



Student & Academic Research Study

Final Quantitative Report

July 2000

Taylor

**The Taylor Research &
Consulting Group, Inc.**

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Executive Summary

In February of 2000, the AICPA commissioned The Taylor Research & Consulting Group, Inc., to conduct a two-phase (qualitative and quantitative) research study among high school and college students. The purpose of this research was twofold:

1. Identify factors causing a downturn in accounting majors and CPAs.
2. Identify means to reverse this trend.

To meet these objectives, the following subject areas were explored:

1. The decision-making processes of students faced with college, college majors, and career choices.
2. The general attitudes toward and perceptions of the CPA profession.
3. Ways to encourage students to consider and choose the CPA profession.

The qualitative phase (Phase I) of the research consisted of nine focus groups among high school and college students in four cities nationwide. The quantitative phase (Phase II) consisted of 2,174 (20- to 25-minute) telephone interviews. Again, these interviews were conducted nationwide with high school and college students. This report is intended to serve as a summary of both the Phase I and Phase II research.

Executive Summary: Phase I

- ➔ The Phase I research suggests that the AICPA faces *challenges of student perceptions and systemic barriers* in reversing the downward trend of interest in accounting majors and CPAs.
- ➔ The main challenges include *ignorance, misinformation, and negative perceptions*.

1. ***Student Ignorance:*** Most students were ignorant of the basics of an accounting career, and awareness of specific careers does seem to breed interest.
2. ***Misinformation:*** Much of student information regarding accounting is limited or faulty.

“A CPA is someone who works for the government.”

“I can’t see any applications for accounting, except being an accountant.”

“If you get a CPA you have to be an accountant, but if you get an MBA you can do anything you want.”

3. ***Negative perceptions:*** Students associate accounting with money, numbers, math, and taxes. And for most students, these are not positive attributes.

“If you are a detailed-oriented person who likes to work by themselves, then it’s for you.”

Executive Summary: Phase I

- ➔ The *systemic barriers* include the availability of high school and college accounting courses—and the type and quality of the accounting courses available. Assessments of the magnitudes of these individual barriers is included in the Phase II research.
- ➔ For many high school students, accounting is not offered; for others, it is offered only as a remedial bookkeeping course.

“There weren’t any accounting classes in the AP classes in high school. Those courses were for secretaries.”

- ➔ Teachers, professors, and the quality of the introductory courses can have an impact on whether a student continues with accounting.

“I had a high school teacher that was really great, and that influenced me a lot.”

“I know they’re just intro classes, but I thought I would be able to learn something that I would be able to use.”

“When I think of accounting, I think of a professor I hated.”

Executive Summary: Phase I

- ➔ The licensing exam, 150 hours, and continuing education requirements are not barriers for students; students are unaware of and unconcerned about the requirements. Younger students, especially, were unaware of the requirements—and this is when students are making career and major decisions.
- ➔ Students are expecting to attend graduate school and to do “whatever it takes” to achieve the career they want, as long as they think the career is “worth it.” Quantitative comparisons of a CPA to other careers/professions/credentials is included in the Phase II research.

“I have never had a problem with it (the additional year of schooling)...But I have thought about accounting as just an undergraduate degree and getting an MBA instead. Whether a CPA is ‘worth it’ per se is something I have to figure out.”

Executive Summary: Phase I

- ➔ Early decision-making is the norm among students regarding colleges, college majors, and careers. Students make decisions—or at least have strong opinions—regarding career plans at a very early age. This finding supports the needs for early intervention, that is, the need to approach students in early high school before they have “a set idea of what accounting is like.” The Phase II research identifies the timing of this decision-making.
- ➔ The Phase I research identified seven attributes that make careers attractive to students. Students want their careers to be lucrative, rewarding, limitless, creative, multi-disciplinary, and include travel and group work. These attributes are further refined and explored in the Phase II research, where students are asked to compare attractive attributes versus their perceptions of CPAs.
- ➔ Parents, not celebrities, are students’ role models. These role models do have an impact on career decisions. Students stressed that it was not critical for a person to be famous (to be a role model), rather it was more important that their story and achievements be compelling.
- ➔ All of these Phase I findings are further explored in Phase II. The executive summary for Phase II continues on pages 8 through 25.

Executive Summary: Phase II

Challenge #1: Student ignorance

- ➔ Most students are ignorant or have limited knowledge of an accounting career.
 - * Many (more than a third of) high school and college students do not know what a CPA does. Those who are aware think CPAs handle money and prepare taxes.
 - * Even accounting students identify CPAs most closely with tax preparation (58%) rather than with designing financial information systems (17%), giving financial advice (21%), or advising on how to run a business (20%).

What is the impact of student ignorance?

- ➔ Student interest in accounting is low and has trended downward from 1990. Only 10 high school students (out of 1,000 interviewed) are considering majoring in accounting. The number of college students majoring in accounting has dropped from 4% in 1990 to 2% in 2000.

	1990	2000
College Students Majoring in Accounting	4%	2%
High School Students Planning on Accounting Major	4%	1%

Executive Summary: Phase II

Challenge #2: Misinformation

- ➔ Much of students' information regarding accounting is limited or faulty. Some see accounting as limiting (rather than expanding) their future career choices. Others have no clue as to the meaning of the CPA credential. And still, others associate accounting with bookkeeping—and therefore don't view it as a career for “good students.”

Why is this important?

- ➔ Students are making decisions earlier and earlier, and the misinformation regarding accounting affects their decision-making—as evidenced by the low numbers of students choosing accounting as a potential career or major.
 - * 63% of high school students stated they were already thinking about a job/occupation/career by their freshman year.
 - * 57% of college students said they became seriously interested in a particular profession prior to college.

Executive Summary: Phase II

Challenge #3: Negative perceptions

- ➔ The qualitative phase showed that students view accountants as doing boring, tedious, and monotonous number-crunching by themselves.
- ➔ The quantitative data shows that students also see CPAs as professional and intelligent. However, the association of CPAs with math and numbers remained strong—even among older students. College students, in particular, see CPAs as math lovers (15%) and people who deal with numbers (13%).

Why are students' negative perceptions of CPAs and accounting important?

- ➔ The data suggest that students are not choosing accounting as a career, because their interests (and values) lie elsewhere. When asked about what is important in choosing a career, students cite they are looking for personally rewarding careers, careers where you are able to work with people, and careers that make a contribution to society and maintain a balance of home and work.

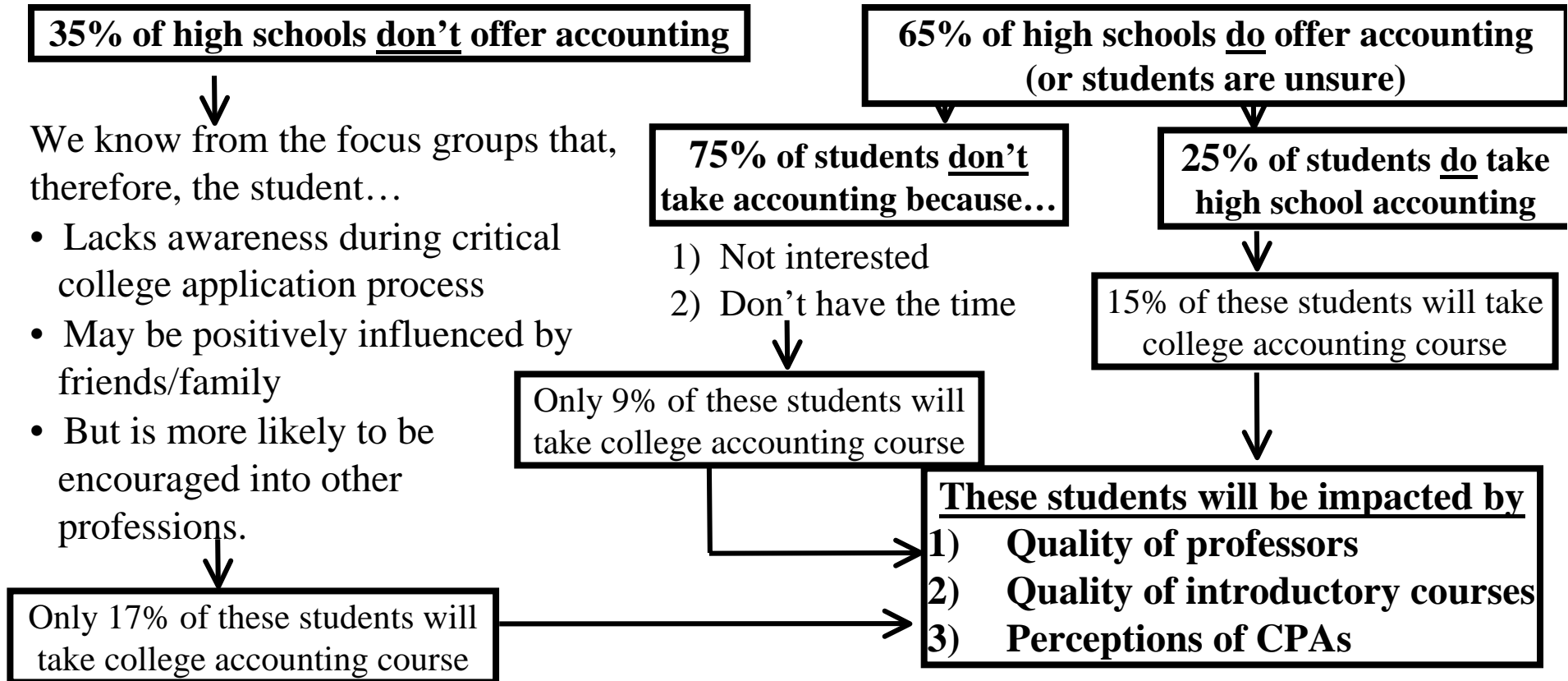
Executive Summary: Phase II

Systemic barriers: The bumpy road to becoming a CPA

- In addition to the challenges of *ignorance, misinformation, and negative perceptions*, students also face systemic barriers on the (bumpy) road to becoming a CPA. As the flow chart on the following page describes:
- * According to college students, more than a third of high schools do not offer accounting.
 - * At high schools where accounting is offered, only 25% of students actually take accounting. The top reasons for not taking accounting courses include not being interested in accounting and not having time for accounting courses.
 - * Interestingly, whether students take accounting in high school has little impact on whether they take accounting in college, as evidenced by the low numbers of students—across the board—who actually take college accounting courses.
 - * But doesn't awareness breed interest? Our qualitative research suggests that many of the accounting courses currently offered by high schools are remedial in nature and therefore do not create the type of interest necessary to increase the number of accounting majors.
 - * The bottom line: currently, only 2% of college students major in accounting and only 1% of high school students plan on majoring in accounting.

Executive Summary: Phase II

Systemic Barriers: The bumpy road to becoming a CPA



The effect of the bumpy road: Only 2% of college students major in accounting—and some of these students will not pursue a CPA.

Executive Summary: Phase II

Impact of introductory courses and teachers

- ➔ High school students, college students, and accounting majors feel pretty similarly about their first high school accounting course. Basically, students think their first course was pretty much the same as other high school courses.
- ➔ Overall, the students suggest more in-depth learning, better teachers, real-life situations, and more computer work as ways to make the courses better.

Executive Summary: Phase II

Impact of introductory courses and teachers

- Switchers do not overwhelmingly point the blame (for switching out of accounting) on their college accounting professors. Instead, switchers are pretty evenly divided, with approximately a third stating their professors made them more interested in accounting, a third less interested, and a third stating their professor had no effect.
- Accounting majors do seem to give some of the credit to their professors. Almost two-thirds state their professor made them more interested in accounting.
- Both the high school and college data suggest that while teachers, professors, and the quality of the accounting courses do have an impact on students, they are not the sole reasons why students choose (or don't choose) careers in accounting.

Effect of College Accounting Professor...	College	Accounting	Switchers
More interested in accounting	21%	65%	35%
Less interested in accounting	31%	5%	27%
No effect on career plans	48%	31%	37%

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

Executive Summary: Phase II

- ➔ As mentioned before, the association between accounting and math is strong in the minds of students. Being good—or not good—with numbers is one of the main reasons for choosing—or not choosing—a career in accounting.
- ➔ Students do see accounting as a career with good job opportunities, as evidenced by the data below as well as our quadrant analyses of work values (pages 73-75).

I would consider a career in accounting because...	High School
I am good with numbers	31%
There are good job opportunities for accountants	15%
Accountants make a lot of money	9%
General interest	6%
Friends/family encouraged to consider accounting	4%
I am not good at math	4%
It is related to my main career goals	4%
I like subjects that have rules	2%

I would <i>not</i> consider a career in accounting because...	High School
I am just not interested in accounting	51%
I am not good at math	16%
I am good with numbers	6%
I am interested in a different career	2%

Executive Summary: Phase II

Not barriers: licensing exam, 150 hours, continuing education requirements

“Unaware”

- The great majority of high school students are *unaware* of the requirements to become a CPA—and our previous data have shown this is when students are making career and major decisions.
- College students are more aware of the requirements, especially the licensing exam. However, subsequent data show these requirements are not impacting their decision-making.

Aware of...	High School	College
Five-year education requirement	23%	29%
Licensing exam	34%	59%
Continuing professional education	35%	44%

Executive Summary: Phase II

Not barriers: licensing exam, 150 hours, continuing education requirements

“Unconcerned”

- The majority of students are *unaware* of the requirements, but more importantly, they are *unconcerned* about the requirements.
- Even those students who have switched from accounting thought the requirements were fair.
- Accounting students, who should be most familiar with the requirements, also believe the requirements are fair. And importantly, none of the individual requirements (exam, 150 hours, continuing education) seem more onerous than others.

Effect decision to become or not become a CPA...?	High School	College	Accounting	Switchers
No, the requirements seem fair	51%	81%	73%	80%
Yes, the five-year education requirement	26%	5%	16%	9%
Yes, the licensing exam	10%	4%	14%	12%
Yes, continuing professional education	16%	4%	12%	7%

Executive Summary: Phase II

Value of the CPA credential: is a CPA worth it?

- ➔ Overwhelming numbers of high school (76%) and college (80%) students plan on attending graduate school. This compares with 57% of college students in 1990.
- ➔ And the overwhelming majority of students would choose the same career, regardless of the education requirements.
- ➔ We might have expected student willingness to decline as they got older (i.e., as the reality of graduate school nears, students have less interest) but, in fact, college students are even more willing than high school students to do “whatever it takes.”

Executive Summary: Phase II

Value of the CPA credential: is a CPA worth it?

- Given that 1) students expect to attend graduate school and 2) are willing to do whatever it takes to achieve the career they want, the question becomes whether or not an individual career is *worth it* in terms of money, time, and education.
- Therefore, a key question for students (and for the AICPA) is whether the CPA credential is *worth it*.
- Comparison of the CPA with other professions/careers/degrees shows the perception is the CPA is *much less worth it*.

Careers worth the extra effort...	High School	College	Accounting
Doctor	90%	92%	89%
Lawyer	71%	77%	75%
Teacher	70%	81%	75%
Engineer	68%	35%	45%
Accountant/CPA	40%	47%	81%
Business Consultant	37%	28%	22%
IT Consultant	34%	39%	48%
Internet Entrepreneur	28%	78%	59%

Executive Summary: Phase II

Value of the CPA credential: is a CPA worth it?

- We asked students to compare the value of an MBA and a CPA, keeping in mind the educational and licensing requirements of each. Compared with an MBA, a CPA is not as attractive to college students. However, the combination of degrees (MBA and CPA) is very attractive.
- Accounting students are two times more likely to be interested in the combination of an MBA and a CPA, rather than a CPA alone.

Rated most attractive...	High School	College	Accounting
CPA	12%	9%	29%
MBA	26%	25%	6%
Combination	55%	59%	63%
Don't know/Refused	7%	7%	1%

Executive Summary: Phase II

Student decision-making process

- Students start thinking about college, college majors, and even careers very early.
- More than two-thirds of college students had thought about their college major prior to entering college. Our qualitative research suggested many are prompted by the college application process.

Started thinking about a college major...	College	Accounting
Before entering college	69%	63%
Freshman year in college	17%	20%
Sophomore year in college	5%	10%
Junior year in college or later	7%	6%
Don't know	1%	1%

- Students start thinking about jobs or careers very early—many starting in or before *junior* high school.
- More than half of college students seriously considered a particular profession prior to entering college.

Executive Summary: Phase II

Student career interests

- ➔ What do high school kids want to be when they grow up? Teachers, doctors, lawyers, and people who work with computers. Two percent would like to be accountants. This has trended downward, slightly, from 1990, when 5% stated they would like to be accountants.
- ➔ They are not interested in these careers for the money; they want to help people, do something they are good at, and do something they think is fun.
- ➔ College students also want to be teachers, doctors, lawyers, and people who work with computers. The entertainment industry also beckons. And again, only 2% want to be accountants. This compares with 4% in 1990.
- ➔ College students are more interested in salary/money than high school students, but their main reasons for their career plans is they *enjoy it and find it interesting*.

Executive Summary: Phase II

Impact of role models

- ➔ Students look to their parents and teachers for information; they also look to them as role models. Students especially look up to their parents and seem to do so even more as they get older.
- ➔ Michael Jordan was the only celebrity that more than 1% of either high school or college students named as a role model. He received 3% of the vote among both high school and college students.
- ➔ According to students, role models (parents and teachers for the most part) do impact students' career choices.
- ➔ More than 95% of high school and college students stated that role models had at least some impact—if not a great deal of impact—on their career choices.

Executive Summary: Phase II

Quadrant analysis methodology

- ➔ To understand students' work values, we asked them to evaluate what attributes are important to them in terms of their future career. We also asked students whether these attributes describe “what a CPA does.”

- ➔ The comparison of this data allows us to conduct quadrant analyses, which are shown on pages 73-75. Please note that the comparisons of data are relative. For example, high importance means students place a relatively higher importance on that attribute. Low importance, therefore, does not mean the student doesn't value it at all; rather, it has a lower relative importance to students.

- ➔ From the quadrant analyses, we find the following interesting trends:
 - * Being a CPA is seen as a secure job by college and high school students as well as accounting majors. All three groups also see accounting as a career that offers a chance to “get ahead,” and all three groups place a relatively high value on advancement.

 - * Both high school and college students are looking for creative work and flexible schedules—and don't think a career as a CPA would offer this. Accounting students are also looking for flexibility and find a CPA career lacking in this area. Creative work is not as highly valued by accounting students.

 - * A CPA is seen—by college students, high school students, and accounting majors—as high paying, but they say they don't value that as much as other things.

 - * Having the opportunity to travel—and be an entrepreneur—are not highly valued.

Executive Summary: Phase II

Profile of current accounting students

- ➔ A key question for the AICPA is understanding the type of students the profession is currently attracting and whether these students will do well in a challenging and dynamic environment. Combining accounting student demographics with some of their attitudes and behaviors leads us to the following profile of current accounting students:
- ➔ Accounting majors (84% of whom plan to pursue a CPA):
 - * Are more likely to be female than college students generally.
 - * Are somewhat more likely to be Hispanic and less likely to be African-American than college students.
 - * Are less likely to have taken both AP and college prep courses than college students.
 - * Are more likely to have attended community college and currently attend public universities.
 - * Do report higher GPAs.
- ➔ Our quadrant analysis of accounting students shows that these students do not differ dramatically in their work values from college students generally. However, their values do differ significantly in one area: they don't seem to value creative work to the same extent as college students.

Methodology

- Phase I—Qualitative Research
 - * Nine focus groups in four locations:
 - 1) Norwalk, Connecticut
 - 2) Columbus, Ohio
 - 3) Atlanta, Georgia
 - 4) Los Angeles, California
 - * High School juniors and seniors
 - ✓ 2 groups, 20 participants
 - ✓ March 6th and 9th
 - * College sophomores, juniors, and seniors
 - ✓ 7 groups, 61 participants
 - ✓ Accounting majors, business majors, and undeclared students
 - ✓ March 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th, and April 11th

Methodology

→ Phase II—Quantitative Research

2,174 (20- to 25-minute) telephone interviews

Conducted May 25-June 27

- * 1,000 interviews among high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors
- * 1,174 interviews among college freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors
 - ✓ 500 “random” college student interviews
 - “College student” results in this report are based on this random sample data.
 - ✓ 204 interviews with undeclared students
 - ✓ 200 interviews with business majors
 - ✓ 214 interviews with accounting majors
 - ✓ 56 “switcher” interviews

Sampling Methodology

- ➔ No weighting of the data was necessary, as all interviews were conducted among random, nationally representative samples of high school and college students.
 - * High School respondents were selected from a national sample with equal numbers of sophomores, juniors, and seniors interviewed.
 - * College respondents were selected from a national sample of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors.
 - * Accounting and Business respondents were selected from oversamples of sophomore, junior, and senior accounting and business majors.
 - * Undeclared respondents were selected from an oversample of freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior undeclared students.
 - * Switcher respondents were based on those stating they had changed their major from accounting.

- ➔ Gender stratification for both the high school and college students was approximately equal to the current census data for these populations (45% male, 55% female).

Sampling Methodology

A note on sampling error...

In interpreting survey results, it should be noted all sample surveys are subject to sampling error. Sampling error is the extent to which survey results may differ from what would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed. The size of sampling error depends largely on the number of interviews completed.

Using the most conservative assumptions—percentages near 50%—we can assume the sampling error for the different sample groups included in this study to be as follows:

Sample size of 1,000 or greater = +/- 3 percentage points

Sample size of 500 = +/- 4 percentage points

Sample size of 300 = +/- 6 percentage points

Sample size of 200 = +/- 7 percentage points

Main Findings: Three Challenges

Three Challenges

1. Ignorance

- Most students are ignorant or have limited knowledge of an accounting career.
- Many (more than a third of) high school and college students do not know what a CPA does. And those who are aware think CPAs handle money and prepare taxes.
- Even accounting students identify CPAs most closely with tax preparation (58%) rather than with designing financial information systems (17%), giving financial advice (21%), or advising on how to run a business (20%).
- Student perceptions have not changed dramatically since 1990, when high school students identified CPAs most closely with tax preparation and handling/managing money.

	High School	College	Accounting
Don't know	35%	37%	4%
Handle money	25%	15%	6%
Tax preparation	18%	31%	58%
Designing financial info systems	11%	2%	17%
Bookkeeping	8%	13%	21%
Giving financial advice	6%	6%	21%
Advising on how to run a business	4%	5%	20%
Audits	-	3%	17%

HS – Q25 “... What do Certified Public Accountants do?”
College – Q19 “... What do Certified Public Accountants do?”

Three Challenges

1. Ignorance

What is the impact of student ignorance?

- Student interest in accounting is low and has trended downward from 1990. Only 10 high school students (out of 1,000 interviewed) are considering majoring in accounting. The number of college students majoring in accounting has dropped from 4% in 1990 to 2% in 2000.

	1990	2000
College students majoring in accounting	4%	2%
High school students planning on accounting major	4%	1%

- When high school students were prompted, “Would you ever consider a career in accounting,” only 18% say “yes.”

College– S5 “Thinking back to the beginning of your Spring 2000 semester, had you declared a major, and if so what was it?”
HS – Q6 “What do you think you will major in, in college?”

Three Challenges

2. Misinformation

- ➔ Much of students' information regarding accounting is limited or faulty. Some see accounting as limiting (rather than expanding) their future career choices (quote #1 below), while others have no clue as to the meaning of the CPA credential (quote #2). Still, others associate accounting with bookkeeping (quote #3) and therefore don't view it as a career for "good students."
 - * *"I can't see any applications for accounting, except being an accountant."*
 - * *"A CPA is someone who works for the government."*
 - * *"There weren't any accounting classes in the AP classes in high school. Those courses were for secretaries."*

Why is this important?

- ➔ Because students are making decisions earlier and earlier and the misinformation regarding accounting affects their decision-making—as evidenced by the low numbers of students choosing accounting as a potential career or major.
 - * 63% of high school students stated they were already thinking about a job/occupation/career by their freshman year.
 - * 57% of college students said they became seriously interested in a particular profession prior to college.

Three Challenges

3. Negative perceptions

- The qualitative phase showed that students view accountants as doing boring, tedious, and monotonous number-crunching by themselves.
 - * *“If you are a detailed-oriented person, who likes to work by [yourself], then it’s for you.”*
- The quantitative data show students also see CPAs as professional and intelligent. However, the association of CPAs with math and numbers remained strong—even among older students. College students, in particular, see CPAs as math lovers (15%) and people who deal with numbers (13%).
- Accounting students, not surprisingly, are more likely to see CPAs as professional, intelligent, and hard-working.

A CPA is...	High School	College	Accounting
Professional	19%	11%	24%
An intelligent person	14%	13%	22%
Someone who likes math	12%	15%	2%
Someone who deals with numbers	9%	13%	4%
A dull person	5%	3%	6%
Hard-working	3%	3%	11%
Suit and tie businessperson	2%	6%	7%

HS – Q26 “When you hear the words ‘Certified Public Accountant,’ what type of person comes to mind?”
College – Q20 “When you hear the words ‘Certified Public Accountant,’ what type of person comes to mind?”

Three Challenges

3. Negative perceptions

Why are students' negative perceptions of CPAs and accounting important?

- The data suggest students are not choosing accounting as a career because their interests (and values) lie elsewhere. When asked about what is important in choosing a career, students cite they are looking for careers that are personally rewarding, where you are able to work with people, that make a contribution to society, and that maintain a balance of home and work.
- Doing math and working with numbers—two things closely associated with accounting—are not as highly valued by students.

Top 3 important things in choosing a career...*

High School		College	
Personally rewarding	90%	Personally rewarding	94%
Working with people	74%	Home/work balance	80%
Making a contribution to society	73%	Making a contribution to society	79%

**Those answering 8-10 on a 10-pt scale*

HS – Q10/Q11 “...some things may be important in choosing a career... please rate its importance to you on a 1 to 10 scale...”
College – Q10/Q11 “...some things may be important in choosing a career... please rate its importance to you on a 1 to 10 scale...”

Main Findings: Systemic Barriers

Systemic Barriers

The bumpy road to becoming a CPA

- In addition to the challenges of ignorance, misinformation, and negative perceptions, students also face systemic barriers on the (bumpy) road to becoming a CPA. As the flow chart on the following page describes...
- * According to college students, more than a third of high schools do not offer accounting.
 - * At high schools where accounting is offered, only 25% of students actually take accounting. The top reasons for not taking accounting courses include not being interested in accounting and not having time for accounting courses.
 - * Interestingly, whether students take accounting in high school has little impact on whether they take accounting in college, as evidenced by the low numbers of students—across the board—who actually take college accounting courses.
 - * But doesn't awareness breed interest? Our qualitative research suggests that many of the accounting courses currently offered by high schools are remedial in nature and therefore do not create the type of interest necessary to increase the number of accounting majors.
 - * The bottom line: currently, only 2% of college students major in accounting, and only 1% of high school students plan on majoring in accounting.

Systemic Barriers

The bumpy road to becoming a CPA

35% of high schools don't offer accounting

↓
We know from the focus groups that, therefore, the student...

- Lacks awareness during critical college application process
- May be positively influenced by friends/family
- But is more likely to be encouraged into other professions.

↓
Only 17% of these students will take college accounting course

65% of high schools do offer accounting (or students are unsure)

↓
75% of students don't take accounting because...

- 1) Not interested
- 2) Don't have the time

↓
Only 9% of these students will take college accounting course

↓
25% of students do take high school accounting

↓
15% of these students will take college accounting course

↓
These students will be impacted by

- 1) **Quality of professors**
- 2) **Quality of introductory courses**
- 3) **Perceptions of CPAs**

The effect of the bumpy road: Only 2% of college students major in accounting—and some of these students will not pursue a CPA.

Systemic Barriers

High school accounting courses

- High school students, college students, and accounting majors feel pretty similarly about their first high school accounting course. Basically, students think their first course was pretty much the same as other high school courses.
- Notably, not many students believe their accounting courses were worse than other courses.

First High School Accounting Course...	High School	College	Accounting
Much better than other high school courses	31%	30%	38%
The same as other high school courses	64%	61%	60%
Much worse than other high school courses	5%	9%	2%

HS – Q20 “In comparison to courses in other subjects, how would you rate your introductory high school accounting course? Would you say that your accounting course was...?”
College – Q17d “In comparison to courses in other subjects, how would you rate your introductory high school accounting course? Would you say that your accounting course was...?”

Systemic Barriers

High school accounting courses

- Given that students found their high school accounting courses pretty similar to other courses, it's not surprising that they don't have any overwhelming suggestions for making them better. Only college students feel strongly that a better teacher could have made a difference.
- Overall, the students suggest in-depth learning, better teachers, real-life situations, and more computer work as ways to make the courses better.

What could have been done to make first high school accounting course better...	High School	College	Accounting
More in-depth learning	9%	10%	13%
Better teacher	9%	21%	10%
More real life situations	7%	4%	7%
More computer work	7%	3%	7%
Nothing, it was a good course	5%	6%	10%
Less work	5%	-	-
Make it harder, more challenging	-	7%	8%
Make it more interesting	3%	4%	-
Smaller classes	3%	4%	1%

HS – Q21 “What could have been done to make the course better?”
 College – Q17e “What could have been done to make the course better?”

Systemic Barriers

High school accounting teacher

- Almost two-thirds of accounting majors state that their high school accounting teacher had a positive impact—making them more interested in accounting.
- Findings from the qualitative research, along with the accounting student data below, suggest teachers can have an impact on students—if the teachers and the courses are “good.”

Effect of High School Accounting Teacher...	High School	College	Accounting
More interested in accounting	49%	21%	65%
Less interested in accounting	16%	19%	5%
No effect on career plans	35%	60%	30%

HS – Q22 “What effect, if any, did your first high school accounting teacher have on your thoughts about a career? Did he or she make you...?”
College – Q17F “What effect, if any, did your first high school accounting teacher have on your thoughts about a career? Did he or she make you...?”

Systemic Barriers

College accounting courses

- While both college and accounting students think better teachers would have improved their introductory courses, other areas for improvement are almost as important—such as more in-depth learning.

What could have been done to make intro college accounting course better...	College	Accounting
Better teacher	16%	12%
More in-depth	10%	8%
Move more slowly	8%	4%
More group projects/interaction	8%	3%
More real-world situations	7%	5%
Smaller class size	7%	6%
Less boring	7%	2%
Make it easier	7%	-
Different book	3%	1%
More computer work	2%	3%
Studied more	-	3%

College – Q18c “What could have been done to make the course better?”

Systemic Barriers

College accounting professor

- Switchers do not overwhelmingly point the blame (for them switching out of accounting) on their college accounting professors. Instead, switchers are pretty evenly divided, with approximately a third stating their professors made them more interested in accounting, a third less interested, and a third stating their professor had no effect.
- Accounting majors do seem to give some of the credit to their professors. Almost two-thirds state their professor made them more interested in accounting.
- Both the high school and college data suggest that while teachers and professors and the quality of the accounting courses do have an impact on students, they are not the sole reasons students choose (or don't choose) careers in accounting.

Effect of College Accounting Professor...	College	Accounting	Switchers
More interested in accounting	21%	65%	35%
Less interested in accounting	31%	5%	27%
No effect on career plans	48%	31%	37%

College – Q18d “What effect, if any, did your first college accounting teacher have on your thoughts about a career? Did he or she make you...?”

Systemic Barriers

Potential career in accounting

- ➔ Only 18% of high school students would consider a career in accounting (66% would not, and 16% might).
- ➔ As mentioned before, the association between accounting and math is strong in the minds of students. Being good—or not good—with numbers is one of the main reasons for choosing—or not choosing—a career in accounting.
- ➔ Students do see accounting as a career with good job opportunities, as evidenced by the data below as well as the quadrant analyses of work values (pages 73-75).

I would consider a career in accounting because...	High School
I am good with numbers	31%
There are good job opportunities for accountants	15%
Accountants make a lot of money	9%
General interest	6%
Friends/family encouraged to consider accounting	4%
I am not good at math	4%
It is related to my main career goals	4%
I like subjects that have rules	2%

I would <i>not</i> consider a career in accounting because...	High School
I am just not interested in accounting	51%
I am not good at math	16%
I am good with numbers	6%
I am interested in a different career	2%

HS – Q23 “Would you ever consider a career in accounting?”
 HS – Q24 “Why do you say that?”

Main Findings: Current CPA Requirements

Current CPA Requirements

Licensing exam, 150 hours, continuing education

“Unaware”

- The great majority of high school students are *unaware* of the requirements to become a CPA—and our previous data has shown that this is when students are making career and major decisions.
- College students are more aware of the requirements, especially the licensing exam. However, subsequent data show that these requirements are not impacting their decision-making.

Aware of...	High School	College
Five-year education requirement	23%	29%
Licensing exam	34%	59%
Continuing professional education	35%	44%

HS – Q32 “The requirements for becoming a CPA include 5 years of college education, a licensing exam, and continuing professional education. Were you aware of the...?”
College – Q18d “The requirements for becoming a CPA include 5 years of college education, a licensing exam, and continuing professional education. Were you aware of the...?”

Current CPA Requirements

Licensing exam, 150 hours, continuing education

“Unconcerned”

- ➔ The majority of students are *unaware* of the requirements, but more importantly, they are *unconcerned* about the requirements.
- ➔ Even those students who have switched from accounting thought the requirements were fair.
- ➔ Accounting students, who should be most familiar with the requirements, also think the requirements are fair. And importantly, none of the individual requirements (exam, 150 hours, continuing education) seem more onerous than others.

Effect decision to become or not become a CPA...?	High School	College	Accounting	Switchers
No, the requirements seem fair	51%	81%	73%	80%
Yes, the five-year education requirement	26%	5%	16%	9%
Yes, the licensing exam	10%	4%	14%	12%
Yes, continuing professional education	16%	4%	12%	7%

HS – Q33 “Do you think any of these requirements would factor into your decision to become a CPA?”
 College – Q33 “Did any of these requirements factor into your decision to become or not become a CPA?”

**Main Findings:
Value of the CPA Credential**

Value of the CPA Credential

- Not only are students unconcerned and unaware, but there is other evidence supporting the fact the 150-hour requirement is not impacting student decisions regarding accounting.
- Overwhelming numbers of high school (76%) and college (80%) students plan on attending graduate school. This compares with 57% of college students in 1990.
- And the overwhelming majority of students would choose the same career, regardless of the education requirements.

Graduate School Plans...	High School	College
Business school (MBA or other business master's degree)	14%	16%
Medicine	19%	12%
Law school	7%	7%
Other graduate school (Ph.D. or master's degree)	28%	39%
Other (specialty schools, etc.)	9%	10%
Don't know	21%	15%

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

HS – Q13 “What are your graduate school plans?”
College – Q13 “What are your graduate school plans?”

Value of the CPA Credential

- ➔ Not only are students willing (and expecting) to attend graduate school, they are comfortable with doing “whatever it takes” to achieve their career goals.
- ➔ We might have expected students’ willingness to decline as they got older (i.e., as the reality of graduate school nears, students have less interest) but, in fact, college students are even more willing than high school students to do “whatever it takes.”
- ➔ In 1990, slightly higher percentages of students said they would still choose the same career—regardless of educational requirements—with 87% of high school students and 90% of college students responding that way. Note, however, that smaller percentages expected to attend graduate school in 1990 (57% of college students in 1990 vs. 80% in 2000.)

Influence on current career plans if had to spend extra time in school...	High School	College	Accounting
I would still choose the same career	78%	85%	87%
I'd look more carefully at other careers	14%	9%	10%
I'd not want to spend the extra time	4%	4%	2%
Don't know/refused	4%	2%	1%

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

HS – Q14 “Do you think your choice of professional career would be influenced by whether or not you had to spend additional time in college beyond a bachelor’s degree...?”
 College – Q14 “Do you think your choice of professional career would be influenced by whether or not you had to spend additional time in college beyond a bachelor’s degree...?”

Value of the CPA Credential

- Given that 1) students expect to attend graduate school and 2) are willing to do whatever it takes to achieve the career they want, the question becomes whether an individual career is *worth it* in terms of money, time, and education.
- Therefore, a key question for students (and for the AICPA) is whether the CPA credential is *worth it* in terms of money, time, and education.
- Comparison of the CPA with other professions/careers/degrees shows the perception is the CPA is *much less worth it*.

Professions/Careers/Degrees worth the extra effort...	High School	College	Accounting
Doctor	90%	92%	89%
MBA	78%	80%	81%
Lawyer	71%	77%	75%
Teacher	70%	81%	75%
Engineer	68%	35%	45%
Accountant/CPA	40%	47%	81%
Business consultant	37%	28%	22%
IT consultant	34%	39%	48%
Internet entrepreneur	28%	78%	59%

HS – Q15 “...please indicate whether or not you think the career is worth the extra effort—in terms of money, time, and education...[THOSE ANSWERING ‘WORTH IT’]”
 College – Q15 “...please indicate whether or not you think the career is worth the extra effort—in terms of money, time, and education...[THOSE ANSWERING ‘WORTH IT’]”

Value of the CPA Credential

- As you will note from the previous chart, 78% of high school students, 80% of college students, and 81% of accounting students agree that obtaining an MBA is worth the extra effort.
- Not surprisingly, students think an MBA is worth the education involved. Additionally, students believe an MBA is worth the extra effort because of the better job opportunities an MBA can provide.

An MBA is worth the extra effort because...	High School	College	Accounting
Worth the education/knowledge	15%	19%	24%
Better job opportunities	13%	21%	28%
Salary/to make money	9%	13%	23%
Important/need to have	9%	6%	9%
Makes you better qualified	8%	1%	1%
People respect it/shows perseverance	3%	1%	1%
Helps with future/life/better yourself	3%	1%	1%
The more education, the better	1%	15%	9%

HS – Q15b “In many professions, people have advanced degrees such as an MBA. Do you feel that obtaining an MBA is worth the extra effort?”
 College – Q15b “In many professions, people have advanced degrees such as an MBA. Do you feel that obtaining an MBA is worth the extra effort?”

Value of the CPA Credential

- We asked students to compare the value of an MBA and a CPA, keeping in mind the educational and licensing requirements of each. Compared with an MBA, a CPA is not attractive to college students. However, the combination of degrees (MBA and CPA) is very attractive.
- Accounting students are two times more likely to be interested in the combination of an MBA and a CPA than a CPA alone.

Rated most attractive...	High School	College	Accounting
CPA	12%	9%	29%
MBA	26%	25%	6%
Combination	55%	59%	63%
Don't know/refused	7%	7%	1%

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

HS – Q34 “...an MBA adds 2 years of graduate study, but you do not have to pass a licensing exam...to become both an MBA and CPA...graduate study and licensing exam...which is most attractive to you, an MBA, a CPA, or the combination?”

College – Q30 “...an MBA adds 2 years of graduate study, but you do not have to pass a licensing exam...to become both an MBA and CPA...graduate study and licensing exam...which is most attractive to you, an MBA, a CPA, or the combination?”

Main Findings: Decision-Making Process

Decision-Making Process

Timing

- As we found in the focus groups, the decision to go to college is a “non-decision” for most students. More than half of students either always knew they would go to college or knew before junior high school.

First knew would really go to college...	HS Sophomores	HS Juniors	HS Seniors
Always knew	45%	48%	52%
Before junior high school	13%	6%	9%
In junior high school	17%	12%	8%
During freshman year of high school	16%	14%	16%
During sophomore year of high school	5%	10%	6%
During junior year of high school	-	7%	5%
During senior year of high school	-	-	3%
Don't know	5%	3%	2%

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

Decision-Making Process

Sources of information: college

- By their senior year of high school, most students have used every means possible to gather information regarding college, including books, catalogues, brochures, the Internet, and college fairs.
- The only avenue not often explored is CD-ROM databases.

Information Sources	High School Sophomores	High School Juniors	High School Seniors
Looked at a college book, college guide, or index	73%	85%	88%
Asked a college to send you a catalogue, brochure, or other material	73%	85%	88%
Used the Internet to gather information	66%	77%	80%
Attended a college fair	20%	39%	65%
Used a database on CD-ROM	14%	25%	20%

HS – Q2a “Have you done any of the following things to get more information about going to college, or to find out what it would be like to go to college? How about...?”

Decision-Making Process

Sources of information: college

- While high school students explore almost every avenue to gather information about college, they see real value in using the Internet.

Most useful sources of information	High School Sophomores	High School Juniors	High School Seniors
Used the Internet to gather information	35%	30%	28%
Looked at a college book, college guide, or index	22%	20%	24%
Asked a college to send material	13%	18%	15%
Attended a college fair	8%	11%	11%
Guidance counselor	3%	3%	3%
Database on CD-ROM	3%	3%	1%
Visited college	2%	4%	4%

Decision-Making Process

Sources of information: college

→ The databases used by high school students are the following...

Databases	High School
CDs from school	6%
Apply	4%
Choices	4%
College board	2%
Fastweb	2%
Kaplan	2%
Princeton Review	2%
Other	16%
Don't know	48%

Decision-Making Process

Timing: college majors

- ➔ As mentioned earlier, students start thinking about college, college majors, and even careers very early.
- ➔ More than two-thirds of college students had thought about their college major prior to entering college. Our qualitative research suggests many are prompted by the college application process.

Started thinking about a college major...	College	Accounting
Before entering college	69%	63%
Freshman year in college	17%	20%
Sophomore year in college	5%	10%
Junior year in college or later	7%	6%
Don't know	1%	1%

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

Decision-Making Process

Timing: college majors

→ High school students also state they are thinking about college majors very early.

Started thinking about a college major...	HS Sophomores	HS Juniors	HS Seniors
Always knew what you'd major in	8%	7%	5%
Before junior high school	8%	3%	4%
In junior high school	21%	13%	8%
During freshman year of high school	33%	27%	20%
During sophomore year of high school	24%	25%	19%
During junior year of high school	-	21%	23%
During senior year of high school	-	-	17%
Don't know	6%	4%	3%

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

Decision-Making Process

Timing: careers

- Students start thinking about jobs or careers very early, with many starting in or before *junior* high school.

Started thinking about a job, occupation, or career...	HS Sophomores	HS Juniors	HS Seniors
Always knew what you wanted to be	14%	9%	11%
Before junior high school	12%	8%	8%
In junior high school	26%	20%	9%
During freshman year of high school	29%	27%	20%
During sophomore year of high school	17%	21%	20%
During junior year of high school	-	14%	18%
During senior year of high school	-	-	11%
Don't know	1%	2%	4%

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

Decision-Making Process

Timing: careers

- More than half of college students seriously considered a particular profession prior to entering college.

Started becoming seriously interested in a profession...	College
Before high school	11%
During freshman year of high school	10%
During sophomore year of high school	8%
During junior year of high school	11%
During senior year of high school	17%
Freshman year of college	23%
Sophomore year of college	11%
Junior year of college or later	7%
Don't know	-

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

College – Q8 “When did you start to become seriously interested in this as a profession?”

Decision-Making Process

Sources of information: careers

- In trying to make decisions regarding careers, students look to their parents and teachers for “useful, believable” information.
- The Internet has become increasingly important to younger students.
- High school guidance counselors are seen as good sources of information for high school students, whereas college advisors were almost unanimously seen as unhelpful during the college student focus groups.
- Note that books and brochures are still—even in the Internet age—a good means of communicating with students.

Sources of useful, believable information	High School	College	“Best Sources” College Students
People you know who work in jobs you are interested in	57%	na	na
Parents	54%	56%	14%
Teachers	43%	44%	18%
Classes at school	36%	na	na
Books & brochures	34%	24%	11%
Friends	19%	20%	7%
Career fairs & presentations	25%	17%	11%
HS guidance counselors	36%	16%	12%
Career Web sites	33%	13%	15%
Movies, television	7%	7%	1%

HS – Q7 “How helpful were each of the following in providing useful, believable information about careers...?”
 College – Q5 “How helpful were each of the following in providing useful, believable information about careers...?”
 College – Q6 “Knowing what you now know, what do you think are the best information sources regarding careers?”

Decision-Making Process

Sources of information: careers

- Almost any information regarding careers would be well received, according to high school students. They are interested in the education requirements, skills needed, an understanding of the work, chances for advancement, and the long-term outlook for jobs.
- Students are slightly less interested in future salaries (note that they are still interested), which is confirmed by our analysis of their work values (pg. 73-75).

Helpful in deciding on a job or career...	High School Sophomores	High School Juniors	High School Seniors
Amount of education needed to get a job	76%	69%	70%
Skills needed in the job	68%	75%	71%
An understanding of the work, day to day	65%	66%	65%
The chance to 'get ahead'	65%	62%	67%
Long-term outlook for jobs	54%	60%	58%
The pay	51%	47%	52%

HS – Q8 “Would any of the following pieces of information be helpful to you in deciding on a job or career...[THOSE ANSWERING VERY HELPFUL]?”

Decision-Making Process

Reasons for career plans

- ➔ *What do high school kids want to be when they grow up?* Teachers, doctors, lawyers, and people who work with computers. Two percent would like to be accountants. This has trended downward, slightly, from 1990, when 5% stated they would like to be accountants.
- ➔ Consistently, they are not interested in these careers for the money; they want to help people, do something they are good at, and do something they think is fun.

Anticipated career plans...	High School
Teacher	12%
Doctor	8%
Computers	7%
Lawyer/paralegal	4%
Entertainment	3%
Psychologist/therapist	3%
Arts/singer/dancer	3%
Engineer	3%
Nurse/EMT	3%
Accountant	2%

Why these career plans...	High School
To help people	9%
Interesting/appealing/fun	9%
Good at it/Like to do it	9%
Like kids/working with kids	7%
Like math/science	6%
Work with people	6%
Interest in computers/technology	5%
Family/friend influence	5%
Taken classes/studied it	4%
Want to teach	3%
Always wanted to do	3%
Interested in drawing/art/design	3%

HS – Q8s “What job, occupation, or career would you like to have when you are older...?”
 HS – Q9a “And why do you think you would be interested in this career?”

Decision-Making Process

Reasons for career plans

- ➔ Consistently, college students also want to be teachers, doctors, lawyers, and people who work with computers. The entertainment industry also beckons. And again, only 2% want to be accountants. This compares with 4% in 1990.
- ➔ College students are more interested in salary/money than high school students, but their main reason for their career plans is they *enjoy it and find it interesting*.

Anticipated career plans...	College
Teacher	17%
Doctor/Medicine	9%
Entertainment	5%
Computers	4%
Lawyer/Paralegal	3%
Management	3%
Own my own business/Entrepreneur	3%
Veterinarian/Work with animals	3%
Engineering	2%
Researcher/Scientist	2%
Accountant	2%

Why these career plans...	College
Enjoy doing it/Interesting	31%
What I've always wanted to do	11%
Good with people/Like working with people	9%
To help people	8%
Good pay/money	7%
Good at it	4%
It goes with what I studied	3%
I have experience in that field	2%
Took class and liked it	2%
Wanted to teach/Work with kids	2%
Flexible hours	2%
Job opportunities	2%

College – Q7 “What job, occupation, or career would you like to have when you are older...?”

College – Q7a “Why did you select this career?”

Decision-Making Process

- ➔ Data from 1990 regarding students' opinions of specific professions show only one profession has lost significant ground: lawyers. Both high school and college students think much less highly of lawyers than they did in 1990.
- ➔ Perceptions of accounting are pretty much unchanged from 1990.

High Opinion Professions	High School		College	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
Doctors	65%	78%	78%	85%
Lawyers	60%	45%	56%	38%
Teachers	52%	66%	72%	83%
Engineers	50%	58%	65%	72%
Accountants	32%	30%	32%	36%

HS – Q15 “I would like you to rate some professions, again using a 1 to 10 scale...1 means you have a very high opinion, and 10 means you have a very low opinion... [THOSE RATING 8-10]?”

College – Q15 “I would like you to rate some professions, again using a 1 to 10 scale...1 means you have a very high opinion, and 10 means you have a very low opinion... [THOSE RATING 8-10]?”

Decision-Making Process

Role models

- Students look to their parents and teachers for information; they also look to them as role models. Students especially look up to their parents and seem to do so even more as they get older.
- Michael Jordan was the only celebrity that more than 1% of either high school or college students named as a role model. He received 3% of the vote among both high school and college students.

Role Models...	High School	College	Accounting
Parents	43%	53%	47%
Teacher/professor	13%	12%	9%
Celebrities	4%	-	-
Siblings	4%	2%	3%
Other relatives--aunt, uncle, cousin	3%	2%	1%
Grandparents	2%	3%	2%
Friends	1%	2%	2%
Don't have a role model	23%	19%	24%

HS – Q35 “...Is there anyone you would consider to be your role model? Who?
College – Q16a “...Is there anyone you would consider to be your role model? Who?”

Decision-Making Process

Role models

- According to students, role models (parents and teachers for the most part) do impact students' career choices.
- More than 95% of high school and college students stated that role models had at least some impact—if not a great deal—on their career choices.

Role Model Influence on Career Choices...	High School	College	Accounting
A great deal of impact	63%	68%	62%
Some impact	32%	28%	32%
No impact whatsoever	6%	4%	6%

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

HS – Q36 “What impact, if any, does your role model have on your career choices? Would you say your role model has...?”

College – Q16b “What impact, if any, does your role model have on your career choices? Would you say your role model has...?”

**Main Findings:
Work Values vs. Perceptions of
CPAs**

Work Values vs. Perceptions of CPAs

Note on the quadrant analysis methodology...

- ➔ To understand students' work values, we asked them to evaluate what attributes are important to them in terms of their future career. We also asked students whether these attributes describe "what a CPA does."
- ➔ The comparison of this data allows us to conduct quadrant analyses, which are shown on pages 73-75. Please note that the comparisons of data are relative. For example, high importance means students place a relatively higher importance on that attribute. Low importance, therefore, does not mean that the student doesn't value it at all; rather, it has a lower relative importance to students.

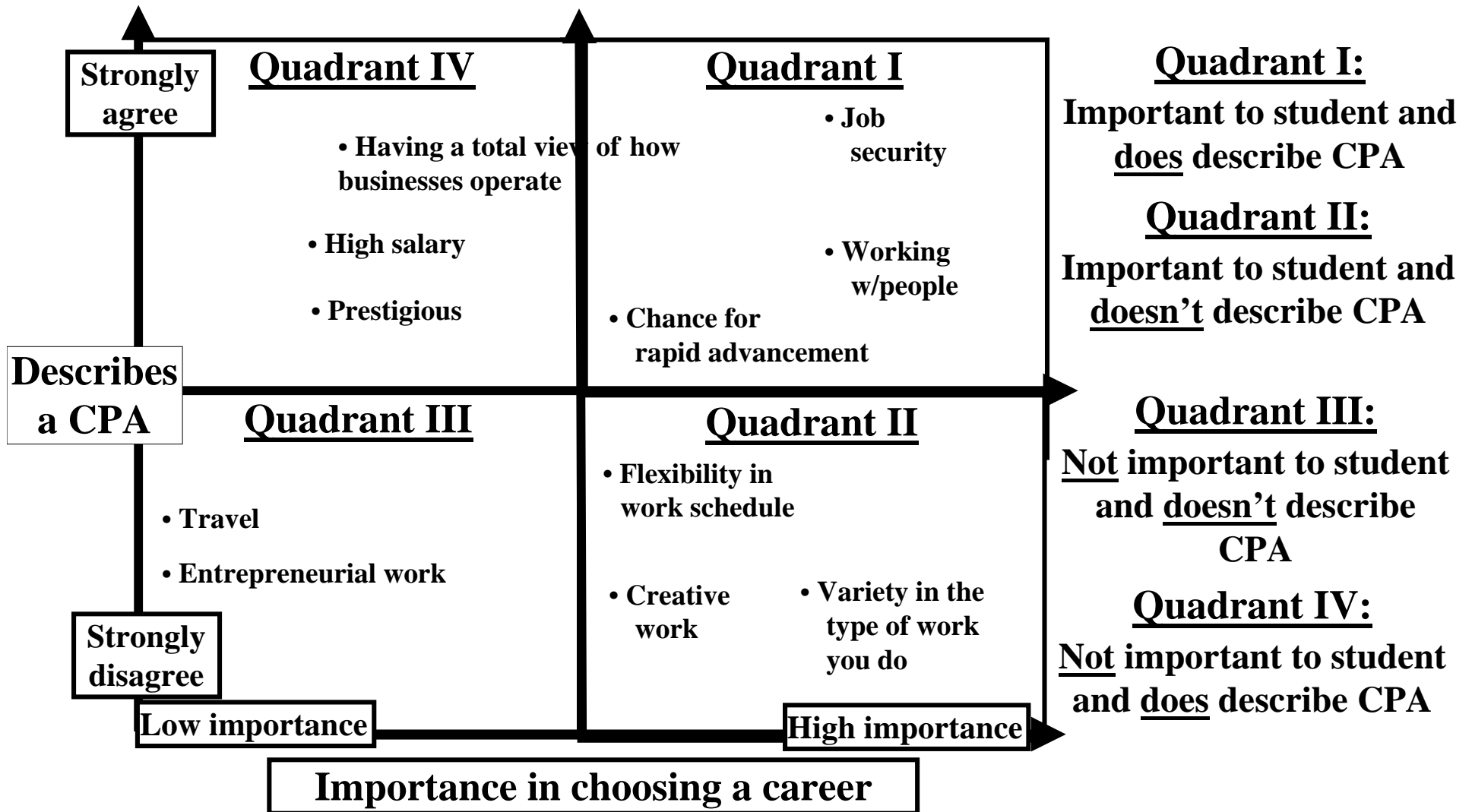
Work Values vs. Perceptions of CPAs

For each quadrant analysis, the following is true:

- Quadrant I are those items that are important to students and describe a CPA. These are values that the AICPA should stress, as they appeal to students and already are associated with CPAs.
- Quadrant II are those items the AICPA should focus on. Students value these attributes but do not think they describe CPAs.
- Quadrant III includes those items that are neither important to students nor describe CPAs. Therefore, these items are not priorities. However, please note that student values can (and do) shift over time, so it is always important to include these items in future tracking.
- Quadrant IV includes those items that describe a CPA but that are not important to students. These are items that do not need to be emphasized as they are already strongly associated with CPAs.

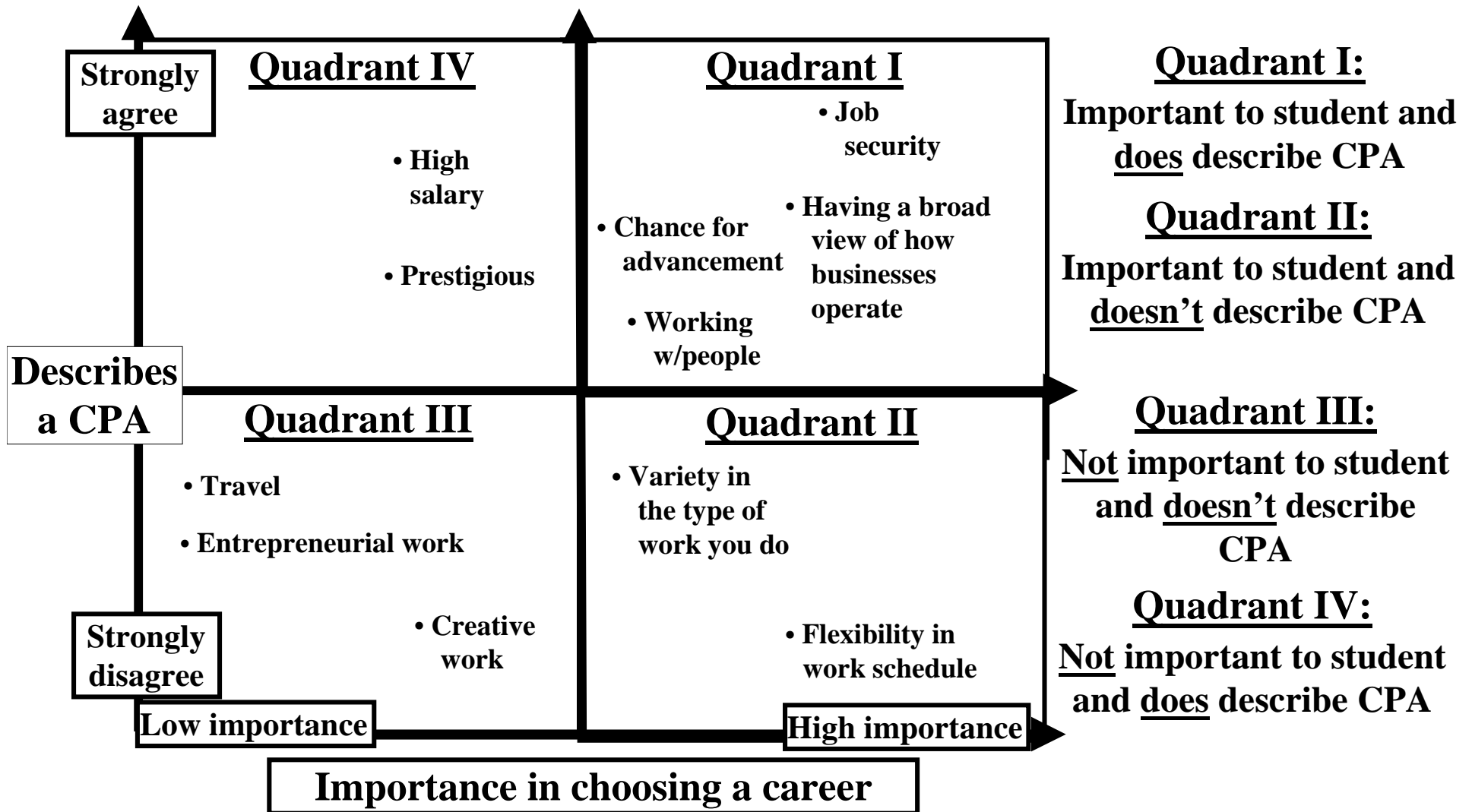
Work Values vs. Perceptions of CPAs

College students



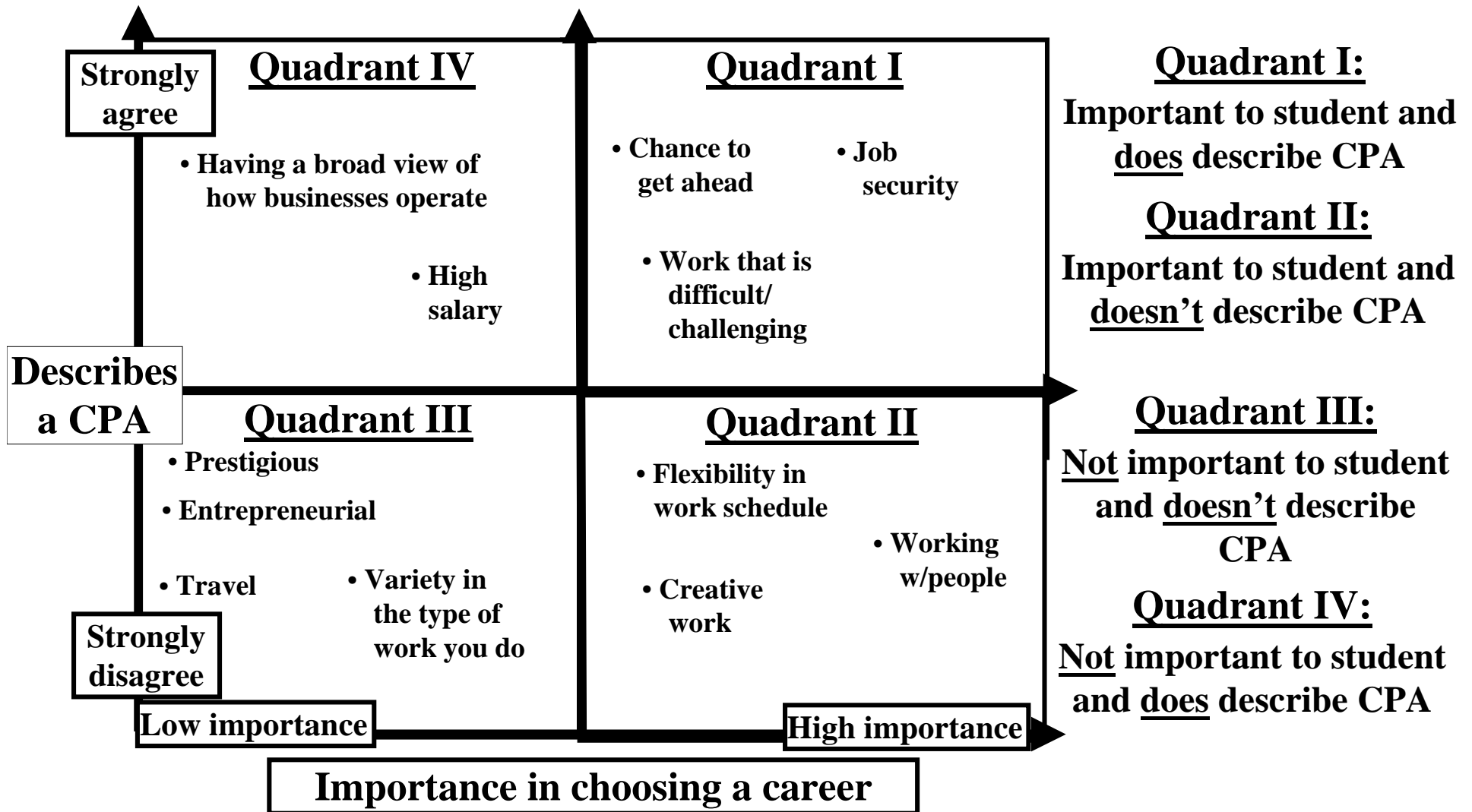
Work Values vs. Perceptions of CPAs

Accounting students



Work Values vs. Perceptions of CPAs

High school students



Work Values vs. Perceptions of CPAs

- As mentioned previously, having a career that is personally rewarding and making a contribution to society are of highest importance to both high school and college students.

- But maybe more interesting are the following trends, which can be seen by examining the quadrant analyses:
 - * Being a CPA is seen as a secure job by college and high school students as well as accounting majors. All three groups also see accounting as a career that offers a chance to “get ahead,” and all three groups place a relatively high value on advancement.

 - * Both high school and college students are looking for creative work and flexible schedules—and don’t think a career as a CPA would offer this. Accounting students are also looking for flexibility and find a CPA career lacking in this area. Creative work is not as highly valued by accounting students.

 - * A CPA is seen by college students, high school students, and accounting majors as high-paying—but they say they don’t value that as much as other things.

 - * Having the opportunity to travel—and be an entrepreneur—are not highly valued.

Work Values vs. Perceptions of CPAs

- To understand changes in student values, over time, following is the student “work values” data captured in the 1990 study.
- For high school students, the interesting trends include their increased interest in chances for advancement and their strongly decreased interest in high salaries.
- Consistently, the college data show a decreased interest in high salaries. Note that students in 1990 were graduating into a recessionary period as opposed to the economic boom students are facing today.

Importance in Career...	High School		College	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
Working with people	81%	74%	76%	73%
Security	76%	68%	76%	75%
Variety	72%	61%	72%	68%
Flexibility in schedule	66%	64%	60%	58%
High salary	66%	52%	50%	38%
Chance for advancement	59%	63%	48%	44%
Prestige	47%	38%	39%	33%
Having a broad view of how businesses operate	66%	47%	46%	43%

HS – Q10 “...some things that may be important in choosing a career...please rate its importance to you on a 1 to 10 scale...[THOSE RATING 8-10]?”
 College – Q10 “...some things that may be important in choosing a career...please rate its importance to you on a 1 to 10 scale...[THOSE RATING 8-10]?”

Work Values vs. Perceptions of CPAs

- High school students in 2000 are less likely to think CPAs solve problems and are more likely to see being a CPA as a secure career.
- The biggest change for college students is their increased perception of CPAs as being numerically oriented. This follows other trends we have seen in the data, where students strongly associate being a CPA with math and numbers.

Describes CPA...	High School		College	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
Problem-solving	73%	64%	70%	70%
Numerically oriented	69%	69%	54%	81%
Working with people	56%	55%	37%	48%
Having a total view of how businesses operate	51%	52%	48%	57%
Secure	41%	54%	44%	47%
High-paying	38%	40%	40%	37%
Chance for advancement	30%	30%	23%	26%
Prestige	25%	28%	24%	24%
Flexibility in schedule	23%	23%	14%	18%
Variety	23%	22%	10%	11%

HS – Q29/Q30 “I’m going to read to you some ways to describe jobs in general, and I want you to consider whether they describe the job of a CPA in particular... [Strongly Agree]?”
 College – Q22/Q23 “I’m going to read to you some ways to describe jobs in general, and I want you to consider whether they describe the job of a CPA in particular... [Strongly Agree]?”

Work Values vs. Perceptions of CPAs

- ➔ For the most part, students' expectations regarding salaries match what they think a CPA would make.
- ➔ High school students expect that the median salary in the field they are pursuing as well as the median salary for a CPA would be approximately \$41K.
- ➔ Similar expectations for college students are \$39K (expecting) versus \$41K (CPA).

Estimate of the Starting Salary of...	High School		College		Accounting	
	Career pursuing	CPA	Career pursuing	CPA	Career pursuing	CPA
Less than \$25,000	6%	5%	9%	2%	1%	1%
\$25,000 to \$35,000	14%	15%	24%	21%	32%	22%
\$35,001-\$50,000	18%	26%	29%	38%	55%	51%
\$50,001-\$75,000	13%	15%	14%	14%	5%	20%
More than \$75,000	5%	4%	5%	3%	3%	2%
Don't know/Refused	44%	35%	19%	22%	4%	4%

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

HS – Q9c “What would you expect a starting salary to be in the field you’re interested in pursuing after college graduation?”

HS – Q27 “What is your estimate of the starting salary of a Certified Public Accountant?”

College – Q9 “What would you expect a starting salary to be in the field you’re interested in pursuing after graduation?”

College – Q21 “What is your estimate of the starting salary of a Certified Public Accountant?”

**Main Findings:
Student Demographics—
Accounting Students and
Switchers**

Student Demographics

Current accounting students

A key question for the AICPA is understanding the type of students the profession is currently attracting—and whether these students will do well in a challenging and dynamic environment. Combining accounting student demographics with some of their attitudes and behaviors leads us to the following profile of current accounting students.

- Accounting majors (84% of whom plan to pursue a CPA):
 - Are more likely to be female than college students generally
 - Are somewhat more likely to be Hispanic and less likely to be African-American than college students
 - Are less likely to have taken AP and college prep courses than college students generally
 - Are more likely to have attended community college and currently attend public universities
 - Do report higher GPAs

Student Demographics

- Our quadrant analysis of accounting students shows that these students do not differ dramatically in their work values than college students generally. However, their values do differ significantly in one area: they don't seem to value creative work to the same extent as college students.

	College	Accounting	Switchers
Gender			
Male	44% (A)	36%	38%
Female	56%	64% (C)	62%
Race			
White	75%	74%	77%
African-American/Black	13% (A,S)	5%	5%
Asian	2%	3%	4%
Hispanic	4%	13% (C)	9%
Other	4%	2%	2%

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

(C), (A), (S) represent significant differences between the three categories at the 95% confidence level

Student Demographics

	College	Accounting	Switchers
GPA			
3.7-4.0	16%	23% (C)	16%
3.3-3.6	25%	27%	18%
2.9-3.2	26%	25%	36%
2.5-2.8	14%	12%	23% (A)
2.1-2.4	4% (S)	1%	2%
2.0 or under	3%	1%	-
Don't know/Refused	7%	3%	4%
Ever Attended a Community College			
Yes	25%	44% (C,S)	29%
No	74% (A)	55%	70% (A)
Don't know/Refused	1%	1%	2%
Public/Private College			
Public	66%	82% (C)	82% (C)
Private	33% (A,S)	16%	16%
Don't know/Refused	1%	2%	2%
Number of Students at College			
Under 2,000	12%	10%	9%
2,000-7,000	25%	20%	16%
More than 7,000	45%	47%	62% (C,A)

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

(C), (A), (S) represent significant differences between the three categories at the 95% confidence level

Student Demographics

Switchers

- Switchers, demographically, do not differ dramatically from college students, though they are somewhat more likely to be female.
- Switchers' reasons for leaving accounting focus on the actual work done by accountants and the type of work in accounting courses; they found the work boring, stressful, and not interesting. Note that job prospects and future pay do not play a role in their decisions.

Switched from accounting major because...	Switchers
Boring/not enough variety	25%
Too hard/too much pressure/stress	21%
Wasn't interested/lost interest	16%
Not what I wanted to do/didn't enjoy it	16%
Bad teacher	4%
Not enough interaction with people	4%
Other	5%
Don't know/refused	4%

Other reasons switched from accounting major...	Switchers
Just not interested in becoming a CPA	18%
Not really suited for CPA-type work	12%
Very hard/too difficult/intense	5%
Didn't get enough information about CPA careers	2%
Other	38%
Don't know/refused	25%

**Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding*

College – Q35 “You mentioned earlier that you majored in accounting but then switched your major. What were the reasons you switched?”
 College – Q38a “Were there any other reasons why you decided to switch from accounting?”

Conclusions & Recommendations

Keeping in mind the overall objective of reversing the downward trend, following are our conclusions and recommendations:

- ➔ The AICPA faces three main challenges—challenges of student perceptions—in reversing the downward trend of interest in accounting and becoming a CPA. The three main challenges are *ignorance, misinformation, and negative perceptions*.
- ➔ To address these challenges, the AICPA should *focus on creating awareness of accounting at an early age*. Our data show students are making decisions earlier and earlier, and they are thinking about colleges, college majors, and careers by junior and early high school.
- ➔ Students use a variety of information sources and are *interested in as much information regarding college and careers as they can find*. The Internet is an increasingly important communication/information tool for younger students.
- ➔ The AICPA should also *stress attractive career attributes* (such as job security) in their communication materials and work to change perceptions regarding attributes (such as creativity and flexibility) that are important to students but that students don't currently associate with CPAs. Students don't value, generally, high salaries in comparison with other attributes such as creativity, flexibility, and working with people. They do value work they enjoy and having fun. Students strongly associate accounting with math and numbers.

Conclusions & Recommendations

- Students also face systemic barriers on the bumpy road to becoming a CPA. Clearly the *availability of accounting courses in high school as well as the type and quality of high school and college courses offered impacts students*. The AICPA should work with schools, teachers, and professors to improve the curriculum, and, specifically, to improve the quality of courses offered in high school, so accounting is perceived as a career for “good students” rather than remedial bookkeeping. According to our findings, current high school courses—which tend to be remedial—are not having a positive impact on the number of accounting majors and CPAs.
- The good news is that the *licensing exam, 150 hours, and continuing education requirements are not barriers*. Students are unaware and unconcerned about the requirements. Therefore, removing these requirements is unlikely to have a large impact on the downward trend.
- The bad news is that while students are willing to do “whatever it takes” in terms of education and time to achieve the career they desire, they *do not think a CPA is as attractive as other careers*. They do believe a combination MBA/CPA is attractive. The AICPA should focus their efforts with universities on increasing the availability of these joint degrees.

Conclusions & Recommendations

- *Parents*—and to a lesser extent teachers—not celebrities, *are students' role models*. This is especially true of older students. These role models do have an impact on student choices. The AICPA should work with teachers on recruitment efforts.
- Compared with college students, generally, *accounting majors are more likely to be female, Hispanic, have attended community college, and currently attend public universities*. The accounting profession seems to be better received by minority populations (women, Hispanics), so the AICPA should consider recruitment efforts in these areas.