**ACADEMIC RESEARCH FOR THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION**

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**ABSTRACT**

To help resolve the shortage of qualified accounting educators, Henage and Smith [1] propose an additional terminal degree that would provide academic qualification for teaching at the university level. This paper suggests some specific types of professional academic research that might strengthen their proposal.

**BACKGROUND**

The news is not good. The number of candidates earning Ph.D.s in accounting is declining, and the number of accounting students is increasing. Retirements of existing faculty will make the situation worse. One specific plan to increase the output of Ph.D.s is the Accounting Doctoral Scholars (ADS) program [2]. Although efforts like this may provide additional Ph.D.s, they are unlikely to resolve the entire problem. Henage and Smith [1] propose a paradigm shift that might be just what is needed to alleviate the shortage for accounting faculty. Using the law school model, they propose an additional terminal degree, perhaps named the Doctorate of Accounting (DAcc), which would be a two-year degree beyond the MAcc. The degree would include additional professional accounting training, pedagogical training, and training to do research. However, the research would be professional research rather than basic research. This research would be more comparable to the writing done by law students and law professors for law reviews, publications which are widely used and cited in both academic and professional settings. It would be immediately and directly relevant to the profession. “The research presented in law reviews encourages faculty members to stay current with developments in their areas of expertise, to establish a reputation of excellence in their chosen fields, and to make creative and valuable contributions to the legal community” [1, p. 11]. “This focus on professional research would allow accounting educators to become the expert accounting minds, comparable to the expert legal minds that are found in law schools. In fact, this focus on professional research might allow accounting education to recruit more of the best and the brightest to the academic world” [1, p. 12]. But, the proposal does not provide much specific information about what professional research would entail.

**WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH?**

To develop a basic understanding of professional research as opposed to academic research, one need only compare the leading journals in each area. The leading journal for professional research is the *Journal of Accountancy* with a circulation of nearly 400,000 copies per month. Its articles are focused at specific issues faced by CPAs and other accounting professionals in providing a variety of financial services to their clients and employers. Examples of other journals which target specific needs of accounting professionals include *Strategic Finance*, *CFO Magazine*, *Management Accounting Quarterly*, *The* *Practical Accountant*, *Accounting Technology*, *The CPA Journal*, *The Practicing CPA*, *Internal Auditor*, *Tax Notes*, *Journal of Taxation*, *Journal of International Taxation*, *Practical Tax Strategies*, and *Cost Management*. The vast majority of these journals would not fit into the definition of accepted publications for most tenure and promotion decisions. By and large, these are not peer-reviewed, “quality” journals as defined by universities and accreditation agencies. Still, the expertise in current accounting issues that is demanded to be capable of helping the accounting profession understand complexities in an ever-changing market is exactly the level of mastery that the academic community should be demanding of the faculty in our schools of accountancy.

In contrast to the professional journals, the leading academic journal is *The Accounting Review* with a circulation of approximately 8,000 copies. Most academics receiving the journal appear to read few, if any, articles in any particular issue. There has been little interest in the journal outside of the academic world.

Other leading academic accounting journals include the *Journal of Accounting Research;* the *Journal of Accounting and Economics;* *Auditing: A Journal of Practice and Theory;* *Accounting, Organizations & Society;* and *Contemporary Accounting Research*, but none has a circulation in excess of 3,000. An example of a business journal which successfully bridges the gap between academics and professionals is the *Harvard Business Review*. This journal is written primarily by successful academics who offer sage advice to professionals. With a circulation of 240,000, the *Harvard Business Review* provides a means for academics to circulate their ideas and expertise in a forum that can actually benefit the business community.

**IDEAS FOR PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH**

One way of looking at professional research would be to look at the subdisciplines within accounting that demand high levels of expertise in fairly narrow fields. Examples of these subdisciplines would include internal auditing, international accounting, taxation, budgeting and forecasting, estate planning, multistate taxation, governmental accounting, business valuations, peer reviews, personal financial planning, forensic accounting, and enterprise resource systems. Professionals working within these narrow disciplines need to have a means of keeping abreast of recent developments including court cases, changes in regulations, improvements in technology, changes in the market, and innovations. As academics establish themselves as experts within these subdisciplines, their research should be of high value to practitioners. In addition, there should also be a high demand for expertise on accounting issues within specific industries. For example, very unique accounting issues arise within such industries as oil & gas, software development, banking, retail, hospitality management, multi-level marketing, pharmaceuticals, insurance, real estate, and high tech. Specific issues within any of these industries might include unique tax planning strategies, information system developments, fraud cases, risk assessment issues, and new or pending changes in GAAP.

A further advantage of professional research is that is lends itself to expanding beyond typical “descriptive” accounting research which defines the way the world is, into “normative” accounting research which defines the way the world should become. Normative accounting research could be of great benefit to standard setting bodies, professional organizations, and regulatory agencies. Normative research published in law journals has been used for many years by legislatures and courts in creating and interpreting the law. The authors envision the academic community expanding its level of professional research with a model similar to what is used in the legal profession. Most law schools have an expertise within specific legal disciplines. Many of these schools have journals which address these narrow, specific topics. This model allows law schools to differentiate themselves from other law schools, to attract bright students with an interest in the given specialty, to attract support from both the industry and the legal profession, and to attract academics with particular research interests. Additionally, by allowing students to participate both in the research and in the editorial review process, law school students are able to develop not only expertise in the discipline, but also research skills that will prove useful in their legal careers. It is easy to envision such a model working successfully in the accounting world. Many accounting schools have already begun to develop both an expertise and a reputation within a specific industry or narrow accounting discipline. Student-run accounting journals within that field of expertise should prove of great benefit in attracting and developing top students. The type of research most students would be involved with should be of interest to the profession. The skills developed in performing this research in conjunction with faculty would be useful in many professional accounting careers. The development of such journals would likely draw financial support from the professions impacted by such research. Even though some of these journals might not have large readership, it is likely that more professionals would read them. The journals could still involve peer review, and with more professional readership, more public scrutiny of ideas would take place, thus improving the quality.

**RESEARCH FOR THE PROFESSION AND CONCLUSION**

Are the types of research suggested in the prior section the research that accounting professionals would find helpful? Would this type of research be more helpful than the basic research produced by many academics? Large accounting firms provide generous support for accounting programs and faculty around the country. Much of this support is in the form of research support. However, an important question remains to be asked: Do the firms fund the research they support because it is the type of research they desire or do they fund it because is the type of research required for faculty tenure and promotion at the institutions where the firms want to recruit? Depending on the answer to this question, it may be appropriate to learn more about what types of research professionals would like to see academics produce. Do accounting professionals subscribe to and/or read basic academic research? Does it make a difference in their daily operations? What journals or other sources for research outputs do professionals use? What research would they like to have, if possible? How would it help the profession? If professionals desire a different type of research from academics than what they currently receive, would they be willing to change funding mechanisms to encourage the research they want? In what ways do professionals look to (or wish they could look to) academics as the content experts? What could professionals do to motivate academics to develop the content expertise that would help the profession? How could professional research provided by academics improve and strengthen the interaction between academics and professionals? Would having students participate in these types of professional research help them prepare for careers in accounting? While the answers to some of these questions can be objectively measured and verified, some of the questions can only be answered by perspectives and opinions. However, an empirical measure of perception could be obtained which would provide evidence about the desirability for academics to engage in professional research. CPAs and others at multiple levels and in various areas of accounting should be contacted to answer these questions.

While the Henage and Smith [1] proposal could help solve the shortage of qualified accounting educators, it did not provide any specific examples of the professional research that was proposed. This paper has suggested the types of professional research that academics could provide. However, it also recognizes the importance of further empirical study to determine if the profession would accept/fund this type of research.

**REFERENCES**

[1] Henage, Richard T. and Sheldon R. Smith, “Overcoming the Shortage of Qualified Accounting Educators,” Presentation at the American Accounting Association 2008 meeting.

[2] Williams, Doyle Z. (2008). “Addressing the Accounting Ph.D. Shortage: The Accounting Doctoral Scholars Program (ADS),” Presentation at the American Accounting Association 2008 meeting.