



S POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

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SPECIAL

Figure out your career path

Mr Yang (far left) took the Master of Professional Accounting after getting his engineering degree because he wanted to be cross-trained. Prof Pang (left) is the dean of SMU's School of Accountancy.

The School of Accountancy at the Singapore Management University develops talents to help Singapore become an accountancy hub

Narendra Aggarwal

SINGAPORE'S accountancy sector is undergoing a major transformation with the aim of becoming a leading global accountancy hub for the Asia-Pacific region by 2020. To achieve this, one of the key initiatives being implemented is the creation of new pathways for the entry of degree holders from non-accountancy disciplines into the sector.

Taking the lead in this direction is the School of Accountancy at Singapore Management University (SMU). It offers two master's programmes: Master of Professional Accounting (MPA), and the newly launched Master of Science in CFO Leadership.

The new Master of Science in CFO Leadership programme, to be launched in August and for which applications are now open, will be the first such programme in the Asia-Pacific region.

SMU's MPA paves the way for exciting career opportunities in the vibrant accountancy sector, both in professional services and corporate accounting. Started in 2006, it is the most established and recognised programme in Singapore to prepare non-accounting graduates for entry into the accountancy sector and for career advancement in accounting and finance functions.

MPA graduates work in the professional accounting services, finance, or corporate accounting sectors. Many also use their accounting knowledge and training for personal development and career advancement opportunities.

"In today's complex business environment, knowledge of accounting is more than ever, essential for anyone who aspires to move up the corporate ladder," says Professor Pang Yang Hoong, dean of the School of Accountancy at SMU.

SMU's MPA programme is Singapore's most recognised graduate qualification in accounting with eight accreditations from regulatory, professional and accounting bodies.

"Our graduates have started new careers in professional accounting services, advanced their accounting and finance careers, and lead finance functions in their organisations," says Prof Pang.

About half of those who take SMU's MPA programme do so for a career switch into accountancy, while the other half are more mature students in managerial positions who oversee functions like accountancy and finance.

The one-year MPA programme is suitable for current chief financial officers (CFOs) who wish to develop their competencies to enhance their effectiveness or who wish to deepen their skills and knowledge, and aspiring CFOs.

The second group is those who are not currently CFOs but whose career paths demonstrate potential and an aim to become CFOs in the future, including middle-level finance and business professionals moving on to senior role.

Among those who have benefited from SMU's MPA programme is Mr Yang Qingjun. The 29-year-old is a senior associate in PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP's Assurance Practice.

As a Senior Associate, he works with audit managers and audit partners to plan for an audit and discuss about the audit approach for various clients. During the audit itself, he is usually in-charge of the team at the client's office.

Mr Yang did the MPA course in 2009, fresh out of college after finishing his bachelor's degree in Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering at the National University of Singapore.

"This course helped to provide me with the technical competency and also an accredited graduate-level degree which allowed me to enter the accounting profession," he says.

Most of his course mates were working professionals in various industries who wanted to acquire technical competency in accounting for various reasons. Some took it to prepare for a career switch. Some took it as they are expecting, or had been assigned, to take on more financial and accounting roles.

Others took it to gain an understanding of accounting as they might be working with accountants, so that they could understand accounting terms and the way accountants think. Some were already in very senior finance or accounting positions, but did not have formal training in accounting.

Mr Yang says the key strengths of SMU's MPA programme were the experienced, knowledgeable, dedicated and passionate course instructors who were a good mix of full time academic and adjunct staff, and the emphasis on both the academic and practical side of accounting.

Looking ahead, Mr Yang says the accountancy profession is set to bloom in Singapore as more people from non-accountancy background will be entering the profession after getting further training in accounting.

At the same time, accounting professionals will become more mobile as global financial reporting standards start to converge towards the International Financial Reporting Standards.

PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG