

## Seeking a Professional Credential After Graduation

Many accounting and A&IS majors elect to pursue a professional certification after graduation. These might include the CPA (Certified Public Accountant), CISA (Certified Information Systems Auditor), CMA (Certified Management Accountant) or CIA (Certified Internal Auditor). The most common of these for our students are the CPA and CISA. The CISA is sponsored by ISACA (formerly the Information Systems Audit and Control Association) and is a technical certification aimed at professionals focusing on audit and assessment of information technology. You may wish to read more about the CISA on the ISACA website.

The CPA is a credential that shows the holder's mastery of the general areas of accounting, taxation, and financial information systems. One way the CPA credential differs from others is that the CPA exam leads to a license, granted by the state, that allows the holder to do specific things, like represent a taxpayer in front of a taxing authority or sign an audit opinion for a client. If you join a CPA firm in a service area like assurance or tax, there will probably be an expectation that you are pursuing a CPA.

The CPA license has three primary requirements: appropriate education, passage of the CPA exam and work experience. Your graduation from Santa Clara University with an Accounting or A&IS degree satisfies the educational requirements, as long as you are careful to amass a total of 225 quarter units of credit (from any accredited colleges or universities) and complete an Accounting Ethics course (either at SCU or elsewhere). In addition, before applying for your license you must have one year of work experience (for a general license – there are additional requirements for a license that allows you to sign audit opinions).

**The CPA Exam:** The exam currently consists of 4 parts: Business Environment and Concepts (BEC), Financial Accounting and Reporting (FARS), Auditing and Attestation (AUD) and Regulation (REG – including taxation). As of January 2022, you may apply for and take any or all parts of the CPA exam starting within 180 days of your planned graduation date. A June graduate, for example, should start the exam application process as early as January. The process starts with an application to the California (or other state in which you plan to take the exam) State Board of Accountancy. You will fill out an application on-line, provide them with transcripts and when you are approved you will be permitted to schedule your first exam part.

In January 2024, the exam format will change. The current 4 parts will be reduced to three parts, covering financial accounting, taxation and audit, including the information technology common in each area. These will be considered the 'Core' parts of the exam. Students will also choose a 4<sup>th</sup> part that matches their interests, either Tax Compliance and Planning, Business Analysis and Reporting or Information Systems and Controls. This specialized exam offers an opportunity to explore parts of the accounting field that you find interesting in a deeper way. However, it isn't intended to restrict the area you might eventually practice in. The specialization area you choose will not be listed on your license, and you cannot elect to take more than one specialization exam. You can also change your mind at any about what specialization area you want to pursue, as your interests and career evolve. There is an article in the Journal of Accountancy (<https://www.journalofaccountancy.com/news/2021/jul/redesigned-cpa-exam-content.html>) that provides more information about this redesign of the CPA exam.

If you are a 2023 graduate, you may be partway through the CPA exam process when the transition occurs. If that is the case, you will take the new exam version for any part you have not completed, except that if you have not completed BEC, you will need to complete any one of the specialized sections instead of BEC. For this reason, 2023 graduates will probably want to make sure they complete BEC prior to January 2024. More specific information about new exam content will be available from the AICPA in January 2023.

The Accounting Department offers electives from time to time that might help you develop a deeper knowledge of areas tested in the core and specialized exam portions. For instance, the Financial Statement Analysis class (ACTG 151) covers some of the knowledge tested on the Business Analysis and Reporting exam. For those students interested in developing deeper computer-related skills, the A&IS major, together with one or more ISA department electives, might be a good choice.

Speaking to your faculty advisor or to the Accounting Peer Advisors can help you decide which specialized exam might be right for you to take.