

ACCOUNT



ABILITY

A RIGOROUS CURRICULUM, EXCEPTIONAL FACULTY AND REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCES
ADD UP TO A HIGH-QUALITY ACCOUNTING PROGRAM AT CANISIUS

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Jennifer A. Moore '03, a certified public accountant (CPA) and manager at Ernst & Young LLP, had six job offers before Thanksgiving of her senior year. An honors student, Moore earned dual degrees in accounting and accounting information systems (AIS). "It was such a great relief to know that I had a job after graduation."

Situations like Moore's are not unique. "Our graduates are in high demand," says **Joseph B. O'Donnell, PhD, CPA, CISA**, chair and associate professor of accounting at Canisius. "In fact, our program is so well known and respected that all major accounting firms in Buffalo recruit on our campus."

Part of what makes Canisius accounting graduates so attractive is quantifiable. According to the National Association of the State Boards of Accountancy, Canisius alumni with bachelor's degrees in accounting earned the highest pass rate percentage (61.5 percent) in New York State on the auditing portion of the 2007 CPA exam (schools with a minimum of 20 candidates). Over the last 20 years, Canisius has frequently led the state in the percentage of students passing parts of the CPA exam.

Photo (left-right):

Accountants Thomas R. Emmerling '75, Joseph B. O'Donnell, Jennifer A. Moore '03 and Edward J. Gress have fun with an old-fashioned adding machine. This former tool of the accounting trade has since been replaced by much more sophisticated computer technology.

These credentials make accounting graduates hot commodities, not only in Western New York but in every market. **Mary R. Packman '02, CPA**, who earned the highest composite score on the New York State 2002 CPA exam, is a senior financial analyst at Nike in Portland, OR. **Katherine D. List '08**, is an associate at PricewaterhouseCoopers in the Washington, D.C. Metro Office and **Grant W. Whieldon '09** will begin his career at PricewaterhouseCoopers in New York City after he graduates this May.

When Whieldon earns his degree, he will join the ranks of the nearly 3,500 accounting alumni. Accounting was one of the first programs to be offered by the founding fathers of Canisius College and remains among its most challenging today.

"The discipline itself is rigorous but the Canisius program takes it to an even higher level," says **Thomas R. Emmerling '75, CPA**, managing partner at Dopkins & Company LLP, and vice chair of the Canisius College Council on Accountancy. "It provides students with a strong curriculum, excellent faculty and real-world experiences."

Those three facts add up to a program that creates a balanced accountant. Well before New York State raised the bar on the required curriculum for accounting majors, Canisius made sure

courses such as accounting theory were part of its bottom line. **Edward J. Gress, PhD, ACPA**, professor of accounting who served as department chair for half of his 32 years at the college, says "These courses are designed to make students think and reason."

They also prepare students for bright futures.

"As a public accountant, you become a trusted advisor to your client," says Moore. "It's a powerful position to assume when you are 21 or 22-years old but the education I received at Canisius provided me with the confidence necessary to be a success and gave my clients confidence in my abilities."

DEGREE PROGRAMS AT CANISIUS

- BS in professional accounting
- BS/MBA in accounting
- MBA in professional accounting
- BS in accounting
- BS in accounting information systems



The Canisius Accounting Department was among the first to introduce a major in accounting information systems (AIS). The program, which integrates accounting and technology, is a rapidly growing field with great long-term potential. "An AIS background can be a deal maker when applying for a job," says O'Donnell, who played a central role in the design of the innovative program. He notes that Canisius' AIS program is the only one of its kind in the region and one of only 30 such programs in the country.

"With my AIS knowledge, I can talk to the people in the Information Systems Department, understand what they are doing and assess the risk within an application," Moore explains. "That knowledge puts me a step above."

Still, the rigor of the accounting curriculum isn't for everyone. "You need to be the best and the brightest to get through this program," says O'Donnell. "However, those who do leave the program usually decide to do so early in their studies and many then choose to pursue another business degree at the college."

In addition to a rigorous curriculum, top-notch faculty keep the accounting program on the cutting-edge of what is happening in the field.

Alumni agree that the program's success can be credited to the core group of accounting faculty who have been with the department for many years. They include professors O'Donnell, Gress, **Ian J. Redpath, JD, LL.M.; Robert R. Davis '61, PhD, CPA; George F. Kermis '70, PhD, CPA; Eugene P. O'Connor, JD;** and, of course, the late **Joseph R. Coppola '40, HON '90, PhD,** (*Canisius Magazine*, spring 2004) who served in the department for nearly four decades.

"Joe built the foundation of the department and launched the careers of some of the top accountants in the field," says Emmerling, who adds that Coppola placed him at Dopkins, the firm he now heads, nearly 35 years ago.

These esteemed accounting professors developed close ties with the accounting community and instituted the Council on Accountancy, a group of nearly 50 accounting and financial executives who serve as advisors to the department, and provide educational and professional opportunities to Canisius' accounting students. They introduced the Accounting Work Experience Program, which provides students with real-world experiences, internships and paid positions. They also launched career and student mentoring programs, and organized weekly accounting breakfasts as an additional way for students to network one-on-one with accounting professionals.

It was Gress who advocated for an endowed scholarship program for accounting majors. "Ed approached Dopkins back in the 80s and we partnered to create the first endowed scholarship sponsored by an accounting firm," says Emmerling. "We have been involved ever since."



Wittlin Adds Practical Insight to Accounting Program

Morton H. Wittlin '66, CPA, planned to follow in the footsteps of the pharmacists in his family. Out of high school, he enrolled at the University at Buffalo (UB). But, he says, his grades fell short and he became "persona non grata." That is when Wittlin realized the returns of an investment in a Canisius education. "I just wanted to take enough accounting electives at Canisius until UB welcomed me back into its pharmacy program." What Wittlin didn't count on was that he "fell in love with accounting."

Wittlin enrolled full-time at Canisius. He also held a full-time job at an accounting firm to support his young family. Throughout, he maintained one of the highest grade point averages in the program.

"It was a terrible challenge at the time," recalls Wittlin. "But the program and the professors helped me to develop the work ethic necessary in the accounting profession."

Wittlin has put that work ethic to practice for nearly four decades. He is the senior partner at Wittlin Cain & Dry LLP, an accounting firm that he founded in 1970. It now has offices in Williamsville, Lockport and Sunrise, FL.

Wittlin is also active in the development of Canisius accounting students. He believes, "The ones who succeed need to be well-trained in school and love the work." To foster this, Wittlin became a member of the Council on Accountancy, which he believes is an integral part of the accounting program. "The members are made up of successful people in the profession who provide practical insight into the current trends in the field. This helps prepare students for when they enter the profession."

To further their practical experiences, Wittlin employs accounting students as interns at his firms. The 2007 Canisius Accountant of the Year also supports the financial needs of the college's future accounting professionals.

Most recently, he and his wife, Carol, made a generous commitment to their previously established Morton H. '66 and Carol A. Wittlin Scholarship. The gift enables Canisius to attract the most talented students to its renowned accounting program. For Wittlin, it is his way of giving back to the college that gave him so much.

"Canisius took me in when I was searching for a way to complete my higher education and gave me the foundation for success," he says. "I want to help others receive that same opportunity. There are a lot of very qualified people who can make it and do well for themselves, their families and the accounting profession. They just need the opportunity."



Castiglia's Ledger Leads Back to Canisius

It didn't take long for First Lieutenant **Joseph "Jerry" Castiglia '55, HON '94, CPA**, to find work when he returned home from the U.S. Army in 1957.

The international accounting firm of Haskins & Sells quickly recruited the young accounting professional and paired him with clients in the automotive, construction, tire and paint industries. One particular paint company, Pratt & Lambert LLC, was so satisfied with Castiglia's work that it appointed him to its chief financial post in 1967.

Throughout his tenure, which included roles as vice president, executive vice president, president and chief executive officer, Castiglia led the company through unprecedented growth. At the time of its sale to Sherwin Williams, in the mid-1990s, Pratt & Lambert was Western New York's largest publicly held company with more than 1,425 employees and annual sales in excess of \$200 million. Canisius recognized Castiglia's distinguished leadership when it presented him with the Dr. Joseph R. Coppola Award in 1983 and the Accountant of the Year Award in 1993.

Today, council members on the Student Financial Aid Committee work with J. Patrick Greenwald, director of principal gifts, to secure endowed scholarships for accounting majors. There are currently 45 such scholarships, which resulted in more than \$150,000 in grants for 2008-2009. The council has set a goal to increase the accounting endowment from its current value of \$3.5 million to \$6 million. The successful completion will result in annual scholarship grants that total \$300,000.

"The accounting program is all about preparing students for the accounting profession," says O'Donnell.

That is why this core group of faculty, along with the Council on Accountancy, work hard to continue the program's tradition with a new generation of accounting professors at Canisius.

"One of the keys to the success of the accounting program is that the department hires both academics and those who have practical experience," says Donald R. Fishback, CPA, vice president of finance at Moog Inc. and chair of the Council on Accountancy. He cites new hires **James C. Goldstein Jr., CPA**, (PhD candidate)

At the same time this astute businessman was building Pratt & Lambert, he was also helping Canisius develop future accountants.

"The accounting program had such a great influence on my career that I've always felt it was important that I give back," says Castiglia. He recalls the challenges and rewards of the coursework, as well as the demands and encouragement of the professors. Castiglia also notes that the late Accounting Professor **Joseph R. Coppola '40, HON '90, PhD**, "taught me how to work hard and always do my best but to never take myself too seriously."

Castiglia's loyalty to the accounting program has manifested itself in many ways. He was a long-time member and former chair of the Council on Accountancy, and believes the advisory board sets the Canisius program apart.

"It speaks well for Canisius to be able to attract so many busy, professional people to the council," says Castiglia. "It also speaks well for the professionals, who see the value in how they can help students and the program."

Castiglia's allegiance to the accounting program is also evidenced by the Joseph J. Castiglia '55 Family Scholarship Fund established by he and his wife, Barbara, in 1991. The fund provides student scholarships in both accounting and other undergraduate programs. Most recently, the Castiglia's committed further support to the scholarship – and the accounting program – through a generous gift to *A Legacy of Leadership: The Campaign for Canisius College*.

"The accounting program at Canisius is one of the strongest programs at the college." Castiglia refers to the CPA exam success rate as just one example of the program's quality. "The contributions that Canisius accounting graduates make, specifically to the Western New York community and the community-at-large, are profound and it's imperative that it continues."

an expert in AIS; **Thomas J. Vogel, '83, PhD, CPA**, a financial accounting specialist; and **Patricia A. Johnson, CPA**, a certified forensic accountant. "These professionals will ensure that the high quality on which the accounting program earned its reputation continues in the future."

Emmerling wholeheartedly agrees.

"Canisius is on track with the vision that it is a small institution, a small program but it has the highest quality program," he says.

But no matter how the accounting program evolves, one aspect will remain constant – the faculty's dedication to the students. It's one that continues long after graduation.

"Dr. Kermis and Dr. O'Donnell have been a constant resource to me," says Moore. "I can't say enough about the faculty, the program and the college. That is why you will see me at Open House, Meet the Accountants Night and the Accounting Banquet. That is why I work with Dr. O'Donnell and Dr. Kermis to recruit students to the program. I want to give back." ■