA designation is prestigious. Combining it with other credentials can be even more impactful, providing a professional with the unique ability to solve business problems from different perspectives.

Mason Darabi CPA, Venture Partner at Blockchain Founders Fund, believes having a multi-faceted skillset is important in today's ever-changing business world. He has a degree in mechanical engineering from Iran and is enthusiastic about information technology and entrepreneurship.

Early in Mason's career, he worked as a web designer and subsequently became involved in major Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) implementations. This provided him with an opportunity to see the full spectrum of how big projects are implemented from design to execution. "I was fascinated by how people with multiple professional skillsets successfully execute these projects," says Mason. "I believe the solutions to complex business, societal, and economic problems require people with diverse backgrounds."

Mason now defines himself as an IT professional with an accounting background who helps businesses navigate digital transformation; but he remembers being unsettled about his

professional future until he enrolled in a master's program for entrepreneurship and innovation at the University of Oslo, Norway. "That was probably the brightest period of my life, because it gave me a compass to pave my way forward," says Mason.

"Becoming a CPA wasn't a career switch. I see engineering and accounting as complementary skillsets. Tech entrepreneurs are usually good at developing technology. But they may lack the business acumen required to take their ideas to the next level. CPAs are the financial engineers of businesses. Their contributions, coupled with a great product, can be instrumental in commercializing technology."

A CPA and an entrepreneur at heart, Mason dreams of building a marketplace for intangible assets. "Companies spend billions of dollars developing intellectual properties that are often not recognized in financial statements. As a result, they cannot fully monetize these assets. I would like to narrow that gap," says Mason.

Reflecting on the immigration process, Mason says it is like an entrepreneurial journey. "As an immigrant, you have to build things one step at a time. It is a marathon, not a sprint. Have a plan. Be patient. Seek out mentors. And aim high."





GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

Will Christensen gives back by mentoring internationally trained professionals

By Andrea Michaud | Photography by Trudie Lee Photography



“**[Internationally trained professionals] have always impressed me with their ability to be tenacious in pursuing their career objectives.**”



Adapting to life in a new country can be challenging. Language barriers, culture shock, cold winters, and even a sense of isolation might hinder internationally trained professionals from immediately pursuing their goals in Canada. Seeking out and connecting with a volunteer mentor can ease the transition.

Will Christensen CPA, CA has been using his personal experiences as an immigrant to mentor new Canadian CPAs for the past six years. When Will transferred from Deloitte’s office in Brisbane, Australia to Calgary, Canada in 2001, he didn’t anticipate many of the challenges he encountered. Although the two countries have many similarities, the culture shock was intense. Even small talk was completely different. “I had to ask people to explain to me what they just said,” recalls Will.

Now a Manager in Counterparty Risk Reporting at TC Energy Corporation, Will still remembers the challenges he faced as a newcomer without a professional network. This awareness is what inspired

him to start volunteering as a mentor. Will helps mentees work through career decisions and grow their personal networks—and sometimes, he simply gives them a shoulder to cry on. He helps mentees figure out how to get the most out of their jobs, even if they aren’t currently working in their ideal role.

Will recalls a mentee who was considering switching to the not-for-profit sector but didn’t know if this was the right move. Will’s coaching and guidance helped the mentee find success in his career. “He felt like it was a great decision, and it was rewarding for me to watch him take on new challenges,” says Will. Along with the satisfaction of seeing mentees succeed, Will learns from his mentees and is often humbled and inspired by their perseverance through any challenge.

Will wants his mentees to know that they’re not alone and that others have gone through similar experiences. He recommends new immigrants take advantage of the services available to them, including mentorship opportunities.

BREAKING DOWN MRA, RMA, AND MOU

Although most candidates achieve their CPA designation through the path outlined on page 15, agreements exist to allow members of recognized international accounting bodies to become Canadian CPAs and registered members of CPA Alberta.

Reciprocal Membership Agreements (RMAs)

Members in good standing of the following recognized accounting bodies may be eligible to obtain the Canadian CPA designation through a RMA:

- Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales
- Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand
- Chartered Accountants Ireland
- Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland
- The Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants
- The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants
- Institute of Chartered Accountants of Zimbabwe

Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs)

Members in good standing of the following recognized accounting bodies may be eligible to obtain the Canadian CPA designation through a MRA:

- Instituto Mexicano de Contadores Públicos
- American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (selected states)
- Chartered Institute of Management Accountants*
- Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (expires April 30, 2021)
- CPA Ireland*
- CPA Australia*

**These agreements are being negotiated and may change at any time.*

For more information about MRAs and RMAs, visit www.cpaalberta.ca/Become-a-CPA/Internationally-Trained-Individuals.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Members of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Pakistan may qualify for the CPA designation through a MOU. Individuals who apply through this route must write and pass the CFE and satisfy practical experience requirements.

The MOU is administered by the CPA Western School of Business.

For more information, email cpaapplication@cpawsb.ca or call 1 866 420.2350.



“CANADIANIZE” YOUR RESUME WHILE HIGHLIGHTING YOUR INTERNATIONAL CREDENTIALS

A resume is a crucial part of the job application process. It demonstrates an applicant’s ability to perform a specific role, and it should pique the recruiter’s interest in order to secure a job interview.

The Canadian resume format is vastly different from the one used in many countries. This means those seeking employment in Alberta need to stick to the Canadian format to maximize their odds of success.

To help you “Canadianize” your resume while playing up your international credentials, CPA Alberta’s Career Services team offers the following tips:

The dos

- **Do** use Canadian words and grammar and incorporate action verbs such as analyzed, audited, budgeted, balanced, and capitalized into your resume. Avoid words such as whilst, forthwith, therein, wherefore, etc.
- **Do** optimize your resume for Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)—software that collects, filters, and categorizes resumes in a database before an employer looks at them. You can achieve this by including key skills in your resume and avoiding complex templates and advanced formatting. Simple formatting is always better! ATS-friendly resumes stand a better chance of being reviewed by a person.
- **Do** state your accomplishments, not just tasks. Show the value of your work with measurable results, outcomes, or any data that demonstrate the scope of your work.
- **Do** provide a brief explanation under a role to clarify its Canadian equivalent, if required. Job titles from overseas may not always match standard Canadian titles.
- **Do** highlight your bilingual skills and your mastery of particular computer applications that are relevant to the position you’re applying for.

The don’ts

- **Do not** include personal, religious, family, or non-relevant protected information that does not pertain to professional employment.
- **Do not** write your resume in first person; avoid personal pronouns such as I, my, and me.
- **Do not** start the resume with an objective statement. Instead, start with a professional summary stating specific skills that are relevant to the job.
- **Do not** list specific international locations where you gained past work experience, if you are concerned about hiring bias. Simply stating “overseas” as a location is acceptable.
- **Do not** sign your resume.

CPA Alberta’s Career Services team offers a variety of resources that help CPAs and candidates effectively market themselves in the Alberta job market.

For more information, visit cpaalberta.ca/Services/Career-Centre.



**CPA SNACK
& CHAT INFO
SESSIONS**

(Now available in a remote format!)

You've got questions, we've got answers! Our virtual Snack & Chat Info Sessions are an excellent opportunity for your clients to become familiar with the requirements of the CPA Professional Education Program (CPA PEP).

Unfortunately, as these are online sessions, we're currently unable to bring snacks, but we still have lots of great info to share.

Snack & Chat Info Sessions typically cover program prerequisites, the admission process, the CPA PEP structure, practical experience requirements, and resources available to CPAs, candidates, and employers.

Book your session today!
Email EmployerRelations@cpaalberta.ca to get started.

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