

Accounting Fanatic

By Loreal Jiles



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When I was young, I thought taxes were the extent of accounting—undoubtedly because my father owned a tax business. Of course, I wanted to be an accountant and do taxes, like my dad. By my sophomore year in high school, I knew more than the average accountant about personal income tax returns. This exposure led me to take an accounting course in my senior year, and it showed me I had other accounting options!

I majored in accounting at Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge, La., and took the only two management accounting courses available—while hearing tons about public accounting. As a member of the Honors College, I had to complete an undergraduate dissertation. My thesis advisor encouraged me to write about the accounting education gap. Most undergraduate accounting curricula are geared toward public accounting even though four out of five grads end up in management accounting. Consequently, most accounting graduates aren't as prepared as they could be for the roles they will have in the business world. I was absolutely floored by this.

The thesis made me realize management accounting was the career path for me. Beginning my career as a management accountant at BP afforded me the opportunity to see the education gap firsthand. Many entry-level management accountants, including me, didn't have the skills needed to perform fundamental management accounting tasks. This meant we worked

twice as hard: teaching ourselves foundational management accounting concepts and learning tasks specific to our new jobs. This only made me more passionate about working to close the gap. I joined IMA®, attended an IMA Young Professionals Forum, and began further research on undergraduate accounting curricula. This research resulted in an article that recommended CMA® (Certified Management Accountant) exam content serve as the basis of a management accounting concentration.

Throughout my career, my passion for management accounting has grown exponentially—so much that I've become a management accounting fanatic! I have spoken at IMA's Annual Student Leadership Conference, sharing career advice with current undergraduate accounting students. I also have spoken on college campuses, telling students how they can perform assessments of the accounting curriculum in their own programs, prepare recommendations for a management accounting concentration, and shape professors' course plans to CMA exam content, thus equipping students with tools that will allow them to take ownership of their readiness for the corporate world.

As for owning my continued management accounting career readiness, I'm currently studying for the CMA exam and continue to seek out learning opportunities. I remain hopeful that closing the education gap is just around the corner and that my role in its closure continues to grow! **SF**