



Interim Report
North Carolina Association
of Certified Public Accountants

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Dr. Courtney
Knoll, CPA

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Meet the Chair: Dr. Courtney Knoll, CPA

Transforming the Profession Through Academia

We are excited to introduce Dr. Courtney Knoll, CPA, as NCACPA's new Board Chair! She enters the role with a distinguished career that bridges academic excellence and practical expertise in the accounting profession. At the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School, she has been pivotal in shaping the minds of future accounting leaders and a key figure in the evolution of accounting education.

A native North Carolinian, Courtney was born in Wilmington, and lived there through the third grade. While her family moved to other states for her father's job in the paper industry, Courtney regularly visited her grandparents in Roxboro and after college, she found her way back to North Carolina to complete her PhD at UNC Chapel Hill.

Her tenure at UNC, marked by her role as Associate Dean of the Master of Accounting (MAC) Program and Executive Director of the UNC Tax Center, demonstrates Courtney's passion for accounting and a commitment to fostering an environment where her specialty—as a CPA—of tax law becomes an exciting topic students can get passionate about. Courtney's influence extends beyond the classroom through her former work experience in taxation, where she has made complex concepts understandable and engaging for students and professionals alike.

"No one understands the entirety of the tax law. But, we should know enough to understand how to be intelligent about what affects us. Or at least to know when to call in a trusted advisor and to be able to communicate with them," Courtney says.

Her time as Board Chair at NCACPA is anticipated to be a continued dedication to the profession, promising a future where education and practice converge to meet the challenges of an evolving industry.

Photos by Lissa Gotwals

AN INADVERTENT DISCOVERY

While her entry into this field was not a childhood dream but a discovery made during her academic pursuits, Courtney's impact on the profession has nevertheless been widespread. "I did not know—not to my knowledge or memory—any accountants. I was not exposed to any. We certainly did not have any accounting classes in my small high school in Selma, Alabama, so I was completely ignorant of the possibilities. I was introduced to accounting because I went to college, decided to pursue a business degree, and had to take a class in it. My first knowledge of accounting was that introductory course, which for the record, I did not love," she recounts. Because of this, she opted to focus her business degree in finance.

A PIVOTAL SHIFT FROM FINANCE TO ACCOUNTING

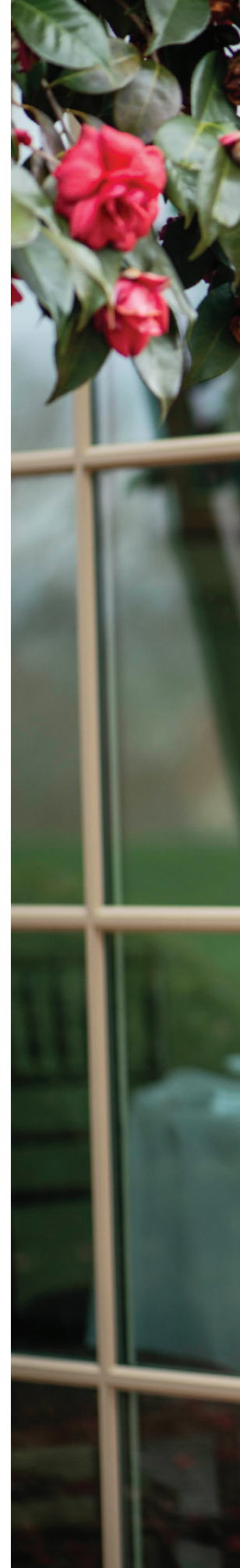
In retrospect, the journey from an undergraduate business student to a respected accounting educator was both intentional and serendipitous for Courtney.

During her undergraduate studies in finance, she decided to take two semesters of Intermediate Accounting as electives. "Those classes dove deep into the more intricate weeds and problem-solving. At this point I'm now a senior, taking this class, and I was like, 'oh, I should have been an accounting major, but it's too late,'" she remembers thinking.

After Courtney graduated and secured her first job at what is now SunTrust Bank in the corporate training program, she took evening and weekend classes to secure what she needed to pursue a master's in accounting. She reflects on why she did not feel drawn to the profession during her undergraduate studies, "It's funny that I was scared away by a class that did not sing to me. And that is why a lot of educators across the country are saying we need to make that first class an experience that students enjoy and help them understand the importance of what they are learning."

It was during her first tax class at Georgia State that Courtney experienced a pivotal moment. "I took an introductory course in tax, and it was like a light bulb went off. I enjoyed the logical problem-solving aspect of it." It appealed to her from the very first class and so she naturally specialized in it. Her college experiences opened doors to a calling she felt deeply connected to.

The introductory course in tax illuminated her path and sparked her desire to light the way into the fields for others. During her MAC program back at the University of Virginia, Courtney was a teacher's assistant, which is what first drew her to teaching. It was here that her love of accounting and teaching first met. Courtney's journey from a business student to a revered educator and leader in the accounting profession is a testament to the power of education, mentorship, and the defining moments that guide our professional destinies.





CONNECT

CHARTING A NEW PATH IN HER PROFESSION

Courtney’s professional journey is a story of big shifts and distinguished achievements, marked by her transition from the corporate world to the academic one and her significant contributions to the University of North Carolina’s Kenan-Flagler Business School. While she knew higher education teaching was the ultimate direction she wanted to go, Courtney remembers being encouraged to get some work experience before pursuing a PhD.

FROM CORPORATE TO CLASSROOM: SHAPING THE FUTURE

Her first job fresh out of the MAC program at University of Virginia began in the bustling environment of Arthur Andersen LLP, in Atlanta, where her role extended beyond the typical duties of a tax professional.

She began going to Arthur Anderson’s training campus in St. Charles, Illinois, for training sessions and eventually began to teach the training courses. As she started raising her hand to go teach more often, Courtney says it was then she was reminded of her “true calling.”

After five years at Arthur Anderson, Courtney decided it was time to pursue yet another one of her passions—educating others—and she began at one of the top universities for Accounting PhDs in the country, UNC Chapel Hill.



TAR HEEL FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS

After she finished the PhD program, Courtney was offered a job at UNC by Doug Shackelford, Senior Associate Dean at the time. Aside from offering her a job, Doug played a huge role in Courtney’s development as a mentor and was also the chair of her dissertation committee.

Since then, her contributions to UNC Kenan-Flagler are marked by her innovative approach to accounting education, particularly within the Master of Accounting Program. Her dedication to bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application has significantly enhanced the learning experience for countless students. Recognized for her excellence in teaching twice with the Weatherspoon Award, Courtney’s efforts have not only elevated the program’s stature but have also prepared students to navigate the complexities of the profession with confidence and skill.

“I tell my students, ‘You will not offend me if you take this [tax] class and don’t want to pursue tax as a career because it is not for everyone. But I guarantee you will appreciate why it’s important that you had this class if you are pursuing a career in accounting or business.’ It’s for anybody. We



are all taxpayers, right? We should all have some understanding. We don’t all have to be professional tax practitioners.”

Courtney’s approach to education has always been about making the complicated world of tax law understandable and engaging. Her journey reflects a commitment to the transformative power of education in the accounting field. By fostering an environment that encourages curiosity and critical thinking, she has played a pivotal role in developing future leaders.

LEADING WITH A BIG PICTURE PERSPECTIVE

Courtney’s professional background is rich with varied experiences that continuously inform her

approach to leadership. “I was completely ignorant of the possibilities,” she admits, reflecting on her initial exposure to accounting. This candid acknowledgment of her unconventional entry into the field highlights a journey characterized by discovery and transformation.

Her transition from practicing at Arthur Andersen to teaching and leading at UNC demonstrates a broader vision for the profession—one that values diverse pathways into the field and recognizes the importance of adaptability and continuous learning. At NCACPA, Courtney’s direction is informed by this vision, emphasizing the need for the profession to evolve in response to changing business landscapes and educational needs.

STAYING PLUGGED INTO THE PIPELINE

As a member and the new Board Chair of NCACPA, as well as her work outside of the Association, Courtney’s approach to addressing the CPA pipeline crisis leverages her academic insights, her passion for education, and her connection to students, the future of the profession. She advocates for a reimagined first encounter with accounting for students, aiming to transform introductory courses into engaging experiences that highlight the profession’s relevance and excitement. This perspective is crucial for NCACPA as it seeks innovative solutions to attract and retain talent in the field.

When asked about her role in NCACPA’s pipeline initiatives regarding her unique, nontraditional perspective, Courtney had a lot to say.

“Part of my role could be as a translator because not only have I been working with students for over two decades, the students

I know include a pretty unique subset. The campus format of UNC’s MAC program was designed for, and is only available to, non-accounting majors because UNC doesn’t offer an undergraduate accounting major. So, my campus students come from everywhere except accounting. We have English majors, psychology majors, music majors. You name it, we have probably seen it! We have many people drawn to accounting that are not your traditional students. They were not in the accounting pipeline, and many of them didn’t even know about accounting as a possible pathway, but they found it through our program.”





Courtney goes on to say that she asks her students questions like, “What do you think? Why are you here? What is it that draws you to this?” to gain their perspective and apply what she learns from them to pipeline initiatives. “The perspective of the pipeline is something I am closely tied into. Helping be part of that translation, from students into the profession, is just part of what I hope to bring to this role,” she says.

While public accounting and other traditional accounting roles are certainly one career path for accounting students to take, she does feel it is vital to help students see the many ways accounting can support and propel their careers regardless of their ultimate career goals. She regularly promotes the message that accounting plays an important role in business and society and accounting education can provide an amazing foundation and launching pad for students.

In understanding that a student’s first encounter with accounting may not be a good one—like her own first experience—and how to get students excited about and engaged with accounting in a more modern, unique way, Courtney’s thoughts are directly aligned with NCACPA’s initiative to do the same.

“I think the biggest thing that can get in anyone’s way here is assuming that the experience that young people have coming into accounting or our member organizations, or our programs, should look like the ones we experienced. That is not going to play well with this group of students. And we see, as educators, our students are changing in front of us. We are also adapting to the idea of inclusive classroom techniques and understanding better how to obtain our learning objectives. We are talking about a different audience than when we were students,” she says.

Beyond the Boardroom



Before & After “I Do”: Once Courtney Edwards, she tied the knot with her husband, Sam, in 2019 and voilà, she’s Courtney Knoll now!



Family Vibes: Mom to a tech-savvy son, Griffin, at Tufts University and stepmom to Jack and Hunter, who are out there making their marks in real estate and insurance.



Weekend Fun: Courtney and Sam enjoy tackling a new recipe, catching a movie, or just running errands together.



NAVIGATING TRANSFORMATION AT NCACPA

Courtney steps into her role as Board Chair at a pivotal moment for NCACPA, a time characterized by both challenges and opportunities for growth. She views this period in the profession as one of the biggest transformational times ever for the industry and, by extension, for NCACPA itself, particularly with the Association searching for a new CEO. “Business as usual is not a successful roadmap for future stability and success,” she asserts, highlighting the need for innovation and adaptability in response to the evolving demands of the profession and the Association.

Thank you, Arleen

As incoming Chair, it is my privilege to express heartfelt thanks to Arleen Thomas for her exemplary leadership over the past year. Arleen’s approach, characterized by her ability to ask deeply probing questions and her passion for uncovering and solving complex issues, has profoundly shaped our organization’s direction and strategies.

Arleen’s deep understanding of our profession, cultivated through years of dedicated service at the AICPA, has enriched our association immeasurably. Her leadership during a pivotal year was instrumental in celebrating the retirement of our esteemed CEO, Sharon Bryson, and navigating the transition period that followed. Arleen’s vision steered us through challenges and toward significant advancements in our strategic initiatives, ensuring NCACPA remains at the forefront of our profession.

On behalf of the board, our members, and the staff of NCACPA, I extend our deepest gratitude to Arleen for her leadership. Her contributions leave an indelible mark on NCACPA.

Thank you, Arleen, for your service and for setting a high standard for us all.

Warm regards,



Dr. Courtney Knoll, CPA
NCACPA’s 2024-2025 Chair



EXPERIMENTATION AND MEMBER-CENTRIC TRANSFORMATION

Courtney champions a culture of experimentation within NCACPA, aligning with her values of risk-taking and continuous improvement. “We should be experimenting. We should take risks and try new things,” she advises, emphasizing the importance of learning from these experiences to better serve the Association’s members. This approach is crucial as NCACPA seeks to support its members through significant industry transformations, particularly those accelerated by technological advancements.

ADAPTING TO CHANGING NEEDS

The coming year, according to Courtney, will include focusing on how NCACPA can provide the education and resources that best support members and their organizations. The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped expectations and preferences for how professional education is delivered. Technology, pipeline issues, and other factors are causing firms to reassess their business models. All of these things mean NCACPA must adapt and evolve as well so it can continue to serve its members and the accounting profession.

As Board Chair, Courtney is positioned to guide NCACPA through a period of momentous change, drawing on her nontraditional background and her commitment to education. Her leadership style, characterized by openness to innovative ideas and a deep understanding of the challenges facing the profession, aligns with NCACPA’s mission to support its members through advocacy, connections, education, and resources.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR FUTURE LEADERSHIP

With NCACPA gearing up to welcome a new CEO soon, Courtney is optimistic about the Association’s direction and its role as a leader among state CPA organizations. “We are set up; the stage is set,” she remarks, reflecting on the solid foundation laid by previous leadership and the strategic initiatives already in motion. Courtney’s involvement in the search committee for the new CEO highlights her active role in shaping the future of NCACPA, ensuring that the next leader is well-positioned to build on the Association’s legacy of excellence and innovation.

In the year ahead, Courtney’s guidance signals a new chapter for NCACPA, marked by strategic foresight and a commitment to embracing change. Her journey, rich with diverse experiences and a deep passion for the profession, positions her uniquely to guide the Association through its current transformation.

With an eye on both the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, Courtney’s vision is not just about navigating change but about thriving in it. As the Association stands on the brink of welcoming a new CEO, tackling the CPA pipeline challenge, and being a partner in firm transformation, it does so with a leader who embodies the resilience and innovation needed for these times. The future with Courtney as our new board chair will be a testament to the power of strategic governance and the collective strength of the NCACPA and accounting communities.