

There's more to bookkeeping than meets the eye

UC Davis Extension's industry-recognized certification course can help propel accounting grads to bigger things in smaller companies

By Susan Silva

After receiving an AA degree in accounting at American River College and working for several years as a bookkeeper, Suzy McKinnon found herself employed by a local accounting firm and realizing that she could do a lot more for her career if she became certified. So, she went ahead and as a result was given accounting duties for her company's clients as well as full charge of the bookkeeping for the company. She now feels she has a strong foothold in a career. "I really learned a lot in studying for the certification exam, and when it came time to look for another job I was hired on the spot once they knew I was certified."

The results of becoming certified were similar for Lynda Roper, who wanted to advance her position with an accounting firm and viewed certification as a good alternative to obtaining a four-year college degree, something she just didn't have time for. "Once I committed myself to doing it and maintaining the certification, I became more focused. The knowledge and skills have really given me an edge. I've been given more responsibility and, of course, a significant salary increase."

It's the same for many who find that certification is followed by a raise and eventually a promotion or new job, either for the current employer or for a new

one. Many find their credibility and the respect they receive goes up considerably after certification. Asked if she felt insecure in today's shaky economy, Roper replied, "Not really. I know that the skills I have are valuable and essential for any business."

Bookkeeping is one of the most widespread and essential positions in modern business. In many small companies, bookkeepers are the only individuals capable of receiving cash, recording transactions, tracking time cards and personal leave, disbursing payroll, monitoring company assets, and reconciling accounts with outside suppliers or service providers.

The California Employment Development Department (EDD) estimates that the number of bookkeeping, accounting and auditing clerks in California will reach 246,800 by 2005. It also estimates that 45,800 jobs will open in bookkeeping and related positions due to people retiring or leaving the occupation. This estimated total promises 57,470 job opportunities through 2005.

Many bookkeepers have obtained their knowledge on the job, learning processes specific to one type of company or situation, resulting in gaps and deficiencies that preparing for certification and passing the exams resolve.

Financial consultant Anita Johnson, who teaches bookkeeping certification courses for University of California, Davis Extension, says that many of her students are business owners, hoping to learn how to organize their balance sheets and pay their employees, but "once they see how time-consuming bookkeeping is and how many rules and regulations there are, they decide that what they really need is a bookkeeper."

Certified bookkeepers are one of the most critical

positions within any organization, but most especially for the small business owner. Johnson notes, "This isn't about data entry, this is about payroll, accruals, deferrals, adjusting trial balances, calculating depreciation and valuation of merchandise inventory. It's the entire package. And if you're certified, you become tremendously valuable."

UC Davis Extension is currently the only continuing education institution in Northern California offering a Certified Bookkeeper Program course endorsed by the American Institute of Professional Bookkeepers (AIPB). The program is geared for those with two or more years of bookkeeping experience (A/P, cash receipts/disbursements, simple general ledger, simple depreciation and payroll). Founded in 1987, the AIPB grew slowly at first but has worked diligently to develop and maintain standards of excellence.

According to AIPB co-founder, Steve Sahlein, "Bookkeeping has become so complex that it required standardization. In preparing for and taking the certification examinations, students learn skills that are crucial and consistent with industry expectations, and those who appreciate certified bookkeepers (CBs) the most are certified public accountants (CPAs), who prepare the tax reports that companies must file each year. Clearly, accountants want to work with someone who's been tabulating and documenting books that correspond to government standards and requirements."

UC Davis Extension is offering a free information session about becoming a certified bookkeeper on Aug. 26 at the Sutter Square Galleria in Sacramento. To find out more, call (800) 752-0881, or log on to the Web site at www.extension.ucdavis.edu/bm.