



SDSU Student Accounting Society

Alumni Panel

11/15/2021

Presenters:

Chris Perdio: C&C, Graduated May 2020, Real Estate Department

Chester Smith: PWC

Pearson Harmel: LL&E, Graduated May 2021

Heather Onifer: L&B, Graduated May 2020

Meghan Valdivia: EY, Graduated May 2021

Brent Thompson: Baker Tilly

Kayla Moreno: BDO, Audit

Questions:

What is one piece of advice you can give to current accounting students?

Chester: Go to as many things as possible, such as this meeting. If you see a recruiting event, a lunch, go to it even if you think it will be awkward. Translates to going to happy hours at work, constantly meeting people. There's so many opportunities around you all the time.

Meghan: To piggyback, don't just go, talk to people! It may be intimidating to talk to managers and partners, but don't be scared, they know where you've been! People are more than happy to talk to you!

Pearson: When you're recruiting, give every firm a chance. Some people have one firm in mind and only try to recruit with them, but give yourself time to

Chris: Don't just get to know the firm professionally. Get to know the people and what their interests are. Get to know them on a personal level, because you'll be working with them on a daily basis. Do you want to be talking about work all the time? I know I don't. It's nice to make those interpersonal connections as well.

Meghan: If you are going through your CPA, get it done as soon as you can!

Chris: In California, you are actually able to start your application right now! It takes about a month to process. The earlier you do it, the better

Pearson: Make sure you get on top of it!

How can students make the most out of their time at SDSU? What were you involved in?

Heather: Again, participate as much as possible! I was super busy, but making sure you know people and make connections will pay off in the future. It's okay if your situation doesn't fit in with what everyone else is doing, but just make ways to find peers or professors who you can reach out to.

Kayla: I completely agree! In addition, networking amongst yourselves is important. People you know may go on to work for different firms or companies, and they may have experiences that you would like to join them on. Or, they might want to join you. You never know what will benefit you in the long run and what that connection might lead to.

Chris: I'm going to answer the second question, I was actually the president in Fall 2019! Try to go to these meetings as much as you can, try to meet the officers. But also try to talk amongst yourselves. Some of these people will become professionals at other firms, and they could be your foot in the door in the future. Starting now and building your network will allow you to make lifelong friendships.

Meghan: You make a lot of connections at SDSU. Encourage sophomores and freshman especially.

Chester: I was involved in SAS a bit, but I was very involved in Ambassadors on campus as well. If there is anything you are interested in and you have time for it, go for it and make the most of it!

Kayla: I was involved in Soccer!

Brent: I was involved in a business frat, we got to do things like work with Karl Strauss. There was plenty of involvement in my professional start up. Something as simple as going to the library and looking at the posters will also help you find ways to get involved. Even just going to see a Movie in the Union or going bowling at Aztec lanes will help you meet people! Play soccer, go surfing, take those one unit classes! Also, 100% get a job! Even if you're working for minimum wage and it's only for 6 months, that's experience!

What is one thing you wish you knew while you were an Accounting student at SDSU?

Pearson: I transferred from Mesa. When you first transfer, no one is telling you to go to these things. By the time you realize that, it's already over. Make sure to make the effort to get involved.

Kayla: Going through classes was very frustrating because I felt that I was teaching myself. But I found it was a life lesson, it taught me how to teach myself things. No one is going to teach you the CPA exam, it's all on you.

Chester: I wish I knew the pandemic was going to happen! It seems very obvious, but things feel very different now then they would have been. You never know what's going to happen, so love what you do!

Brent: If you're comfortable, show up in person for as much as you can! Also, talk to your professors as a human being. Talk to them outside of the realm of academia, it can change your perspective on individuals.

Are there any tips you could give to current students about getting through their courses?

Brent: As much as I hated reading textbooks, do it before class. As mundane and boring as Accounting is, do it before class. It helps. Reading ahead is better than reading after. The professors are most likely going to describe what's in there, and having a huge broad idea of what the stuff is about is nice, and the professor will show what they want you to know.

Chris: If you are struggling, seek supplemental help. Even online, there are a lot of videos that will help you. Seek out that extra help one way or another. You could be the kind of student that learns a different way.

Heather: Find a study partner who you connect with! Who knows what's going to happen, you may have to skip class one day. Find someone you trust to go to. Also, go to office hours. Leverage the things that are available to you, such as teaching assistants. Sometimes it takes hearing one different perspective to get it to click.

What aspects/characteristics do you think helped you to be successful in landing an internship/full time offer?

Meghan: It's getting your face and your name out there. I started in SAS when I was a freshman. Even if you are not old enough to recruit, the professionals will see you and recognize your name. Professionals are always willing to respond to requests for coffee chats.

Kayla: Having that attitude of "I have no idea what I'm doing but at least I'm going to do it with a smile," will show that you are happy to be there!

Brent: Confidence and honesty are the #1 things you can do. Be honest about what you know and don't know. If you need more time, be honest about that. Be honest with yourself and make the most of what you got. They know that you don't know anything!

Pearson: The networking is the most important thing. When I was in school I was working for a very small firm. When I went to recruit for my career, my old boss knew partners at all the other firms I was recruiting at. He was able to set me up.

Chris: When you are interviewing or talking to professionals, do a little research about them beforehand. It does impress us when you know things about the firms. They all do work very similarly, but there are little differences that, if you know them, prove you are truly interested in that specific firm.

Meghan: Have questions ready, but make sure that you're actually interested in it. Don't use the cookie cutter questions. They will be able to tell if you are actually interested in what you are interested in!

Member Questions

Is it a norm for students to have a gap year after graduation if they aren't able to land the job they want?

Kayla: Personally, I graduated without the 150 units, so it looks on my transcript that I didn't do anything for a year after graduation because I was taking classes at Mesa. It's mostly about what you do in between, as long as it helps you find your way on your own path. There are these people who have these gaps, and they are easily explained! As long as you have a good reason for it, then people won't knock you for it.

Meghan: Just make sure you don't get out of the recruiting mindset! Once you get out of it, it's hard to get back into it.

Brent: Starting full time, your time is very limited. So consider getting started on the CPA Exam!

Most firms help pay for your CPA. Should you wait until you get that full time offer to get started?

Kayla: If you don't get that offer, save your receipts and firms will reimburse you, at least to a certain extent.

Brent: For my firm, if you purchase Becker, they will reimburse the full amount, but any other program was around 75% or so.

Was there any point in your career where you thought accounting wasn't for you? And what pulled you out of that?

Chris: When I was the president, I was complaining a lot about how things were difficult and tough. But when you get to work you won't see the full scope. You can specialize in subjects that fit you. It is hard, but it's also nice to be able to go through it with other people! As long as you get through it, it is worth it.

Chester: When things went online, I was questioning if this really was for me, but now that I have others to talk to about it helps motivate me so much. Separation made it tougher, that support system is really important.

How was your transition from student to professional, was there anything that helped you?

Heather: Plan your first vacation as soon as you first start working. If you feel overwhelmed, it will give you a light at the end of a tunnel. Accounting in the field is a lot different than school. The ways you apply what you learn is a whole different ball game.

Meghan: Don't give up! You will learn it! It was a learning curve because, unlike in school, there is no one textbook answer. In the real world, there are a million different answers.

Chris: Be a sponge, absorb everything as you can. Asking questions will help put things in context, and it's really nice because now I have relationships with my manager and my partner. If I am truly stuck on something, he will answer it without complaining, he really wants me to know about it!

Did the majority of you pass the CPA exam before starting your job?

Kayla: I passed 3 out of the 4 before and it was the best thing I ever did!

Meghan: I passed 2/4 beforehand, and wish that I had passed more. It is very difficult to work and study.

Chris: When they are hiring, they are looking for juniors and seniors, so they don't expect you to have started on the CPA exam. However, once you get your job, seek out resources and materials from your firm.

Meghan: While you don't have to have it finished beforehand, a lot of firms have incentives for completing your CPA exam early.

To pass four exams, what is a realistic timeline (before working)?

Heather: I worked full time and did all four in nine months. You could do all four in 6 months if you wanted to devote your whole time to them, but it's easy to burn out.

Chris: There are testing windows, and you won't find out your results of each exam right away. You have to plan around that.

Meghan: You can get them done pretty quickly if you aren't in school or work. If you are working, communication is key. Your team may be able to help you and your schedule.

Are there any tips for choosing between Tax and Audit?

Kayla: I don't think anyone really knew. You just pick one and go with it.

Meghan: It just depends on what you see yourself doing. If it's something you end up disliking, you will have the opportunity to change service lines.

Chester: If you are able to, you could always get a Tax internship and an Audit internship and compare the two. You aren't able to know exactly what things look like until you actually do it.

Have any of you considered leaving public accounting?

Chris: Before going into public accounting, I did an internship for a private corporation. I found it very boring. In public accounting, you are working for a variety of different clients instead of just for one company.

Meghan: It depends on whether you prefer to put together financial statements or audit them. For Assurance at least.

Kayla: You get a broader scope of everything going into Accounting in public.

How did you handle your first busy season and manage that balance?

Kayla: Set the bar really low, expect to have no time for anything at all, because you will have some time.

Chris: Find that one activity during the day that gets you away from your job. I wasn't working the whole day, but I was working a lot of hours. Find ways to step away. Also, remember you are going through it with others!

What made you choose the firmst you chose?

Pearson: I liked the people at the firm I chose more than those at other firms I talked to. I liked that we had paid overtime and vacation policies.

Meghan: I got written off by a lot of firms at first because I was young when I was recruiting, and EY was a firm where I connected with the people. They invested in me early on, and that connection carried out throughout college.

Heather: You can't stick to the dialogue of "one firm is better than the other." Different firms are better for different people. Ultimately, what you choose is going to determine whether you stay or not.