

## I Achieved My Goal

By Marc Ursick, CMA, CPA, CISA



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I will never forget when I first sat down with my mentor at Ernst & Young and told him my plan to achieve three certifications and a master's degree within two years while working full-time. He looked at me like I was crazy, chuckled, and replied, "I would advise against that." At that moment I decided I would become a CMA® (Certified Management Accountant), CPA (Certified Public Accountant), and CISA (Certified Information Systems Auditor) and graduate from the University of Notre Dame with a master's degree in a two-year time frame—all before the age of 24.

I graduated undergrad from Walsh University in April 2009 and started my first semester at Notre Dame in May. The master's program was an accelerated program that ran two summers. I finished my first semester at Notre Dame in August and started full-time in E&Y's Advisory practice in September 2009. I decided to pursue the CISA certification first (December 2009) to obtain baseline IT knowledge that would benefit me during both the CMA and CPA exams. I passed the CISA exam and moved on to the CMA, which was a two-part exam that I took in February and April 2010. The CMA was a perfect exam to prelude the CPA because a lot of similar concepts are tested on both exams, and it helped train my brain to concentrate for numerous hours at a time. I passed both parts, and it was time to head back to Notre Dame in May. After a long, hard summer of studying at ND, I walked across the graduation stage with my fellow

classmates in August 2010 as we received our master's in accountancy degrees. I headed back to E&Y's Cleveland office a day after graduation to get back to work and start studying for the CPA. I took and passed the CPA exams in the following order to achieve my goal of three certifications and a master's degree in less than two years: FAR (October 2010), AUD (November 2010), REG (January 2011), and BEC (February 2011).

I first learned about the CMA certification while taking a cost accounting class at ND. My professor was a CMA and urged us to look into obtaining the certification. I gained experience with CMA subject areas during an internship at Equity Trust Company, which I consider to be one of the best internship programs in the country, so was very interested in taking the exam. The CMA has prepared me more than I could imagine in my current role as a staff consultant with E&Y's Performance Improvement group, especially in the areas of planning/budgeting/forecasting, cost management, and corporate finance.

My best advice to those studying for certifications is to maintain a balance in your life while taking the exams. It's easy to become stressed out by all of the complex information, but if you clear your mind and understand the concepts fundamentally, you will give yourself the greatest chance to succeed. I am very grateful to have such great family, friends, and coworkers who supported me throughout this process and can't thank them enough for their support! **SF**