

Cassette 2-1 Tape Transcript  
Kwantlen College Career Tape: Accounting, 02/82

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*I'm Shelly Somerville, an Educational Planner in the Counselling Department of Kwantlen College, and today I'm interviewing George Battistel, an instructor in the Accounting Program at Kwantlen College. George, how would you define an accountant?*

**George:**

*Well Shelly, every organization regardless of how large or small it is, has management information needs, and the accountants' job is to supervise the Management and Information System from start to finish, and they're involved, at the very start, in designing the system. They're then involved in implementing the system, and ensuring that all the information is recorded in a proper manner. Finally, they're involved in producing financial statements, or other statements that management would like to see, and possibly in assisting them to interpret the information that comes from those statements.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Okay. What is this system that they're designing? That's, that's what I don't understand. Could you elaborate a little more on that?*

**George:**

*Sure. Well all managers need information to make decisions, that information has to come from somewhere, and if we're talking about financial information, well the accountant insures that all financial transactions are recorded in the system. That they're summarized properly, and that they're put together in a form that non-accountants, managers, can [... unintelligible] easily understand.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*[.... unintelligible], and what kind of an occupational range would someone have, working in accounting, or, and would there be any areas of specialization?*

**George:**

*Well, obviously, since the Management Information System covers a broad range of jobs, and since accountants are involved in all aspects of that Management Information System, the accountant can be, at the very start, a bookkeeper. He can be a supervisor of bookkeepers. He can be an auditor, who actually verifies the work that the bookkeepers and the accountants have done. He can be a financial analyst, who analyzes the information of, the information that's*

*obtained from financial statements of other organizations, and he can, maybe compare that with his own organization, and then assist management in making a decision in that particular area.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*That's quite a few areas to specialize in.*

**George:**

*Well, these are not [... unintelligible] areas of specialization. They're more, at this, at the level that we've been speaking at up to this point, we're talking about progression in the abilities of [... unintelligible] then you off at one of the lower levels, and then you work your way up to a certain point, and then you specialize.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Okay-*

**George:**

*We all, sort of, have to go through an initial process, so at least we have an understanding of what the, what the Management Information System is.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Could you give us some, some idea about one of those areas of specialization, and what someone would do. The auditor, for instance, what would the auditor do?*

**George:**

*Well sure. Well I can give you, I can give you an idea of two specific ones that I've, that I myself have been involved in. I was an auditor with a large food, and drug, wholesale, retail organization, and as part of my job was to ensure all the different retail outlets, and all the different wholesale outlets, follow the policies that were set down by top management. This involved traveling to these outlets. Out of province, out of country, and going through their records. Not just their financial records, but their, the way that they kept their employee records. The condition of the, of the outlet, of the place, was clean, whatever, and the second career alternative that we can discuss was my job as a chief accountant for a smaller retail chain. When I went into this job, they had never actually had an accountant working directly for them. They had a public accountant come in once a year and do their records, and, as a result, I had to devise the system that they were going to use. I had to train their staff, their accounting staff, in the new system, and I had to format the new financial statements that the management people wanted. They weren't happy with the ones previously because they didn't give them the information that they required. So, I had to supervise staff. I had to ensure that the financial statements were prepared properly, and also, I had special projects to do. When we were going to add on a new store, I did some lease negotiation, I did some feasibility studies. We were going*

*into the point of sales, scanning type registers. I had to do a feasibility study on which particular brand would be best for our organization. We were going to buy [... unintelligible] computer, and I had to do a feasibility study on the various types of computers. So, as you can see, if you work in a smaller organization, you get to do just about any possible type of financial job that's, that exists.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Certainly, sounds it. Now, the two positions that, or careers that you described for us, in the accounting field, are very senior ones. However, our graduates, what could they hope to start at, and where?*

**George:**

*Well, actually, the internal auditor positions, most internal auditor positions are not senior. Most of them are pretty close to entry level positions. It is felt that, if you're going to have accountants working for your organization, one of the best ways for them to learn about your organization is to actually go out and audit the various areas of that organization, and then, they will then, when they move to a higher level, have a better understanding of what goes on, in an overall basis.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Okay, but what other positions then, or job titles might some, a graduate start at?*

**George:**

*Well, a lot of it depends if they've had any previous business experience before entering the program. If they have had no business experience, I would think that, probably would, they would be called, would be an Intermediate Accountant. So, they're not starting at, at the bookkeeper level, they're, certainly, above that, and they would have some management responsibilities, but they're still learning at that point.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*And I won't ask how many because of, anyone that's familiar or reads the newspapers can see that there's always a demand for accountants.*

**George:**

*There certainly is-*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Yep.*

**George:**

*-and, accounting is one of the, one of the professions that, when we're in tough, economic times, like now, most organizations are concerned about where their dollars are going, and so accounting employment actually increases during bad times because they're trying to get, as much as possible, every dollar.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Now, work would they expect to start with, maybe the government, or?*

**George:**

*Well, as I indicated at the very beginning, every organization, large, small, profit, or non-profit, needs accountants, and a lot of it depends on what the students, or the graduates, own particular interests are. Whether they want to work for a larger company, and be, and have a very narrowly defined job, or whether they want to work for a smaller organization, and have a shot at doing many things.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*And then they could, mind you, change back and forth I suppose as-*

**George:**

*Oh, certainly.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*-[.... unintelligible] gained experience.*

**George:**

*Certainly. You find that, that when you're in your entry level positions, you're still doing a lot of learning, and nobody expects that the, the direction you've chosen will be your direction forever.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Once the graduate has a professional accreditation, which we're going to let you describe very shortly for us. What would their opportunities be for setting up their own business?*

**George:**

*There are two professional accreditations that most of our students enter and that's the Certified General Accountants Association, which gives a CGA designation, and the Society of Management Accountants, which gives an RA designation. Now, they both have different focuses. The CGA designation is a financial type, public accountant organization. Whereas the RA designation is mostly for students who are interested in cost accounting, or management*

*accounting. However, there is no restriction on either, on either organization, or accountants with either designation, from entering public practice on their own, and in fact many, many accountants do set up their own practices.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Do you see any trends? Any changes in the future? [... unintelligible]*

**George:**

*Well, I guess computers. Computers is it, as far as accountants are concerned, and accounting is one of the first areas that was computerized, because a lot of the lower level accounting is very repetitive, and so it lends itself, quite easily, to being computerized, and therefore, I think that all accountants and our students, we do give them a grounding in computers, and they will have to keep updating this ability.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*And I guess then, which brings me to my next question. The opportunities for continuing education.*

**George:**

*Well, excuse me, for our specific graduates, we expect that most of them will go on to one of the, one of the associations, and further their education. Once they get their designation, either one, whatever they've done in the past, as far as educational, educational training, is almost ignored. So, a student with a diploma from Kwantlen College, and a CGA, will be regarded just as highly as a student who has CGA and a B-Com because they look at the CGA and not worry too much about what's in the past. Also, once a student has obtained either the CGA, or the RA designation, both of these associations require them to remain current, and there is a requirement that they take courses on an ongoing basis, and these courses can either be offered by the associations, who do offer, what are called, "Professional Development Seminars", or they can take courses at the university level in Management Techniques, or in some particular area of interest.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Well, okay. The year is 1982, what salary are we looking at? Starting salary, and would it vary between the professional, oh no, depending if you, if you were working on your CGA or RIA, would it matter?*

**George:**

*No, at the entry level, most employers are not really concerned about which designation the students are going for. The salaries will depend, again, substantially on, on whether the student*

*has any previous business background, or any previous accounting background, but I would think that our graduates this year will probably earn an average of \$1500 a month, to start.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Really? That's not bad to start.*

**George:**

*No, it's pretty reasonable, and again, if the students have a, small amount even, of a bookkeeping background, it can be substantially higher than that, cause there is a substantial demand.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*And then the salary range would, there would be no way of predicting what someone could go to because, you know, heads of cooperation's and bursars, anyone just needs to take a look at-*

**George:**

*-in the papers.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*You know, in the papers, but I'm thinking more, you know, the reports that are produced by McMillian, and Bloedel, whatever-*

**George:**

*Sure.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*When they have, the various company heads, and so on, more often than not, the back, the letters after their name will be CGA-*

**George:**

*-sure-*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*-RIA, etcetera. As well as CA, of course.*

**George:**

*Most organizations, of the type you speak, have two senior officers. They have the Chief Operating Officer, who's usually a management type, and they have the Chief Financial Officer, who's usually an accounting, finance type, and, certainly, there's nothing to keep any of our students, if they have the abilities and the ambitions, from reaching one of these positions.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Well, company controllers, and-*

**George:**

*Sure.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*-college, and university bursars, all seem to have accounting backgrounds.*

**George:**

*That's right.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Now, what fringe benefits? Kind of an odd question.*

**George:**

*Well, as far as, as far as tangible fringe benefits, again, we're talking, we must realize that our students are going into mid-level management positions, and there're going to get these standard fringe benefits from most mid-level managers, and in some companies that it's going to include, you know, usually medical and, quite often, dental, pension plan. In some larger organizations, if you're an internal auditor, you usually get a company car or, you know, a decent travelling allowance because you are expected to be on the road a substantial portion of the time.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*They're not bad perks, are they.*

**George:**

*No, they're not, no.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Rather nice, yeah. Now, George, I won't ask you about admission requirements, or tuition fees, and books, etcetera, because they, someone can always, anyone if, that's listening to the tape can*

*find this information by referring to the college calendar, and I would hope that they're going to make an appointment to speak with either an Educational Planner, or a councillor, and will go over any of the admission requirements, etcetera. But, what kind of personal requirements do you like? I would imagine, someone should have a fairly good math background.*

**George:**

*Well it's, it's not so much a good math background, [... unintelligible] as long as it should, it should be a strong arithmetic background. Someone who's going to be an accountant should like to work with numbers, should like to work with detail. Should have some analytical skills, and more, and more, they should be able to communicate. It's not enough to produce the reports, it's necessary, also, to communicate the information from the reports, sometimes verbally, and sometimes in written form to managers, who cannot just look at the reports and understand them because they're not trained in that area.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*What kind of personal qualities do you look for?*

**George:**

*Well, one thing, we have to remember that accountants are looking after other people's money and, as a result, probably the number one characteristic that, I think, would be honesty, and integrity. That's very important, and they also have to be the type that don't give up easily because it, quite often you'll have a problem that stumps you and you just can't walk away from it.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Would you also say that there would be less inclined to be people oriented, and much more of a-*  
*?*

**George:**

*I think that's a popular misconception about accountants, but accountants have to work in teams, you have to be able to get along with others. But on the other hand, you also have to be able to, if you're on the road by yourself, as an auditor, you have to be able to motivate yourself and be able to work without somebody peering over your shoulder all the time.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Are there any physical skills, then, that you would say that, that someone should have, or shouldn't have?*

**George:**



*No. I think that, probably, accounting is open to, to anyone.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*So, whether they're handy capped or not, male or female, wide open?*

**George:**

*Not at all. In fact, I think accounting was, probably, one of the first professions that, that actively encouraged women to, to become accountants.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Great. Now, how long is the course?*

**George:**

*The course is four semesters, and you do the four semesters over two years.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*So, and then you graduate with a diploma. Do you have a certificate, a one-year certificate?*

**George:**

*We don't have a specific certificate in accounting. We have a general, part-time certificate, which comprises ten courses. The first courses are the same for everyone, and they give the student a general smattering of all the business areas, and then their final five courses, they can choose in any of the business areas. So, if they wanted to concentrate on accounting, they could, but we don't require them to.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Now, is this a "limited enrolment program", or, or the, you know, [... unintelligible] would have to really apply by a specific deadline, or, or would I be able to do it part-time, or-?*

**George:**

*Well, the diploma program is specifically designed for full-time students, and it does have a limited enrolment, and, as a result, students should apply as soon as they're sure that they're interested in the program, and individuals who'd like to, maybe, try it on a part-time basis should try the certificate. Most of the courses that are in their certificate program are transferable to the diploma program, and if, after they've done their certificate, they feel that they would like to go on for the diploma, well, we'd be happy to take them and give them advanced standing for the courses that they have already completed.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Now, what courses do they take when they're in it? Aside from Accounting.*

**George:**

*Well, in the first semester they do take courses in, in economics, and they do take courses in law, and in communications, because, again, I like to stress that data is fairly important for Accountants. However, once we get past those courses we do heavily emphasize the accounting aspects because most of our students do go to one of the associations, and we try and get as many transferable credits as possible, so students get through the, the courses of the association as quickly as possible, and start earning the good wages.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Okay, and which was going to bring me to my next one about additional training. So, they would graduate, move on to one of the professional associations. What about the possibility, cause I know that some of our courses, in fact, do have "CA" transfer credit, but they would have to get a university degree first, would they not?*

**George:**

*That's right. The "CA" program requires a university degree. Not necessarily in commerce, but some university degree, and unfortunately, although some of our courses in the program are transferable to universities, they are not all transferable, and as a result we generally encourage our students to take this, take the "CGRIA" route, and if they are interested in becoming CA's, we suggest they take the University Transfer Commerce program, that we also have at Kwantlen College.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*What's the difference then between, say, becoming a Chartered Accountant, over the Industrial Accountant, or the General Accountant?*

**George:**

*Well, the difference between the Certified General Accountant and the Chartered Accountant is not that great in B.C. In some areas, in some of the provinces, CGA's are not allowed to audit, or not allowed to sign audit reports of publicly-traded companies. In B.C. there really is no such distinction. However, if you look at the jobs that the two different branches of accountants do, you find that the CAs are much more involved in the public-auditing aspect of accounting, whereas CGAs are, generally, involved in industry, although that is not a strict requirement. It just seems to be a preference.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Now, once a student receives their diploma, how would they go about getting their first job?*

**George:**

*Well, at the present time, we do have a Student Placement Officer at the college. Also, the instructors in the program do have contacts in industry, and we are always ready to suggest places where students can go and apply.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Now lastly, and I think we've pretty well covered it all the way along the "licencing requirements". That would be the certification, would it not?*

**George:**

*Well, actually, no. It's not, necessarily for an accountant to get a certificate. In fact, in B.C. anyone can call themselves accountant, even if they have never taken an accounting course. The, the only licencing requirement is if you wanna call yourself a "CGA", you must go through their program, and obtain their certificate. But there is no specific licencing requirement just to be an accountant.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Something I would like to know. Since we know that, if I want to be an accountant, I can simply contact the CGA or the RIA Association and I've, perhaps I'm already working as a, as a bookkeeper, or a junior accountant, I can sign on. What advantage, would you say, there is to doing the program? Doing the two-year diploma program, and then transferring.*

**George:**

*Well, the advantage is that, that if you can, if you are working, you can give up your work. It is going to speed up the process because two-years at Kwantlen College will give you the first three levels of the association, which would normally take you probably three and a half years to do. Also, the courses at the college are substantially less expensive, and the, the evaluation procedure, the way that they're graded is, not easier, but is more in tune with what most students expect. The CGA Association, you write one exam, and it's pass or fail, and, whereas, at the college, they, we have at least five different methods of evaluations. So, if a student doesn't do well early on in the course, they haven't wasted the entire course. They can pick up towards the end and still get required grade. With the CGA's, it's not possible.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*George, is there anything I haven't asked you, that you might like to-?*

**George:**

*No, I think I've probably covered everything-*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*[.... unintelligible]*

**George:**

*-pretty well.*

**Shelly (Interviewer):**

*Good, great. Well, thank you very much.*

**George:**

*You're welcome.*