

## Keiser University in Melbourne well positioned to meet the growing demand for accountants — job opportunities in field very diverse; open house set at campus

By Ken Datzman

Keiser University has long been known by employers for its degree offerings and hands-on training in the field of health care. Its graduates work statewide and beyond in a wide range of positions for all types of organizations and businesses in the gigantic sector.

Early on, the school was branded as a training ground for health-care professionals, and still plays a leading role in Florida doing just that.

Through the years, though, Keiser University expanded into many different types of degree programs targeting fields and industries with high-growth potential. Now the 40-year-old private institution that offers associate through doctorate degrees in various disciplines is gearing up to raise its visibility as a local training ground for accountants.

Companies and entities are scrambling to hire accounting talent, even at a time when enrollment in accounting programs at colleges is up. Excellent job prospects across many different business and industry segments are drawing more people into the accounting profession, as demand for their services has surged.

“We are putting a much sharper focus on this particular field of study because we know there is a growing need in the community for graduates with accounting backgrounds,” said Karen Runk, dean of academic affairs at Keiser University in Melbourne.

“It’s great to be known around the state as a training ground for health-care professionals. When people think of Keiser University, they often think of health care. But we want more people and more employers to also see us as an institution that serves the accounting profession and business in general.”

The unemployment rate for experienced accountants and auditors is around 2.3 percent, about half the unemployment rate for all workers.

“There is a huge demand for accountants. The demand has been building for years. The opportunities for graduates are wide open, from cost accounting to financial accounting to governmental accounting and auditing positions, for example,” said Certified Public Accountant Kathy Emerson, a member of Keiser University’s accounting faculty at the Melbourne campus. Her school offers associate’s, bachelor’s and master’s degrees in accounting.

Students interested in learning more about Keiser University’s accounting programs, as well as the school’s other degree offerings, are invited to attend a special open-house event.

“Keiser’s Back to School Open House” will be hosted from 5–8 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 9, at the Melbourne campus on South Babcock Street. The event, which is held at each Keiser University campus on that date, will include music, games, prizes, and refreshments. Attendees will have the opportunity to meet Emerson and other members of the faculty.

Emerson recently joined the faculty at Keiser Univer-



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

CPA Kathy Emerson, left, has joined the accounting faculty at Keiser University in Melbourne. The school plans to grow enrollment in both its accounting programs and business programs. There is strong demand for accountant services across the nation. Dr. Murielle Pamphile is the school’s director of student services. She says KU’s accounting placement is growing.

sity in Melbourne. She has strong credentials and in-depth knowledge and experience in her field. As a CPA, Emerson has worked closely with chief financial officers, as a financial analyst, as a senior auditor, and as a corporate controller. Emerson also was a retail regional manager.

She earned her bachelor’s degree in accounting from California State University and her MBA degree from Webster University. Emerson is a Certified International Auditor, and a Chartered Global Management Accountant. Both are professional designations within her industry.

“We are thrilled to have Kathy as a member of our faculty,” said Runk. “She brings a lot of enthusiasm into the classroom and makes accounting very interesting for the students.”

“One of my goals in the classroom is to take the ‘fear’

out of accounting,” said Emerson. “Many times the students come into the class without any exposure to accounting. So I take the ‘sting’ out of it by having them understand that accounting is more about ‘puzzles’ and is more about ‘stories.’ It’s seeing how business transactions come together and are posted. When the students post something and see the results, it stirs their interest in the subject.”

The two foundation courses are Accounting I and Accounting II. “That’s where the interest starts to grow in the students. The more education, training, and degrees the students earn in the field, the more marketable they are to businesses and organizations,” said Emerson, adding that the two accounting courses are required for all

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Keiser University business students as well.

Keiser University uses a hybrid format for teaching accounting, combining classroom instruction with online learning. "The format works very well for our accounting and business students," said Runk. "Many of the students hold full-time jobs and have family responsibilities. So the hybrid format fits nicely with their work schedules and their family life."

Dr. Murielle Pamphile, director of student services at Keiser University in Melbourne, said there are many different job options for accounting graduates with businesses and organizations of all sizes, and as entrepreneurs in the field running their own practice.

"Our accounting placement is growing. More businesses are contacting us. Some of the students start work as interns and then move into full-time positions. Our placement is doing well. In May, we had a Job Fair at Keiser University in Melbourne and some 70 employers, representing various businesses and organizations, took part in the event. There is a big need for accountants. We just have to get the students trained and ready to go into the market," she said.

PricewaterhouseCoopers, and other such firms, has been encouraging high school students to consider college accounting programs.

Finding and training staff are the top issues facing CPA firms this year, and talent-pool challenges are expected to have the biggest impact on public accounting practice organizations over the next five years, too, new research by

the American Institute of CPAs shows.

"Finding qualified staff" was the No. 1 issue in every firm-size segment except solo practitioners, where it was ranked No. 3, according to the 2017 "CPA Firm Top Issues Survey," conducted by the American Institute of CPAs.

Likewise, "retraining qualified staff" was a Top 5 issue in every grouping except solo practitioners. Recruitment and retention were leading concerns the last time the survey was conducted in 2015, too, but the challenge appears steeper as the profession continues to gain strength in a growing economy.

In general, employment growth of accountants and auditors is tied to the health of the overall economy. As the economy grows, accountants will continue to be needed to prepare and examine financial records. Globalization, an expanding economy, and an increasingly complex tax and regulatory environment are expected to lead to strong demand for accountants and auditors.

"Every business needs an accountant," said Runk. "And as businesses grow, the job market for accountants grows, too."

Keiser University's associate degree program provides a basic understanding of essential business skills and addresses unique skills needed by an accounting clerk. Accounting topics include federal taxation, financial accounting, and the use of accounting and tax software.

The bachelor's degree program includes instruction in the various areas of accounting, such as taxation, auditing, managerial/cost, financial, governmental and accounting

information systems, as well as general business courses. Students gain knowledge of specialty areas within accounting and general business, and learn about business and accounting software applications.

The school's intensive master of accountancy curriculum focuses on both the basics of accounting theory and practice, and the higher-order skills such as aiding businesses in global advancement, pursuing ethical accounting practices, using professional communication, and effectively integrating modern technology, said Runk.

"If you are thinking about going the CPA route, the master of accountancy program is a perfect fit. All of the classes meet the Florida Board of Accountancy Standards and the program is fully online," she said.

Career opportunities with a master of accountancy degree include work as an auditor, chief financial officer, consultant, researcher, tax professional, partner in a CPA firm, and accountant in a public or private business, government, or nonprofit agency.

Most accountant and auditor positions require at least a bachelor's degree in accounting or a related field. Some employers prefer to hire applicants who have a master's degree, either in accounting or in business administration with a concentration in accounting.

"Through our delivery system, we can meet the needs of both nontraditional students and traditional students just coming out of high school. We have a range of programs and options in accounting and in business to help put them on the track to career success," said Runk.

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