

# **Explore Accounting Day: Combatting Higher Education Enrollment Challenges in United States Undergraduate Accounting Programs**

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## **Abstract**

U.S. accounting higher education is currently experiencing enrollment challenges. While existing research has examined the factors that create these challenges and offered potential methods for mitigating these issues, the problem persists. In this article, we present a framework for a campus visit where students can be encouraged to study accounting. This experience, labeled Explore Accounting Day, shows promise in increasing student awareness of the positive attributes of accounting as well the number of available job opportunities. Furthermore, results indicate that this type of outing can increase student interest in majoring in accounting at the host institution.

## **Introduction**

A healthy supply of students desiring to major in accounting is critical to the success of any undergraduate accounting program. Unfortunately, American universities seeking to recruit undergraduate students to study accounting face enrollment challenges on two fronts. First, overall undergraduate enrollment is declining in the United States. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), making it more difficult for universities to recruit students in a competitive marketplace (Szekeres, 2010). Second, accounting, in particular, suffers from a “perception problem,” as high school students perceive accounting to be a boring and tedious discipline (Mc Dowall, Jackling, and Natoli, 2012). While prior literature has extensively documented these challenges, research on practical steps universities can take to recruit more accounting students (e.g. Kaenzig and Keller, 2011) is scarce. In this study, we address this gap in the literature by exploring whether an accounting-specific campus visit for high school students, which we call “Explore Accounting Day”, can be effective in combatting these two enrollment challenges.

Explore Accounting Day is a field trip where high school students are provided an opportunity to visit a university campus, participate in various accounting-related activities, and learn about the accounting profession. Results from pre- and post-surveys distributed to participating high school students indicate that after attending Explore Accounting Day, their interest level increased related to attending the host university to study accounting. The event also heightened student awareness of the number of job opportunities in accounting. Finally, Explore Accounting Day increased student beliefs that careers in accounting can be rewarding, engaging, and socially interactive. These results imply that recruiting events such as Explore Accounting Day could play a role in combatting enrollment challenges and negative impressions of accounting while fostering growth within the major. Thus, we contribute to the literature by demonstrating the effectiveness of an accounting recruitment event targeted at high school students.

We organize the remainder of this article as follows. First, we review prior research on university student recruitment and enrollment, as well as research on students' decisions to be accounting majors. Next, we outline the design of Explore Accounting Day and present our research hypotheses. Finally, we detail our research method and results, and we offer discussion and concluding remarks.

## Literature Review

### *Competing for Students Amid Declining Enrollment*

Overall undergraduate university enrollment in the United States declined by 7 percent between 2010 and 2017 (from 18.1 million to 16.8 million students), and is only expected to increase by 3 percent (from 16.8 million to 17.2 million students) by 2028 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This decline in enrollment, partially caused by changing demographics (Fox 2019a) and low unemployment (Fox 2019b), creates challenges for universities that depend on students' tuition dollars to fund their operations (Hossler, 2015). To compete for students, universities engage in various recruiting and marketing techniques such as mass media advertising, personal selling (e.g., high school visits and campus tours), and direct marketing (e.g., mailings, telemarketing, and social media posts) (Hayes, 2015; Hossler, 2015). Numerous studies indicate that visits to campus play the most crucial role in student recruitment and enrollment (e.g., Kitchen, Sonnert, and Sadler, 2019; Secore, 2018; Fleming and Grace, 2015; Hope, 2015; Brown, 2010; Johnston, 2010; Cohen, 2009; Fischbach, 2006; Hesel, 2004; Moogan, Baron, and Harris, 1999; Yost and Tucker, 1995). Therefore, we focus this section of our literature review on campus visits both because of their importance and because our study involves a campus visit.

Secore (2018) claims that “the campus visit—be it a tour, an open house, a fly-in, an overnight stay, or some other student-oriented event—is overwhelmingly the single most influential source of information for students in their decision on college choice” (p. 151). Brown (2010) finds that students who participate in campus visits are twice as likely to enroll as students. Similarly, 80 percent of students surveyed by Fischbach (2006) indicated that attending an open house event increased their desire to attend the hosting university. Hesel (2004) finds that 65 percent of college-bound students ranked campus visits as “very influential” in their decision of which institution(s) to apply to, beating other influences such as parents and family members, university websites, and high school guidance counselors. Similarly, Cohen (2009) reports that, based on a sample of 1,100 high school seniors, “visits to colleges were, by far, the most important factor in a student’s decision about where to apply” (p. 3).

Campus visits are central to student recruitment and enrollment in part because they allow prospective students to experience a taste of life on campus and obtain information that cannot be communicated as effectively via print advertisements or a campus website. For example, Hesel (2004) finds that “the hospitable nature of the community and the friendliness of the people students encountered during these visits had a significant positive impact on their interest in a school” (p. 1). Hesel (2004) indicates that when students visited the university that would eventually become their first choice, 95 percent of students saw facilities of interest to them, 80 percent had a tour conducted by a student tour guide, 76 percent met with admissions staff, and 61 percent talked with professors. Secore (2018) explains that visiting campus allows students to evaluate a university based on psychosocial factors and see if they would fit in well with the other students on campus. That is, “as students partake in a campus tour, they are intrinsically connecting openly with the ecology, climate, and culture of the institution. Resultantly, students are able to both evaluate and react to campus aesthetics and the community within” (Secore, 2018; 153). Similarly, Okerson (2016) finds that students visiting campuses want to connect with and have positive interactions with campus community members, to see that students on campus are happy, and to enjoy the campus aesthetic and community/vibe.

Overall, prior research indicates that visits to campus are an important tool that universities can use to recruit students effectively. Importantly, consultants who conduct “campus visit audits” stress that instead of yet another library tour, visiting students are looking for something “real”—they want to interact with campus community members, including hearing said members personal stories, and create memorable experiences (Hoover, 2009).

Therefore, the design of the campus visit is very important to creating a positive, personal impression on prospective students.

### *Negative Perceptions of the Accounting Profession*

In 1966, *The Accounting Review* published an article where author Willian Anderson stated that one of the problems in recruiting students into the field was being able to “inform students and others in an effective manner of the interesting and truthful story associated with opportunities in accounting” (p. 331). This problem remains with current research showing that students continue to perceive accounting to be boring and too numbers-focused (e.g., Bekoe, Owusu, Ofori, Essel-Anderson, and Welbeck, 2018; Maas, Keeling, Michenzi, and Bossle, 2014; Baxter and Kavanah, 2013; Mc Dowall, Jackling, and Natoli, 2012; Smith, 2005; Hunt, Falgiani, and Inrieri, 2004; Franciso, Noland, and Kelly, 2003; Barsky and Catanach, 2001; Albrecht and Sack, 2000). As university accounting programs look to maintain or increase enrollment and the accounting profession at large seeks to attract talented new employees, this perception poses a challenge. Therefore, we review the literature on the foundations of these negative perceptions in order to inform the design of our on-campus event.

Negative perceptions about accounting stem from a few sources. First, accountants are often portrayed in media as boring, introverted “bean-counters” (Davison and Warren, 2009). Smith and Briggs (1999) credit what they characterize as an “infamous” (p. 28) Monty Python sketch with creating the stereotype. In the sketch (Chapman, Cleese, Idle, Jones, Palin, Gilliam, and MacNaughton, 1969), the following conversation transpires between a vocational guidance counselor and his client, Mr. Anchovy:

Mr. Anchovy: I've been a chartered accountant for the last twenty years. I want a new job. Something exciting that will let me live.

Counselor: Well chartered accountancy is rather exciting isn't it?

Mr. Anchovy: Exciting? No it's not. It's dull. Dull. Dull. My God it's dull, it's so desperately dull and tedious and stuffy and boring and des-per-ate-ly DULL.

Counselor: Well, er, yes Mr Anchovy, but you see your report here says that you are an extremely dull person. You see, our experts describe you as an appallingly dull fellow, unimaginative, timid, lacking in initiative, spineless, easily dominated, no sense of humor, tedious company and irrepressibly drab and awful. And whereas in most professions these would be considerable drawbacks, in chartered accountancy they are a positive boon.

While humorous, this portrayal of accounting as a dull and stodgy profession can negatively influence the public's perception of accountants, making it more challenging for universities to recruit students to study accounting (Barsky and Catanach, 2001). This stereotype persists in more current media as well. For example, in the popular American television series *The Office*, the character of Angela, the head of the accounting department, is portrayed as an uptight, humorless individual who seldom smiles (Daniels, 2005).

Outdated high school accounting curriculum may also be inadvertently contributing to high school students' negative perceptions of accounting. The accounting profession has experienced substantial change over the last few decades. As Brewer, Sorensen, and Stout (2014) explain, “accountants have evolved from support-oriented personnel who hand off information to others [...] into *business partners* who [...] formulate and plan strategies, then participate in collaborative decision-making processes that execute those strategies” (p. 30, emphasis in original). However, Deines, Bittner, and Eichman (2012) report that high school curriculum still emphasizes mechanistic bookkeeping instead of accounting professionals' more complex, modern role. According to Deines, Bittner, and Eichman (2012), American high school accounting curriculum has not substantially changed since the issuance of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants' Taylor Report (AICPA, 2000), which found that the curriculum's focus on rote bookkeeping presented a “systematic barrier” to entry into the profession. In addition to outdated curriculum, high school teachers may also be steering students away from accounting. Hardin, O'Bryan, and Quirin (2000)'s find that high school teachers identified as being most influential in providing career advice to their college-bound students have a relatively low opinion of accounting compared to other professions. These factors are especially concerning given that many students form their career goals before they graduate high school (Tan and Laswad, 2009; Hartwell, Lightle, and Maxwell, 2005).

While the research outlined above suggests negative media portrayals and outdated high school accounting curriculum may be decreasing students' interest in pursuing accounting in college and beyond, other research examines the positive reasons why students do major in accounting. Bekoe, Owusu, Ofori, Essel-Anderson, and Welbeck (2018) find that intrinsic interest, opinions of family members and teachers, exposure to accounting in high school, and a desire to pursue a professional accounting qualification are predictors of a student's intention to major in accounting. Djatej, Chen, Eriksen, and Zhou (2015) find that students are more likely to major in accounting if they have high accounting self-efficacy, have positive perceptions of the accounting profession, and receive encouragement from significant others. Germanou, Hassall, and Tournas (2009) find that students are more likely to intend to pursue an accounting career if they have a positive perception of accounting and if they believe an accounting career will be intrinsically rewarding, extrinsically rewarding, prestigious, and social. Simons, Lowe, and Stout (2003) review prior literature from 1982-2002 and find that financial rewards, job opportunities, and an interest in the major/career are the most important factors in selecting accounting.

Fedoryshyn and Tyson (2003) find that most students decide to major in accounting as a result of their experience in their first accounting course. Unfortunately, many students may never be exposed to such an experience. As displayed in Figure 1, the average number of credits that high school graduates take in topics of business management, finance, or office support decreased by .78 credit hours from 1992 to 2013 (National Center for Education Statistics).

A similar decline is seen in the percent of first-year students at four-year institutions that indicate a major of accounting. As shown in Figure 2, student interest has declined from 7.1% to 1.7% from the time period of 1977 to 2018 (Stolzenberg, Eagan, Romo, Tamargo, Aragon, Luedke, and Kang, 2019; Egan, Lozano, Hurtado, and Case, 2014; Dey, Astin, and Korn, 1991).

Prior research indicates that having high-levels of instructor communication in introductory accounting courses, hosting student recognition dinners, providing internship experiences, and holding events where students can meet accounting professionals are effective ways to recruit accounting majors (Hutchings and Roberts, 2018; Kaenzig and Keller, 2011). Additionally, inviting practitioners to present to potential accounting students can have a "favorable impact on students' perceptions of accountants, the accounting profession, and careers in accounting" (Fedoryshyn and Tyson, 2003; 284). Unfortunately, many of these events studied in prior literature (e.g. Kaenzig and Keller, 2011; Zucca and McFall, 2008) do not occur until students are enrolled in college, when many students have already decided their career goals (Tan and Laswad, 2009; Hartwell, Lightle, and Maxwell, 2005).

### **Design of Explore Accounting Day**

Given declining college enrollments, negative perceptions of accounting, and opportunity for additional research on the recruitment of high school students to study accounting, we set out to create an on-campus event could be used to recruit prospective students and promote the accounting profession before students begin their college education. The schedule for the event, as delivered, which we call "Explore Accounting Day," is in Figure 3.

As shown, the day starts with a welcome from both the accounting department chair and a representative from the state's society of CPA's. This is followed by an active learning activity that gets students involved in how accounting information can be used to make decisions. Next, students get to hear from a faculty member of the university as they learn more specifics about accounting education, the profession of accounting, and accounting career opportunities. This is followed by a student panel where current accounting students from the host university are able to share their experiences. Within this section of the day, a question and answer component is facilitated where attendees are able to ask questions to the panel. After the panel discussion, participants are escorted on a short tour followed by a small group breakout session where more focused questions can continue to be asked. The field trip ends with students being able to eat lunch on campus. More detailed specifics of Explore Accounting Day can be found in Appendix A.

## Hypotheses

Explore Accounting Day is intended to be a fun and informative field trip where high school students can visit campus and discover that accounting can be an immensely rewarding and engaging career. The day is also designed to try and help combat the enrollment challenges identified above: (1) undergraduate accounting enrollment in the United States is declining and (2) accounting suffers from a perception problem.

All of the activities on the schedule of Explore Accounting Day (besides lunch) include content that is specifically designed to highlight the benefits of accounting careers. We take care to dispel common, negative misconceptions about accounting and portray it as a career that can be social and interesting. The active learning activity, in particular, is designed to correct any perception that students may have obtained from their high school curriculum that accounting careers are bookkeeping-focused. Therefore, we expect that after attending Explore Accounting Day, students will have a heightened opinion of accounting. We formally state the following hypotheses:

**H1: After attending Explore Accounting Day, high school students are more likely to think an accounting career can be financially rewarding.**

**H2: After attending Explore Accounting Day, high school students are more likely to think an accounting career can be personally rewarding.**

**H3: After attending Explore Accounting Day, high school students are more likely to think an accounting career can be engaging.**

**H4: After attending Explore Accounting Day, high school students are more likely to think an accounting career can be socially interactive.**

**H5: After attending Explore Accounting Day, high school students are more likely to think there are many job opportunities available to accountants.**

**H6: After attending Explore Accounting Day, high school students will be more interested in pursuing a career in accounting.**

The activities included in Explore Accounting Day also include content designed to give high school students a positive impression of the campus. Given that prior research indicates that campus visits play an important role in attracting potential students (Secore, 2018; Brown, 2010; Cohen, 2009; Fischbach, 2006; Hesel, 2004), we expect that students will be more interested in attending the host university, both in general and to study accounting, after attending Explore Accounting Day. We state the following hypotheses:

**H7: After attending Explore Accounting Day, high school students will be more interested in attending the host university in general.**

**H8: After attending Explore Accounting Day, high school students will be more interested in attending the host university to study accounting.**

## Method

We hosted Explore Accounting Day at a large, public university in the Midwestern United States. Before and after attending Explore Accounting Day, high school teachers distributed a questionnaire to their students to obtain their opinions on accounting and our university. The post-survey is included in Figure 4. All but the last question were also included in the pre-survey.

[Insert Figure 4]

## Results

Descriptive statistics and the results of t-tests comparing pre- and post-test means appear in Table 1. 192 students completed the pre-survey and 136 students completed the post-survey. *Number of classes* is the number of accounting classes a student had taken. The vast majority of our sample (97.4 (98.5) percent in the pre (post)-survey) reported having taken at least one accounting class. *Interest in field* is how interesting a student rated the field of accounting on a Likert scale, with 5 equal to very interesting. *Interest in accounting career* is how interested a

student is in pursuing a career in accounting on a Likert scale, with 5 equal to very interested. *Job opportunities* is the number of job opportunities a student thinks are available to accountants on a Likert scale, with 1 equal to lots of jobs. *Financially rewarding* is how financially rewarding a student thinks an accounting career can be on a Likert scale, with 5 equal to very rewarding. *Personally rewarding* is how personally rewarding a student thinks an accounting career can be on a Likert scale, with 5 equal to very rewarding. *Engaging* is how engaging a student thinks an accounting career can be on a Likert scale, with 5 equal to very engaging. *Socially interactive* is how socially interactive a student thinks an accounting career can be on a Likert scale, with 5 equal to very socially interactive. *Interest in university* is how interested a student is in attending the host university in general on a Likert scale, with 5 equal to very interested. *Interest in accounting at university* is how interested a student is in attending the host university to study accounting on a Likert scale, with 5 equal to very interested. *Enjoyment* is how much a student enjoyed Explore Accounting Day, with 3 equal to a lot.

Review of the t-tests comparing survey responses before and after attending Explore Accounting Day (see Table 1) highlight that students are more likely, at a statistically significant level, to think careers in accounting can be financially rewarding, personally rewarding, engaging, and socially interactive. They are also more likely to think there are many job opportunities available to accountants. Therefore, we find support for hypotheses 1-5. However, we do not find a difference in students' interest in the field of accounting or interest in pursuing careers in accounting. Therefore, we fail to find support for hypotheses 6 and 7. Finally, we do not find a difference in students' interest in attending the host university in general, but do find that they are statistically significantly more interested in attending the host university to study accounting. Therefore, we do not find support for hypothesis 8, but find support for hypothesis 9.

As the goal of the day is to encourage high school students to enroll at the host university as accounting majors, we also investigate, as a supplemental analysis, which factors influence a student's interest in attending the host university to study accounting. We perform a regression analysis where the dependent variable is *interest in accounting at university*. The regression results appear in Table 2. All variables were defined previously except for *pre/post*, which is set to equal 1 if the response was given in the pre-survey and 2 if the response was given in the post-survey. Results indicate the students are more interested in attending the host university to study accounting after attending Explore Accounting Day. Results also suggest that the more engaging students think accounting careers can be, the more interested they are in attending the university to study accounting. Surprisingly, the more financially rewarding students think accounting careers can be, the *less* interested they are in attending the university to study accounting. Finally, the more interested students are in pursuing accounting careers and in attending the university in general, the more interested they are in attending the university to study accounting.

## Discussion of Results

In this article, we study whether an accounting-specific, on-campus event for U.S. high school students can be effective in accounting major recruitment. Prior literature documents many of the challenges American universities face in attracting students to the accounting major, as well as some practical steps these universities can take to convince their existing students to study accounting. We build upon this literature by demonstrating how accounting programs can recruit students from high schools.

Our results indicate that after attending Explore Accounting Day, students are more likely to think careers in accounting can be financially rewarding, personally rewarding, engaging, and socially interactive (H1-4). They are also more likely to think there are many job opportunities available to accountants (H5). These findings are an important contribution to the accounting profession, because even if Explore Accounting Day did not convince an individual student to pursue a career in accounting (which is to be expected, as accounting cannot possibly be a good fit for everyone), if that student's opinion of the accounting profession improved, the profession stands to benefit. Tan and Laswad (2009) highlight the importance of promoting accounting careers to the public, and these students may one day become parents or teachers and therefore influence future students' decisions to pursue accounting careers (Mc Dowall, Jackling, and Natoli, 2012). Additionally, these students' opinions may improve public

perception of the accounting profession, which is not held in as high esteem as other professions (Byrne and Willis, 2005; Hardin, O'Bryan, and Quirin, 2000).

We do not find that students are more interested in the accounting field (H6) or in pursuing a career in accounting (H7) after attending Explore Accounting Day. Therefore, it appears that while the event is successful at improving students' opinion of accounting (H1-5), it did not immediately convince students to enter the accounting profession. We therefore suggest that future research is warranted to make the event even more successful. First, we propose that while students may not be initially convinced, it is possible that they continue to contemplate their future and discuss possibilities with their parents, teachers, and friends after the event ends. In essence, a half day event may not be enough to immediately cause a change in career interest; however, the knowledge gained throughout the day may be the first seed planted that could grow into a future decision to study accounting. Therefore, future research could investigate whether recruiting events like Explore Accounting Day have a possible lagged effect. Second, we suggest that if high school accounting curriculum is outdated and focuses too heavily on bookkeeping (Deines, Bittner, and Eichman, 2012), a one-day field trip may not be enough to counter the perception that accounting careers are dull and overly focused on numbers. Future research could investigate how universities and high schools can partner to update high school curriculum with more real-world examples about what accounting careers are actually like.

While we do not find that, after the event, students are more interested in attending the host university *in general* (H8), we do find that students are more interested in attending the host university *to study accounting* (H9). We interpret this first finding (H8) as an indication that more time during Explore Accounting Day should be allocated to promoting the university in general, rather than focusing exclusively on the accounting program. For example, we suggest that taking students on a full campus tour or providing more information about dorms, athletics, and non-accounting extracurricular activities could increase students' interest in attending the host university in general. We interpret the second finding (H9) as an indication that the event is an overall success, as a primary motivation behind Explore Accounting Day is to encourage high school students to enroll at the host university as accounting majors.

Finally, our supplemental analysis reveals that students are more interested in attending the host university to study accounting: 1) if they attend Explore Accounting Day, 2) if they perceive accounting be an engaging career, 3) if they are interested in pursuing an accounting career, and 4) if they are interested in attending the host university in general. These findings contribute to our knowledge of what convinces a student to attend a university as an accounting major, and may assist universities in their recruitment efforts. Surprisingly, we also find that the more financially rewarding students think accounting careers can be, the *less* interested they are in attending the university to study accounting. This finding bears further research, though we suggest that it could potentially be driven by Generation Z's lower levels of materialism (Cagle, 2019).

## Conclusion

We outline and present the results of Explore Accounting Day—an on-campus high school field trip designed to mitigate university enrollment challenges and combat high school students' negative impressions of accounting. Overall, we find that after attending, students are more interested in attending the host university to study accounting, and they have a heightened opinion of accounting in that they perceive there to be more job opportunities. In addition, after attending, students think careers in accounting are more financially rewarding, personally rewarding, engaging, and socially interactive. We also find that students' interests in attending the host university to study accounting are driven by their attendance at Explore Accounting Day, interest in pursuing an accounting career, interest in attending the university in general, and perceptions of accounting careers' potential to be financially rewarding and engaging.

We contribute to accounting recruitment literature by studying how an on-campus event can be used to recruit high school students to enroll as accounting majors and exploring which factors contribute to a student's desire to study accounting at a particular university. This knowledge should prove useful to universities struggling to recruit accounting majors in a competitive environment. We also contribute to the accounting profession by demonstrating how an event can be structured to increase students' opinions of accounting, which should benefit the profession at-

large by decreasing negative perceptions of accounting. Finally, we also contribute to research on university enrollment and the role of campus visits by outlining a template for how a high school field trip can be run to encourage students to attend the hosting university. While our event focused on accounting, it could easily be modified to focus on a different major or to be held as a weekend event for students and parents instead of a high school field trip.

As Explore Accounting Day is successful in increasing students' opinions of the accounting profession and their interest in attending the host university to study accounting, we consider the event to be a success. However, our results suggest room for improvement, as Explore Accounting Day did not cause students to be more interested in accounting or pursuing a career in accounting. Therefore, we suggest that future research is necessary to determine if an event can be structured in a way to successfully convince students to pursue careers in the accounting field.



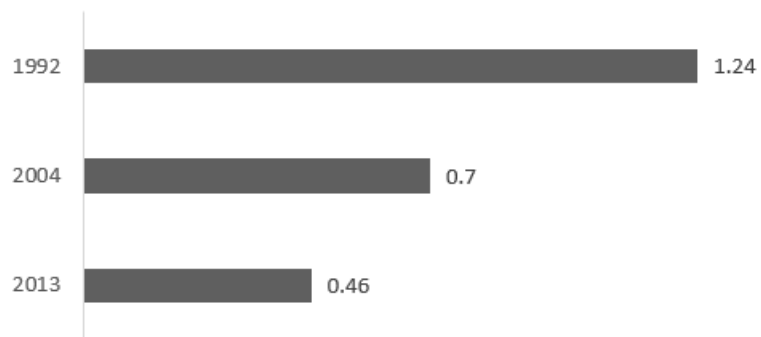
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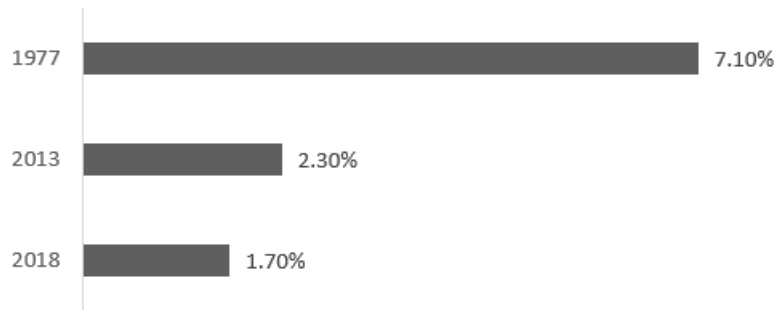
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**Figure 1. Average number of high school credits taken of business management, finance, or office by year**



*Source: National Center for Education Statistics*

**Figure 2. Percent of first-year students at four-year institutions that indicate a major of accounting by year**



*Source: National Center for Education Statistics*

**Figure 3. Explore Accounting Day schedule**

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| <b>Time</b> | <b>Activity</b>  |
|-------------|--|
| 8:30 am     | Check-in opens   |
| 9:30 am     | Welcome from accounting department chair and representative from the state's society of CPAs |
| 9:45 am     | Active learning activity   |
| 10:30 am    | Accounting education and careers talk by accounting department professor                     |
| 10:45 am    | Accounting student panel   |
| 11:30 am    | Breakout sessions  |
| 12:30 pm    | Lunch  |

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Figure 4 Post Survey

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics**

| Variable Name                               | Pre-survey<br>(n = 192) |           | Post-survey<br>(n = 136) |           | Difference |
|---|-------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-----------|------------|
|   | Mean                    | Std. Dev. | Mean                     | Std. Dev. |            |
| <i>Number of classes</i>                    | 1.214                   | 0.481     | 1.250                    | 0.483     | 0.036      |
| <i>Interest in field</i>                    | 3.740                   | 0.957     | 3.610                    | 1.097     | -0.129     |
| <i>Interest in accounting career</i>        | 3.380                   | 1.170     | 3.360                    | 1.209     | -0.020     |
| <i>Job opportunities</i>                    | 2.036                   | 0.973     | 1.415                    | 0.757     | -0.622***  |
| <i>Financially rewarding</i>                | 4.073                   | 0.757     | 4.331                    | 0.721     | 0.258***   |
| <i>Personally rewarding</i>                 | 3.330                   | 0.877     | 3.581                    | 0.978     | 0.251**    |
| <i>Engaging</i>                             | 3.408                   | 1.011     | 3.618                    | 1.096     | 0.209*     |
| <i>Socially interactive</i>                 | 3.220                   | 1.033     | 3.706                    | 0.997     | 0.486***   |
| <i>Interest in university</i>               | 3.183                   | 1.139     | 3.199                    | 1.293     | 0.015      |
| <i>Interest in accounting at university</i> | 2.743                   | 1.116     | 2.996                    | 1.280     | 0.253*     |
| <i>Enjoyment</i>                            |                         |           | 2.415                    | 0.601     |            |

Significance levels (one-tailed) \* .05; \*\* .01; \*\*\*.001

**Table 2. Regression Results**

| Dependent variable: <i>interest in accounting at university</i> |             |            |      |
|---|-------------|------------|------|
| Variable Name   | Coefficient | Std. Error | Sig. |
| <i>Constant</i>   | -0.382      | 0.336      |      |
| <i>Pre/post</i>   | 0.220       | 0.087      | **   |
| <i>Number of classes</i>  | -0.030      | 0.087      |      |
| <i>Interest in field</i>  | -0.038      | 0.069      |      |
| <i>Interest in accounting career</i>                            | 0.437       | 0.059      | ***  |
| <i>Job opportunities</i>  | -0.038      | 0.047      |      |
| <i>Financially rewarding</i>                                    | -0.124      | 0.061      | **   |
| <i>Personally rewarding</i>                                     | 0.062       | 0.057      |      |
| <i>Engaging</i>   | 0.125       | 0.054      | **   |
| <i>Socially interactive</i>                                     | -0.024      | 0.049      |      |
| <i>Interest in university</i>                                   | 0.517       | 0.035      | ***  |
| Observations  | 328         |            |      |
| R Square  | 0.666       |            |      |
| Adjusted R Square   | 0.655       |            |      |
| F-Value (significance)  | 62.393 ***  |            |      |
| Maximum VIF   | 3.235       |            |      |
| Significance levels (one-tailed) * .05; ** .01; ***.001         |             |            |      |



## Appendix A Explore Accounting Day Specifics

### *General notes*

- Explore Accounting Day is designed as a field trip for high school students. Prior to the event, we reach out to business education teachers from local high schools (within an approximate one-hour drive) to invite them to attend the event with their students. Once they confirm their attendance, we provide them with logistical information such as bus parking areas and how to find the business building. As our funding allows, we offer to help pay for a bus for financially disadvantaged high schools.
- To avoid conflicts with university class schedules, we typically hold the event on a Friday, though it could easily be held on a different day of the week.
- We solicit help from university accounting major volunteers at various points throughout the day. These students are typically recruited from the accounting student organization (Beta Alpha Psi), and they receive community service credit for helping.
- We partner with our state's society of certified public accountants (CPAs) to host the event. The state's society of CPAs provides us with financial support and also sends a representative to speak during the day's welcome. If desired, this role could be filled by an accounting firm, university alumni, or other accounting professionals.
- We run Explore Accounting Day as a large event, often with over 300 high school students in attendance (for the specific event in the current study, attendance was 255 high school students). Therefore, our chosen activities are suitable to a large-scale audience. If desired, the event could be run with a smaller number of high school students with either the same activities or alternate activities more suitable to the size of the audience.

### *Check-in*

When the high school students and their teachers enter the lobby of the business building, they are greeted by our check-in team, which consists of the accounting department administrative assistant, accounting major volunteers, and one or more accounting professors. Each high school student is given an Explore Accounting Day t-shirt and a drawstring backpack, both with the university's logo and color scheme. Students are also given a small notebook with the logo of (and provided by) the state's society of CPAs. These types of "goodies" are relatively inexpensive and can enhance a student's campus visit experience (Secore, 2018).

### *Welcome*

The day formally begins with a brief welcome from the accounting department chair, followed by a short talk by a representative sent by the state's society of CPAs. In the past, this representative has typically been the society's president, chief financial officer, or chair of the board. For the specific event in our current study, this individual was the chair of the board as well as an alumnus of the university. The purpose of this talk is to expose students to a professional who has had a successful accounting career and hear about his or her personal experiences as an accountant.

### *Active learning activity*

After the welcome, we engage the high school students in an active-learning activity designed to be entertaining and to combat the perception that accounting consists of mechanistic bookkeeping. Following the success of Huels and Weber (2018, 2020), we use an activity based on ABC's hit reality television series *Shark Tank*. For the specific event in our current study, we created an activity featuring the company SENDaBALL, which appeared on *Shark Tank* on February 5, 2010 (Burnett, 2010). *Shark Tank* is a television series in which entrepreneurs seek financing celebrity investors known as "sharks."

At the beginning of the activity, the facilitator (an accounting faculty member) presents a brief overview of the components of the basic accounting equation (including assets, liabilities, equity, revenues, and expenses). We then play the SENDaBALL video segment from *Shark Tank* (season 1, episode 14), stopping it before the sharks begin to make their decision. After the video segment, the facilitator leads the high school students through a series of questions as a large group, including two live-polling questions that students are asked to “vote” on with their cell phones. After the facilitator-led discussion, we break students up into smaller discussion groups (approximately 15 to 20 students) where they are led through discussion prompts by an accounting major volunteer. After time for small group work, the facilitator asks members of the audience to share their responses to these prompts. Finally, we play the remainder of the video segment so students can see whether SENDaBALL received investment. All discussion questions for the activity are included in Appendix B.

We make use of a *Shark Tank*-based activity for a few reasons. First, Huels and Weber (2018, 2020) have demonstrated that students find these types of activities to be enjoyable and informative. In particular, Berk (2009) suggests that the types of brainwaves needed to be attentive and focused are stimulated by entertaining videos. Second, given the large size of our audience, we need to utilize an activity that can scale to accommodate many people. Third, by breaking the students into groups and allowing them to work with their peers and report back to the larger group, we provide an opportunity for collaborative and active learning, instead of requiring them to be passive audience members (Prince, 2004). Finally, we designed the discussion questions to focus more on areas where technical accounting data intersects with big picture business issues. This allows us to highlight accounting’s role in business strategy and decision-making (Brewer, Sorensen, and Stout, 2014) instead of mechanistic bookkeeping often found in high school accounting curriculum (Deines, Bittner, and Eichman, 2012).

### ***Accounting education and careers talk***

Next on the schedule is a short talk given by an accounting department faculty member. The talk is designed to promote the host university and the accounting profession. Topics include the following:

- major selling points of the university’s accounting program (e.g. reputation, programs offered, student organizations, internships, CPA exam results, relationships with employers)
- reasons to become an accountant (e.g., relationships and networking, high earnings potential, opportunities to travel, opportunities for career growth, easily transferrable skills)
- different types of accounting careers (e.g., public accounting, including tax, auditing, and consulting; private accounting, including financial and cost accounting; governmental accounting)
- common misconceptions about accounting (e.g., accountants are all introverted and like working alone, you have to be good at math to do accounting, accountants just prepare financial records all day long)

### ***Accounting student panel***

We next host a panel of graduate and undergraduate accounting students, recruited from our masters of professional accountancy program, our masters of business administration program (if the student is completing the accounting emphasis or is a graduate of our accounting program), or from Beta Alpha Psi. The panel allows the high school students to hear the university students’ perspectives on a variety of topics, including college life and accounting. The panel is moderated by an accounting faculty member. While the faculty member has a prepared list of questions to ask if no high school students have a question, we encourage the high school students to ask questions as much as possible to keep the students active and engaged. During this time, it is helpful to have accounting faculty members (or other individuals) walk around the room with microphones to hand to the high school students who desire to ask a question. The prepared list of questions is as follows:

- Please give a brief introduction of yourself and state your name, where you grew up, what high school you attended, and your post-college plans.
- How and why did you choose [the host university] for college?
- How and why did you choose to study accounting?
- What has been your best experience at [the host university] in general?
- What has been your best experience at [the host university] in terms of accounting?

- Did you have an accounting internship or job while at [the host university]? Tell us about it.
- Have you been in any student organizations? Tell us about that experience.
- What is a piece of advice you would offer to a new [host university] student?
- What was the hardest part about transitioning to college life?
- Tell us about a mistake you made in college.

### ***Breakout sessions***

At this point in the day, the high school teachers and students participate in different activities. The students are divided up into groups by their school (sometimes grouping smaller schools if necessary). Two accounting major volunteers are then assigned to each group to serve as breakout session leaders. While students are attending breakout sessions, the high school teachers in attendance spend time with faculty members of the accounting department.

#### **Student breakout sessions**

After the high school students are divided into their groups, their two accounting major volunteers take them on a tour of the business building. The accounting major volunteers are given a list of important locations to point out, such as a few classrooms and computer labs, the academic advising and career services office, the café housed in the building, student lounge areas, the investment center, the accounting tutoring lab, student organization offices, and faculty offices. The tour ends in a designated classroom assigned to that breakout session group. At this time, the high school students are given a few minutes to ask questions of the accounting major volunteers about various topics.

#### **Teacher breakout session**

During this time, the high school teachers and accounting department members are given a chance to engage in discussion with one another. The content of this breakout session varies. In the past, it has generally included discussions of educational trends at both the high school and university level and how the university can support the high schools and vice versa. For the specific event in our current study, this breakout session included a presentation on the use of analytics in the accounting classroom by an accounting department faculty member.

### ***Lunch***

After the breakout sessions, it is time for lunch. The high school teachers and students are given passes to eat lunch in a campus dining hall. This allows the high school students to get a glimpse of campus culture outside of an academic building, see what a college dorm cafeteria looks like, and sample the campus food. Lunch marks the end of Explore Accounting Day, so after the students are finished eating, they board their buses and return to their schools.

**Appendix B***Facilitator-led questions*

1. Would you invest in the SENDaBALL business?
2. How many days a week do you think the business operates?
3. How much money is being asked for?
4. What percentage of the company are they willing to sell?
5. What have total sales of SENDaBALL been per year?
6. What does it cost a customer to purchase one ball?
7. What is the cost of the company to get a ball in the mail to the customer?
8. How many balls need to ship a day to make a profit?
9. What do the owners think the business is worth?
10. What is the gross profit, in dollars, for one ball?
11. What is the gross profit percentage for SENDaBALL?
12. How many balls are selling per year?

*Small group discussion questions*

1. How much investment do you think it took Michele and Melisa to start SENDaBALL?
2. What assets do you think the business has?
3. What liabilities do you think the business has?
4. What expenses do you think the business has/needs to operate?
5. Who would your target audience be for this product? Who would you sell it to?
6. What would you do to grow this business? (be specific)
7. What challenges do you think the business will have?
8. Kevin makes the comment – “no, you ask for more.” Does your group agree with this comment?
9. Any concerns with the business not identified above?