

1-1995

Attracting African American Honor Students into Accounting

Dana Hermanson

Kennesaw State University, dhermans@kennesaw.edu


Susan H. Ivancevich

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Roger H. Hermanson

Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/facpubs>

 Part of the [Accounting Commons](#), [African American Studies Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hermanson, Dana R., Susan H. Ivancevich, and Roger H. Hermanson. "Attracting African American Honor Students into Accounting." *Strategic Finance* 76.7 (1995): 16.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

TRENDS

IN EDUCATION

RALPH L. BENKE, JR., CMA, AND
ROGER H. HERMANSON, EDITORS

ATTRACTING AFRICAN AMERICAN HONOR STUDENTS INTO ACCOUNTING

BY DANA R. HERMANSON, SUSAN
H. IVANCEVICH, AND ROGER H.
HERMANSON

If the accounting profession is to maintain the quality of its personnel, it must do a better job of attracting the best and brightest students. Of particular concern is the lack of minority students. Over the past 20 years, several initiatives have been undertaken to attract minority honor students into the accounting profession, but they have not been successful. The percentage of minority professionals in the major accounting firms has risen only two percentage points since 1976, and the percentage of black professionals actually has fallen slightly from 1.8% to 1.3% (AICPA 1992¹; Williams 1993²).

Why is there such a small number of black accountants? One possibility is that black honor students' perceptions of the accounting profession lead them to select other majors. To explore this possibility, we surveyed black members of a national collegiate honor society. First, we wanted to determine students' perceptions of the accounting profession, and, second, the factors causing black students to major or not major in accounting.

Thirty-four black honor students with an average GPA of 3.6 completed our survey, a response rate of about 20%. Fifteen of the students were business majors (eight in accounting), and 19 were nonbusiness majors. Respondents rated 12 characteristics of the ac-

counting profession on a scale from very low to very high. Short-term and long-term characteristics were included as well as financial and nonfinancial characteristics.

The eight accounting majors generally had positive views of the profession. Perceived slightly less positively were nonfinancial characteristics: the opportunity to be own boss, lifestyle, and work environment. The 26 nonaccounting students perceived the accounting profession very positively in providing long-term financial rewards and in availability of employment. Generally they were impressed by the long-term economic benefits available in accounting. Less robust was their perception of these characteristics: long-term opportunity, job security, prestige or social status, opportunity to be own boss, nature of advancement, job satisfaction, and contribution to society. The nonfinancial characteristics of lifestyle, work environment, and nature of accounting work were perceived poorly by respondents. Based on the 12 ratings, it appears that the respondents view the accounting profession positively from a long-term financial perspective, but they do not have very favorable views of the nature of the work, the lifestyle, or the work environment.

The skills of quantitative ability, personal ethics, creativity, communication, and people skills were rated for their importance in leading to potential success in the accounting profession. Respondents used the same rating scale provided for rating the profession's characteristics.

The eight accounting majors rated each of the skills as fairly important, with the exception of creativity. These respondents did not appear to appreciate the role of creative problem solving in accounting today. Highly rated were ethics, communication skills, and people skills. The 26 nonaccounting majors' responses were less positive. Only quantitative skills were perceived as important. Ethics, communication skills, and people skills received moderate ratings, while the importance of creativity was rated quite low.

The nonaccounting respondents were queried as to why they did not choose to major in accounting. Twenty-one never considered majoring in accounting because they already had selected a different field. The second most common response was that the work is uninteresting. Some respondents who had considered accounting decided not to select the major for this

reason, and for others it was the reason they never considered the field at all. Finally, a few respondents said they disliked their accounting instructor(s) and chose to pursue other interests.

The most common reasons that caused students to major in accounting were that they liked their accounting courses and instructors. Other reasons cited were an interest in the nature of accounting work and the high prestige of accountants. Overall, 19 of the 34 students selected their major while still in high school, and high school teachers were rated as the most important influence on these students' choice of major (acquaintances in their chosen field and parents were the other important influences).

We believe that programs to attract black honor society students into accounting should incorporate the following two points. First, if this group of 34 black students represents the population, black students already recognize the long-term financial rewards of a career in accounting. It is vital, however, that they gain a better understanding of the nonfinancial nature of accounting work and of the role of creative problem solving in the profession. If students appreciate the importance of people skills and critical thinking in accounting, the profession may appear more attractive and rewarding.

Second, the efforts to attract black honor students must begin at the high school level. High school students often know a great deal about other professions (law, medicine, and engineering), but they may have had little or no exposure to the accounting profession. ■

Dana R. Hermanson, Ph.D., is assistant professor of accounting at Kennesaw State College in Atlanta, Ga. He can be reached at (404) 423-6077.

Susan H. Ivancevich, Ph.D., is assistant professor of hospitality accounting and finance, W.F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nev. She can be reached at (702) 895-3932.

Roger H. Hermanson, Ph.D., is the Ernst & Young - J. W. Holloway Memorial Professor and Regents' Professor at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Ga. He can be reached at (404) 651-4462.

¹"The Supply of Accounting Graduates and the Demand for Public Accounting Recruits-1992. AICPA, New York, N.Y.

²D.Z. Williams, "In Pursuit of Minority Talent," *New Accountant*, February 1993, pp. 7-9, 24.