

## Research on Undergraduate Accounting Education at the Present Stage Based on Questionnaire Survey

LI Lin<sup>[a],\*</sup>; SHENG Xin<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup> Shandong Polytechnic University, Shandong, China.

\* Corresponding author.

Received 10 July 2012; accepted 23 September 2012

### Abstract

The characteristics of economic globalization and the era of knowledge economy have proposed the demand of top accounting talents featuring internationalization and cross-discipline. The undergraduate accounting education should launch the reform on talent cultivation mode under the guidance of competence framework of professional accountants, aiming at cultivating accountants competent to socioeconomic development and providing the modern enterprises with the guarantee of talents to meet the practical demands of reform on higher accounting education in China. This paper firstly elaborates on the theoretical relationship between undergraduate accounting education and ability cultivation of professional accountants. Secondly, this paper explores the professional roles and demands of professional competences of undergraduates major in accounting through questionnaire survey, and proposes some opinions and suggestions.

**Key words:** Undergraduate; Accounting education; Professional competence; Talent cultivation

LI Lin, SHENG Xin (2012). Research on Undergraduate Accounting Education at the Present Stage Based on Questionnaire Survey. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 3(2), 35-39. Available from <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/j.hess.1927024020120302.ZR0215> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.hess.1927024020120302.ZR0215>

With continuous development of market economy, social demands on accountancy have undergone huge changes. Facing with the requirements of competence framework in terms of knowledge, professional skills and professional values proposed by the accounting profession at home and abroad to accounting personnel, the accounting education

circle must implement comprehensive reform on the training target, teaching contents and teaching methods of accounting major. The undergraduate accounting education plays as the main force of the cultivation of high-class accounting talents, and the reform of talent cultivation mode should be carried out under the guidance of competence framework of professional accountants.

### 1. THE ROLE OF UNDERGRADUATE ACCOUNTING EDUCATION PLAYED IN THE CULTIVATION PROCESS OF PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS

In the era of knowledge economy, an accounting worker also has to be a knowledge worker. Therefore, accounting personnel have to receive certain official accounting education to gain their abilities of theoretical application and analysis of accounting practice. The accounting education can lay the foundation of knowledge, techniques and professional values for accounting personnel, which can prepare them for further study and for their adaption of changes that will run through their whole accounting careers. Consequently, strengthening the school education of accounting is of importance to theoretical and practical enhancement of professional accountants.

Besides playing as the foundation with long-term development prospective in the current accounting education system, the undergraduate accounting education should become the core of accounting education system. The results of the survey conducted by Junrui Zhang and Donglin Liu from the beginning of 2004 to the March of 2005 on the demands of professional talents in the fields of finance and economics have shown that the education background demands to the graduates placed by employment units were as followed: the demand of PhD graduates accounted for 0.7%, the demand of master graduates accounted for 9.4%, the demand of

bachelor graduates accounted for 61.6%, the demand of junior college graduates accounted for 20.3%, and the demand of graduates below junior college education background accounted for 8%. By this token, the social demand proportion of undergraduate accounting talents is growing, together with the higher quality demand of accounting personnel. The lower level technical secondary and senior college accounting education have been far beyond meeting the needs of increasingly expanding accounting businesses in various units; however, due to the theoretical research nature and the higher salary requirement, the master and PhD graduates have missed the employment opportunities of most industrial and commercial enterprises.

In consideration of the increasingly higher proportion of the undergraduate accounting talents proposed by social demand and the increasingly higher demand of all-round talents proposed by economic diversification, the undergraduate accounting education has become the core of accounting education system. In a considerable long period in the future, the accounting undergraduate will be the main force of the employment in various enterprises in China, bearing an important mission of China's accounting talent cultivation. Thus, how to cultivate the accounting personnel meeting the social demands has become the main issue confronting with the undergraduate accounting education. Therefore, the reform on China's accounting undergraduate education will become an important task of the accounting education. From the perspective of undergraduate accounting education, this paper mainly discusses its reform based on the competence requirements of professional accountants, to develop and train the accounting talents fitting the competence requirements of professional accountants.

## **2. UNDERGRADUATE ACCOUNTING EDUCATION & COMPETENCE AND ABILITY ANALYSIS OF PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS BASED ON QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY**

According to the competence framework of professional accountants, this paper conducts a research on the professional and ability requirements placed by the current accounting practice in China based on a questionnaire survey of undergraduates major in accounting. This paper analyzes the existing problems in the current undergraduate accounting education, summarizes the professional knowledge, skills and values required to personnel engaged in accounting practice, and further discusses the relationship between undergraduate accounting education and the competence requirements of professional accountants, to provide with some basis and reference for the reform of undergraduate accounting education.

### **2.1 Project Design of Questionnaire Survey**

By referring to the competence requirements of professional accountants placed by the International Education Standard of IFAC and proceeding from the realistic situation in China, and we design 24 questions in all. The contents of the questionnaire are consisting of the basic information of interviewees, including gender, education background, type of employment unit, work seniority and post of work (namely professional role); professional competent demand investigation of undergraduates major in accounting; the opinions and suggestions of interviewees toward the undergraduate accounting education.

Our work advantage is used to issue our questionnaires to selected objectives among undergraduates on the spot or through e-mail. Under the premise of on-the-spot questionnaire maintaining the sample size, we also conduct survey through e-mail. The range of questionnaire issuance includes government agencies, institutional organizations and various enterprises.

### **2.2 Competence Demand Survey Result of Professional Accountants**

#### **2.2.1 Specialty Accounting Knowledge Is the Most Demanding**

In the survey on the importance of professional knowledge, the instruction of specialty basic knowledge of accounting, finance and relevant knowledge still plays as an important role in accounting education; however, with the economic informationization, the knowledge instruction of computer information system is becoming more and more important. In addition, integrated talents are in demand in the society, requiring the accounting personnel to be equipped with a broader scope of knowledge, this has resulted in the instruction of the theory of economic management, knowledge about organizations and enterprises, legal knowledge and the knowledge of foreign languages not neglectable; the importance of the knowledge of foreign languages to professional accountants varies in different contexts.

#### **2.2.2 Self-Control Ranks Top Among All the Enterprises' Needs of Professional Skills**

Self-control ranks top in the survey of professional skills, showing that the accounting personnel must have strong ability of self-control over their own behaviors. Because the accounting personnel are dealing with the money of their employment units, any carelessness or absence of self-control may lead to economic mistakes. Teamwork and communication are also the must-have skills of professional accounting personnel. In the modern society, it is really hard for any individual to fulfill a project along, only the teamwork can lead to the final success; therefore the spirit of teamwork and communication skills are needed for better development. Although we find that our interviewees have realized the importance

of the knowledge and skills mentioned above, the current accounting education field in China still fails to provide with effective instruction of these knowledge and skills. As a whole, China's accounting education is also relatively weak in terms of skill cultivation, in need of enhancement in the future accounting education.

### **2.2.3 Professional Values Are also Important**

The survey result of the professional values has shown that the score of professional values ranks highest among all the survey items. Compared to other vocations, accounting features its uniqueness, which is the demanding professional ethics and integrity awareness. But the current accounting education in terms of professional ethnics is relatively weak: most schools haven't offer courses related to professional ethnics, which is just involved in courses in relation to ideological and political theories at most and hard to meet the target of professional education. To achieve the fusion and coordination to meet the needs of the professional ethics education both in practical work and school education is the important task that should be paid great attention to and made efforts to deal with in the undergraduate accounting education in the future.

## **2.3 The Survey Result of the Opinions of Accounting Undergraduates to Undergraduate Accounting Education**

### **2.3.1 There Is Gap Between Theoretical Education and Practice**

Our survey result has shown that there are 13.8% of interviewees believe the undergraduates major in accounting can be competent to accounting practice, this has demonstrated the difference between undergraduate accounting education and accounting practice; to narrow this gap is the direction of the reform on accounting education.

### **2.3.2 Students Favor Practice Instruction**

Interviewees believe the practice link is important to cultivate talents major in accounting. Most interviewees think the practice courses should account for above 30% among the overall courses, and practice bases should be established both inside and outside the campus. Our survey result has shown that the training objectives of accounting major can't be met with solely depending on theoretical courses; instead, practice instruction should be introduced greatly to be smooth in fulfilling these targets. This means the education of specialty knowledge mainly relies on the theoretical instruction offered by teachers and after-class exercises, while the practice education must be strengthened to make students really learn the skills of how to apply, analyze, integrate and evaluate the knowledge they have mastered, to exercise their professional skills and competence, cultivate their professional ethnics, train their personality characteristics and competence and broaden their business scope. The

importance of accounting practice is also expressed in the survey on teaching methods, course installation and faculty. Consequently, strengthening the practice instruction of accounting education should be placed as the priority of all in the reform of accounting education.

## **3. SUGGESTIONS ON THE REFORM OF UNDERGRADUATE ACCOUNTING EDUCATION IN CHINA**

Through the survey analysis mentioned above, we have found the undesirable talent cultivation mode of the current accounting education and the universal phenomenon of preferring theory to practice, preferring knowledge instruction to ability development and preferring specialty knowledge to ethics education. Those undergraduates major in accounting cultivated according to the traditional cultivation mode are incompetent to the accountant profession in terms of knowledge structure and professional skills, because the current higher accounting education has lagged behind the needs of market economic development. Aiming at the problems mentioned above, the prospective reform on the talent cultivation mode of undergraduates major in accounting should proceed from the following aspects:

### **3.1 Adapt the Market Demand and Reset the Training Target of Undergraduate Accounting Education**

In the 1980s, the former State Education Commission and Ministry of Finance have set the cultivation object of the undergraduate accounting education in China: to cultivate high-class professional talents having both ability and political integrity competent to engage in accounting practice, accounting teaching and research in enterprises, institutional organizations, accounting firms, economic authorities, schools and research institutions. Many schools' mechanical application of this education target set by the Ministry of Education has led to the vague and general target with no guiding effect. The training objective of accounting major should proceed from the required knowledge, skills and abilities of professional accountants to express the demand of the accounting profession and cultivate cross-disciplinary talents equipped with various aspects of knowledge, skills and abilities in terms of management, economy, law and accounting. The purpose is to make the undergraduates major in accounting competent to engage in accounting, money management and auditing practice in enterprises, institutional organizations and government departments.

### **3.2 Build a Rational Curriculum System and Upgrade the Quality and Efficiency of Instruction**

Due to the existence of many problems, the traditional curriculum system must be rebuilt to meet the social demands and to adapt the development of accounting

science. In terms of the formation, the curriculum system should be regarded as an integrated system based on the accounting education target of one school, with the consideration of the relationship among various curriculums as a whole and the overall effect of each course contributing to the quality development of students. We should be good at finding out the binding sites of various courses, and make these courses linked up with each other within one system, to resolve the contradiction between the increasingly comprehensive accounting science and the excessively divided courses. The limited courses should cover the increasingly expanded knowledge domain through the intensification and integration of courses. In addition, the course installation should also pay attention to the intelligence potential of students, instead of regarding students as the receivers of knowledge. Personal education should be stressed to train students' ability of long-term development, both complying with the development trend of international accounting education and meeting with the objective requirements of social development.

### **3.3 Improve the Methods and Approaches of Traditional Accounting Education, Optimize the Mode of Instruction**

#### **3.3.1 Guide Students to Participate in the Teaching Process**

The accounting teaching in China applies the typical method of mechanical memorizing, meaning teachers are responsible for instruction, and students are responsible for remembering and doing exercises after class aiming at teachers' instruction. To meet the cultivation requirements of modern accounting talents, flexible and diverse teaching methods should be applied, while abandoning the traditional teaching methods oriented by class instruction and mechanical memorizing. The teaching methods featuring original analysis, deliberation and training of problem-resolving should be carried out to turn the knowledge instruction into ability development. The undergraduate accounting teaching should apply the interactive teaching method, which is in favor of training lifelong learning ability for students.

#### **3.3.2 Strengthen the Practice Instruction**

As we know, accounting is a science marring theory and practice. The specialty knowledge learnt from class and textbooks can only lay a foundation of accountancy for accounting personnel, while how to flexibly apply knowledge to resolve problems emerged in practical work is left to accounting workers to constantly explore and accumulate experience. Therefore, we have to put the practice teaching of accounting education; the curriculum installation, especially for senior students, has to focus on practical operation.

#### **3.3.3 Introduce Case Method of Teaching**

The case method of accounting teaching means help students apply the knowledge they have mastered into

"accounting practical activities" through accounting case analysis, on the basis that they have learnt and mastered certain finance and accounting theoretical knowledge. This is an accounting teaching method to improve students' abilities of finding, analyzing and resolving problems, and to turn study from mechanical into flexible.

### **3.4 Strength Integrity Education, Reinforce Professional Values**

Although professional ethics plays an important role in accounting profession, the survey analysis above has shown that there are few curriculums installed in China's colleges and universities that have demonstrated the professional ethics of accounting. Considering a lot of frauds in the accounting profession, China's Ministry of Finance has listed the education of "professional ethics" into one of the requirements to gain the Accounting Qualification Certificate, making it an inevitable learning content for students major in accounting between their graduations and gaining their Accounting Qualification Certificates. This approach has undoubtedly socialized the education of "professional ethics", turning it into the content of social education instead of that of undergraduate specialty education.

The higher education of accounting is the significant link in building the professional ethics of accounting and training the awareness of professional ethics. Just as some experts have pointed out that the fading of current accounting professional ethics is partially resulting from the absence of professional ethics education, which should be infiltrated into the process of ability training. Improving students' ability of initial knowledge exploration and building up the professional personality of "integrity-oriented" can lay a sound foundation for the formation of professional judgment when they graduate from universities or colleges and come into the real world. A plenty of empirical research on professional ethics education conducted by American scholars has shown the importance and effectiveness of the professional ethics education in class. At present, the professional ethics education in China is often neglected or concealed, though the professional ethics of CPA has been mentioned in the auditing in undergraduate accounting education, it seems that both the course content and arrangement are too little and thin.

### **3.5 Pay Great Attention to and Strengthen the Faculty Construction of Undergraduate Accounting Education**

An excellent accounting faculty is essential for the cultivation of qualified accounting talents, and the construction of accounting faculty is the key link of accounting instruction in colleges and universities. In our questionnaire survey, our interviewees argue that to strengthen the faculty construction, improving the practice ability of teachers should be put into priority, followed by the responsibility, specialty knowledge and research capability of teachers.



### 3.5.1 Formulate a Scientific Selection Method of Undergraduate Accounting Teachers Through Multiple Channels

Teachers with high quality should be equipped with profound theoretical foundation and rich practical experience. Currently, accounting teachers are mainly selected from graduates of colleges and universities, such a system results in the inexperienced faculty due to the linkage from schools to schools without any social practice of these teachers, adverse to cultivate the undergraduate accounting faculty with high quality. Relevant approaches can be attempted, such as selecting undergraduate accounting teachers from the top talents in society or talents in other relevant majors, to expand the import channel of accounting teachers and enrich the faculty of undergraduate accounting education. Meanwhile, the cooperation relationship among enterprises, scientific research institutions and education institutions should be paid close attention to built up. At the same time, colleges and universities can try to run schools in alliance with these enterprises, employ well-known professionals and entrepreneurs in the related fields to be part-time teachers and really offer courses for our students.

### 3.5.2 Proactively Create Conditions, Strengthen the Continuing Education of Undergraduate Accounting Teachers

At present, many colleges and universities haven't paid balanced attention to the use and cultivation of teachers, contributing to the difficulty of training a high-quality accounting faculty. On the one hand, colleges and universities should strengthen the relearning of accounting theories among in-service teachers, upgrade their knowledge structure, encourage and finance teachers' further study. Academic communication among schools and between schools and enterprises should also be launched for the cutting-edge position of our teachers' academic research. On the other hand, the practical accounting experience of our in-service teachers should be enriched. Based on the application nature of accounting science, colleges and universities can try to carry out the approaches of sending the undergraduate accounting teachers to engage in accounting practice in social entity units, or help and support teachers to engage in accounting practice in enterprises, accounting firms or other units with concentrated accounting businesses by using their winter and summer vacations. This approach is aiming at building a connection and communication mechanism between accounting profession and teachers, helping teachers in colleges and universities to improve their business skills through practice engagement, and accumulate rich practice cases used as teaching materials for the more vivid teaching and learning.

### 3.5.3 Complete and Improve the Teaching Quality Assessment System and Faculty Management System

To some extent, currently there are several problems

existing in the teacher assessment system, including preferring quantity to quality, scientific research to teaching. Aiming at these problems, we believe we should complete and improve the teaching quality assessment system and faculty management system of undergraduate education, setting "to the benefit of the progress and development of students" as the index to measure teachers' performance. Teachers should be encouraged and supported from the orientation of policies to proactively explore and innovate the training methods of thinking ability during the process of knowledge instruction, and put these ideas into practice. Colleges and universities should appropriately finance and reward teachers who launch the innovation and development of undergraduate accounting courses, conduct instructional experiments and research and actively explore new teaching methods. A pattern of balancing teaching and scientific research should be implemented on the basis of guaranteeing teaching as priority.

## CONCLUSION

From the above, the current undergraduate accounting education still has a long way to go in the progress of social adaption. The undergraduate accounting education has to be oriented by market demands with an eye to upgrade students' competence framework, and reset its training objective scientifically, build a rational curriculum system, optimize and strengthen its faculty construction to adapt the social demands and turn the undergraduate accounting education into the cradle of prospective professional accountants.

## REFERENCES

- Chen, Lihua (n.d.). *The Competence Training of Professional Accounting under the Environment of Informationization*. Nanjing University Press.
- Chen, Yugui (1994). International Guidance of Qualification Evaluation on Professional Accountants, (4), 60-62.
- Liu, Yongze & Sun, Guangguo (2004). The Current Status and Countermeasures of Accounting Education & Research on Accounting Education in China, (2), 75-81.
- Liu, Zhongwen & Chen, Jiajun (2008). The Professional Competence Survey Analysis of Undergraduates Major in Accounting. *Education Research*, (2), 106-109.
- Multiple Roles of Professional Accountants: Monographic Interview on Professional Accountants in Non-Auditing Service field by IFAC. China Certified Public Accountant Association.
- Yan, Dawu & Wang, Huacheng (1998). The 21th Century Oriented Accounting Series Courses and the Research on its Reform of Instruction Contents. The Annual Conference Paper in 1998 of CAPA-Chinese Accounting Professors Association. Beijing.