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Filling the demand for municipal government accountants: The benefits of a governmental and not-for-profit accounting course

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ABSTRACT

The demand for accounting professionals in municipal governments is increasing as a result of an aging workforce and a period characterized by cautious hiring. Challenges faced by municipal governments in filling these positions are exacerbated by the competing opportunities available for accounting graduates. In this paper, we examine undergraduate- and graduate-level accounting students' perceptions of careers in governmental and whether perceptions improve for students who take an elective governmental and not-for-profit accounting course. From the beginning to the end of the course, we document an increase in students' perceptions of financial and non-monetary benefits associated with a government job as well as a shift toward viewing governmental accounting as offering creative and dynamic opportunities. The increase suggests that students taking the elective course view government careers as providing greater opportunity than public accounting or corporate accounting for work-life balance and having the potential for non-monetary benefits, although students tend to still view government careers as having less potential for monetary benefits. These results underscore the benefits of a governmental and not-for-profit accounting course within accounting programs.

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1. Introduction

Accounting professionals fill an important role in municipal governments. These professionals are responsible for the reporting of financial information to external users, establishing and evaluating the efficacy of the budget, and participating in operation decisions within the government. Despite the importance of this role, many municipal governments rely on a constrained accounting staff. Two primary factors contribute to this constraint. First, municipal governments face significant fiscal challenges which may decrease hiring (GAO, 2013), in spite of an aging workforce that necessitates hiring (Lewis & Cho, 2011). Experience gaps between senior and new governmental accounting staff likely have implications for the career progression of the newer staff, i.e., newer staff have the opportunity to be promoted more quickly, but will be expected to gain the skills necessary to do so (Lewis & Cho, 2011; Williamson, Burke, & Beinecke, 2011; Wolf & Amirkhanyan, 2010). Second, competing opportunities for students, including both public accounting and corporate, may constrain the supply of account-

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ing graduates available for government opportunities.^{1,2} These constraints, i.e., decreased hiring and the opportunities in other areas, may make it difficult for municipal governments to attract and retain talented accountants.

Attracting accountants begins in undergraduate accounting programs and continues in graduate accounting programs. The literature has long documented the unfavorable views of students toward careers in governmental accounting (Hardnett, Daniels, & Warrick, 2012; McKenzie, 1992; Shivaswamy & Hanks, 1985). This is consistent with findings from a broad range of public administration careers (Ritz & Waldner, 2011). Accounting curricula typically emphasize accounting for for-profit commercial entities, with little emphasis on governmental and not-for-profit (GNP) entities. GNP courses, if offered, tend to emphasize financial reporting concepts, although other accounting topics are applicable in this sector (e.g., auditing and managerial). Furthermore, if a stand-alone GNP course is offered, placement often occurs at the end of an undergraduate student's four-year program or within a graduate program, giving students very little opportunity to consider careers in governmental accounting since recruiting begins as early as the junior undergraduate year (Kimmell, Keltyka, & Ofobike, 2008).

In this study, we examine the perceptions of governmental accounting careers among students majoring in accounting at a regional Midwestern university. We include students from both a GNP course (experimental group) and students in a financial reporting course who have not already taken or are not concurrently taking GNP (control group) to compare perceptions at the beginning and end of the semester.³ The design allows us to test whether those students enrolled in the GNP course view governmental accounting careers more favorably as a result of exposure to the content of the course. We use two instruments, one adapted from McKenzie (1992) and Hardnett et al. (2012) and one adapted from Saemann and Crooker (1999). The first instrument requests students' evaluations of accounting career opportunities in: (1) federal, state, and local governments, (2) public accounting firms, and (3) corporations (either private or publicly traded). Using a five-point Likert scale, students assess the potential for earnings, financial security, work-life balance, job security, and non-monetary benefits (see Appendix A). The second instrument was designed to evaluate students' perceptions of the governmental accounting profession based on 36 pairs of adjectives (see Appendix B).

From the beginning to the end of a GNP course, we find an increase in students' perceptions of financial and non-monetary benefits associated with a government job, as well as a shift toward viewing governmental accounting as offering creative and dynamic opportunities. The increase suggests that students taking the elective course view government careers as providing greater opportunity than public or corporate accounting careers for work-life balance and having the potential for non-monetary benefits, although students still tend to view government careers as having less potential for monetary benefits. These results underscore the impact of courses on shaping student career interests and, more specifically, the benefits of a governmental accounting course within accounting programs.

2. Literature background and hypothesis development

A close examination of the prior literature reveals two main contributions to students' negative perceptions of careers in governmental accounting.⁴ One is the lack of exposure to governmental accounting during their undergraduate education (Lowensohn & Reck, 2005). This fact has been bemoaned by researchers for quite some time. Accounting researchers have demonstrated a general lack of required exposure to governmental coursework, even in AACSB-accredited programs (Engstrom, 1979; Lowensohn & Reck, 2005). Scholars have then connected this lack of exposure to a greater demand than supply of competent governmental accountants (Beights, 1954; Engstrom, 1979; Lowensohn & Reck, 2005). Lowensohn and Reck (2005) noted that governmental accounting is typically linked with not-for-profit accounting and rarely required in an undergraduate program; in the best of circumstances it is offered as an elective. Thus, it is highly likely that the lack of exposure to governmental accounting via a required or elective course contributes to students' lower perceptions of a career in governmental accounting as compared with the public or commercial sector.

A second reason for students' negative perceptions of careers in governmental accounting is a lack of qualified educators at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The excess of demand over supply for faculty members interested and qualified in public sector accounting has dramatically increased over time (Engstrom, 1979; Schiffel & Smith, 2006). Schiffel and Smith (2006) compiled data from Hasselback's *Accounting Faculty Directory*, an online survey, and doctoral program websites that revealed that overall accounting degrees awarded in the governmental area decreased in the five-year period 2001–2005 as compared with the previous four five-year periods. Additionally, and rather alarmingly, governmental accounting doctoral graduates dropped from 67 during the period 1981 through 1985 to only 20 during the period 2001 through 2005. Schiffel and Smith (2006) described this as a “looming crisis” and presented several proposals to increase governmental accounting doctorates. Finally, Wilson (2013) noted that while demand for governmental accounting education has recently

¹ Public accounting firms offer opportunities in audit and tax, as well as Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) compliance engagements. Big 4 firms report an increase and sustained need for accounting graduates to conduct SOX engagements (Thompson, Fernandez, Budnik, & Boston, 2008).

² Whether the 150-h requirement has limited the number of CPA exam candidates has also been explored in the literature. Gramling and Rosman (2009) report a decline in the number of candidates, even in jurisdictions without a 150-h requirement (i.e., only 120 h are required for candidacy) over the period 1980–2002. The AICPA (2015) reports an increase in the supply of graduates (both bachelor's and master's) over the period 2002–2014, but also record hiring by public accounting firms. For a history of the 150-h requirement, see Mauldin, Braun, Viosca, and Chiasson (2013).

³ We focus on student perceptions, with the expectation that an increase in their perceptions will increase the likelihood that they would consider a governmental accounting career upon entry to the profession or at a later date.

⁴ Beights (1954), Engstrom (1979), McKenzie (1992), Lowensohn and Reck (2005), Schiffel and Smith (2006), and Hardnett et al. (2012).

increased given the new governmental accounting and auditing standards, there is still a lack of qualified faculty members with an interest in this area.⁵ Although GNP accounting may also be taught by instructors and practitioners serving as adjuncts, the lack of tenure-track faculty in this niche may have implications for students' perception of governmental accounting careers.

Shivaswamy and Hanks (1985) surveyed 712 students enrolled in accounting courses at the sophomore level and above to explore previous negative perceptions of careers in government. Their findings revealed that the closer students were to graduation, the less likely they were to feel that a career in governmental accounting had the potential for high earnings and/or held opportunities for advancement. They also noted that only 17% of students believed governmental accounting careers offered possibilities of innovation and opportunities to use special abilities and talents. Attitudes toward non-monetary rewards such as working with like-minded colleagues and work-life balance were generally neutral. Finally, the one aspect of government careers viewed favorably by students was job security, with 80% viewing careers in government favorably on this dimension.

McKenzie (1992) expanded Shivaswamy and Hanks (1985) work by comparing student perceptions of job characteristics on three accounting career paths: public, commercial, and governmental. Additionally, she incorporated the impact of exposure to a GNP course on the response of students. McKenzie (1992) surveyed students attending the first meeting of all accounting class offered during the fall semester at one university. Participation was voluntary, and 859 usable surveys were completed for a response rate of 67%. Overall, McKenzie's findings mirrored those of Shivaswamy and Hanks (1985). She found that governmental accounting careers appeared to only have an advantage over commercial and public accounting in the area of job security. Additionally, she examined the differences between students' responses who had been exposed to governmental accounting via coursework and those who had not. While the strength of her results was limited by a large number of neutral responses, overall she found two interesting yet somewhat contradictory results with this variable. Students who had been exposed to governmental accounting via coursework appeared to perceive governmental accounting as no more repetitive and boring than commercial or public accounting. In comparison, students who had not been exposed to governmental accounting via coursework perceived governmental accounting as significantly more repetitive and boring than commercial or public accounting. A somewhat differing finding was that students with exposure to governmental accounting generally viewed careers in governmental accounting as providing little opportunity for innovative and creative thought on the job. In contrast, students who had no exposure to governmental accounting via coursework were more neutral in their attitudes regarding innovation and creativity on the job in government careers.

Hardnett et al. (2012) extended McKenzie's (1992) work by focusing their study exclusively on African American students' perceptions of careers in governmental accounting. Their findings suggested that these minority students perceived high earnings, non-monetary benefits, and job security as positive aspects of governmental accountants. The authors encouraged accounting recruiters to seek out minority students for careers in governmental accounting.

At the conclusion of her research, McKenzie (1992) strongly stated, "Results of this study indicate that such an acknowledgment [of the legitimacy and viability of governmental accounting] from educators is lacking. This is the time to act. The public and commercial segments cannot, and must not, absorb all the quality accounting students" (p. 76). Since the publication of McKenzie's (1992) research, revolutionary change in requirements for governmental financial reporting has taken place. The Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB, 1999) issued *Statement No. 34*, "Basic Financial Statements— and Management's Discussion and Analysis—for State and Local Governments" (GASB 34). GASB 34 replaced the previous fund-type financial statements and required governments to translate their fund accounting records into accrual-based accounting for reporting purposes at the end of each fiscal year. This led to significant implementation problems for governments and a high demand for talented and knowledgeable accountants.

The current study extends the previous literature by focusing on the effect of an elective GNP course on students' perceptions in the post-GASB 34 environment. McKenzie's (1992) conclusions regarding the impact of exposure to governmental accounting via coursework were limited due to the overall large number of neutral responses to her questionnaire; McKenzie also only surveyed students at one point in their exposure to governmental accounting, presumably after their completion of a GNP course or another course which included governmental accounting. Given the current complexities of and rich opportunities in governmental accounting, we predict that exposure to a GNP course post-GASB 34 will increase students' perceptions of a career in governmental accounting. This prediction is also supported by the psychological theory of the mere exposure effect. The mere exposure effect is the phenomenon that individuals have increasingly positive views of people or things after more exposure to them (Zajonc, 1968). Additionally, we believe a better understanding of the effects of exposure to governmental accounting via coursework includes contrasting the perceptions of students before and after their completion of a GNP course. Based on this foundation, we state our first hypothesis in the alternative form:

H1. There will be a significant increase in students' perceptions of governmental accounting careers over a semester in an elective GNP course.

Our ability to strengthen the testing of this hypothesis is increased with the inclusion of a control group as a means of comparison. The students in the control group are not currently (and have not previously been) enrolled in a GNP course.

⁵ Accounting academics can join sections of the American Accounting Association that align with their research and teaching interests. Although membership might not necessarily equate to the number of qualified faculty with a particular interest, we note that the Government and Nonprofit (GNP) Section has experienced a decline in membership, from 393 in the 2008–09 academic year to the 343 in the 2015–16 academic year.

We expect there to be no change in these students' expressed perceptions of governmental accounting careers. We make no predictions about the post-tests between the two groups – those enrolled and those not enrolled in a GNP course – but the mere exposure effect, noted above, and the communication to the GNP course regarding certain advantages of a governmental accounting career may have implications for the post-score results between the two groups.⁶ We therefore examine the post-survey results between governmental and public accounting careers and between governmental and corporate accounting careers to explore this possibility.

This research also expands the prior literature by examining students' perceptions of the governmental accounting profession in general and the effects of an elective GNP course on these perceptions. Saemann and Crooker (1999) find that accounting curricula tend to discourage creativity. We use their scale and administer it to the students in the GNP course in an effort to determine whether exposure to governmental accounting (Zajonc, 1968), through this elective course, will be associated with an increase in the perception that this area provides students with creative and dynamic opportunities. We therefore hypothesize, in the alternative form, that:

H2. There will be a significant positive increase in students' perceptions of creative and dynamic opportunities in the governmental accounting profession over a semester enrolled in an elective GNP course.

3. Research method

3.1. Design and procedure

This research employs a within- and between-subjects experimental design. The between-subjects aspect of the survey involved students at a public university during either the spring 2015 or spring 2016 semester. Students, all of whom were accounting majors, were enrolled in either (1) a required financial reporting accounting course (control group) or (2) an elective GNP accounting course (experimental group). The required financial accounting course is Financial Reporting II, referred to as Intermediate Accounting II at some institutions. Based on course sequencing, students can take Financial Reporting II as early as the fall semester of their senior year.

The elective GNP course is taken by approximately two-thirds of undergraduate accounting students at the university and includes Financial Reporting I as a prerequisite; therefore, these students are either senior undergraduate or graduate students. The course includes coverage of financial reporting for state and local governments (approximately two-thirds of the course) as well as financial reporting for not-for-profit organizations, auditing of governments and not-for-profit organizations, and specialized industries, including healthcare and higher education. Course deliverables include exams, applied financial statement assignments, quizzes, and projects.⁷ Among the students in the control group of our sample, none were concurrently enrolled in GNP accounting and none had previously taken GNP accounting.

The survey incorporates three scenarios and 36 pairs of adjectives, to which participants in the control group and experimental group responded. The only difference in the surveys distributed to the two groups is that the students in the required financial reporting accounting class were asked if they intended to take the elective GNP course. The students in both groups completed the survey at the beginning and at the end of each course. The post-surveys collected demographic data. Participants were asked to write the last four digits of their university ID for purposes of linking the pre- and post-survey responses, but individuals were not identifiable by these four digits.

3.2. Instrument

The survey measures used in this study were mostly drawn from previously validated instruments from prior literature. The first part of the survey consisted of three scenarios, and each participant responded to each scenario. The scenarios were similar to those developed by McKenzie (1992) and used by Hardnett et al. (2012). Each scenario stated, "Assume that you have recently completed an accounting degree and have been offered an entry-level position. . ." and then listed one of the following:

1. in a public accounting firm, i.e., a firm that completes audits or tax preparations for publicly or privately held companies;
2. in federal, state, or local government;
3. as an internal accountant within a company, either privately held or publicly traded.

⁶ The instructor provides information regarding the non-monetary benefits associated with governmental accounting careers, including that such a career presents an opportunity to serve the public which can be rewarding. Although the benefits of work-life balance and flexibility are not directly discussed in the classroom, this information is provided individually to students who request it outside of class. This is not meant to suggest that governmental accounting careers are characterized in the course as easy. Indeed, the expectations in governmental accounting careers are high, and the work schedule often requires more than 40 h per week. However, in contrast with the expectations in public accounting, graduates of this public university who pursue governmental accounting careers both in local governments in the state and in federal government report having more reasonable workload expectations.

⁷ The course is heavily focused on technical content, but lectures do include references to career opportunities where the content could be used. In addition, the course includes one guest speaker each semester. In one of the semesters covered by the study, the guest speaker was a partner in a regional accounting firm whose clients are all local governments. In the other semester, the guest speaker was an employee of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and an alumnus of the university.

Participants then responded to questions regarding the job's potential earnings, non-monetary benefits, and financial and job security (see Appendix A).

The second part of the survey consisted of an instrument developed and tested by Saemann and Crooker (1999), which measures perceptions of the accounting profession (PAPI). We adapted this instrument to measure perceptions of the governmental accounting profession specifically (see Appendix B). The instrument consists of 36 pairs of adjectives representing opposing views. Participants were instructed to use the five-point Likert scale between the pairings to express their perceptions of the work of a governmental accountant. Approximately one-half of the pairings were reverse coded.

The final section of the survey asked students which field of accounting was their first choice to pursue after graduation and which types of certification exams they intended to take (CFE, CGFM, CIA, CMA, and CPA). The surveys distributed to the financial reporting accounting class then asked about students' intentions to take the elective GNP accounting course. Finally, the post-survey for both groups requested demographic information, including gender, race, age, GPA, and political affiliation.

4. Results

4.1. Demographics

Table 1 presents the demographics for the students in our experimental and control groups. The number of participants is 238, with 166 in the experimental group (enrolled in an elective GNP accounting course) and 72 in the control group (enrolled in a required financial reporting course).⁸ Male students outnumber female students in both groups (44.1% are female overall), most students are Caucasian (64.7% overall), average age is 24.1, and average GPA is 3.54.⁹ Most students plan to pursue CPA licensure (96.2%), 77.7% intend to pursue a public accounting career, and only 2.9% plan to pursue a career in government. Of the demographic variables collected, there are no statistical differences noted between the experimental and control groups.¹⁰

4.2. Empirical results

Table 2 presents the results of a series of *t*-tests designed to determine differences in pre- and post-survey results (within design) and differences in post-surveys between the experimental and control groups (between design) for the three career scenarios. Panel A presents the results for differences in pre- and post-surveys as a test of H1, that the governmental course will improve students' perceptions of governmental accounting careers.¹¹ As expected, perceptions of governmental accounting careers generally did not shift over the course of the semester among the control group. There is one exception: students enrolled in the financial reporting course reported a lesser belief that governmental accounting careers provide job security over the course of the semester (p -value = 0.039). In contrast, students enrolled in the GNP course increased their perceptions that these careers have potential for high initial earnings, flexibility in work-life balance issues, job security, and potential for high non-monetary benefits (p -values = 0.083, 0.049, 0.017, and 0.003, respectively). These results are consistent with H1. It should be noted that among this experimental group, there was no change from the beginning to the end of the semester in students' perceptions of financial security and potential for high long-term earnings.

In addition to the noted shifts in the perceptions of the students enrolled in the GNP course (experimental group), we also compare their post-survey responses to those of the students enrolled in the financial reporting course (control group). As presented in Table 2, Panel A, at the conclusion of the course, students in the experimental group demonstrate significantly higher perceptions that a governmental career provides flexibility in work-life balance (4.000 on a 5-point scale, compared with 3.750, p -value = 0.027), job security (4.169 compared with 3.889, p -value = 0.016), and potential for high non-monetary benefits (4.048 compared with 3.708, p -value = 0.005). No differences are noted between the groups for the statements regarding a governmental career providing the potential for high earnings (initial or long term) or providing financial security.

Panels B and C of Table 2 compare post-survey assessments of career potential between governmental accounting careers and public accounting careers (Panel B) and between governmental accounting careers and corporate accounting careers (Panel C). These comparisons are calculated within the two groups: experimental (those enrolled in a GNP course) and control (those enrolled in a financial reporting course). In Panel B, we note that both groups of students appear to continue to believe that public accounting offers greater potential than governmental careers for high initial and long-term earnings and financial security (p -value < 0.01). Both groups also continue to believe that governmental accounting careers provide more

⁸ Of the 72 students in the control group, 34 report that they plan to take GNP in a future semester, 34 report that they are unsure whether they will take the course in a future semester, and 4 report that they do not plan to take GNP in a future semester.

⁹ We note that the average age of 24.1 is higher than one would expect for a traditional senior undergraduate student. The university has a large commuting population, including students who have worked in another career before returning to pursue an accounting degree. There are 23 students of the 238 in our sample who are 30 or older for whom this may be the case.

¹⁰ We also collected political affiliation information from students. We note that there are no differences in the political affiliations between the experimental and control groups.

¹¹ It should be noted that Panel A also reflects no statistical differences in the perceptions of governmental accounting careers between the control group and the experimental group at the outset of the course.

Table 1
Demographics of respondents.

	Overall	Experimental group (enrolled in elective GNP course)	Control group (enrolled in required financial accounting course)	Difference	Significance
N	238	166	72		<i>p</i> -value
Percentage female	44.1%	44.6%	43.1%	1.5%	0.829 <i>ns</i>
Percentage caucasian	64.7%	62.7%	69.6%	−6.9%	0.323 <i>ns</i>
Average age	24.1	24.1	23.9	0.19	0.779 <i>ns</i>
GPA	3.54	3.54	3.53	0.00	0.973 <i>ns</i>
Percentage planning to pursue CPA	96.2%	97.0%	94.4%	2.5%	0.347 <i>ns</i>
Percentage planning public accounting career	77.7%	78.3%	76.4%	1.9%	0.744 <i>ns</i>
Percentage planning governmental career	2.9%	3.6%	1.4%	2.2%	0.353 <i>ns</i>
Percentage identified as Republican	21.4%	19.9%	25.0%	−5.1%	0.379 <i>ns</i>
Percentage identified as Democrat	34.0%	35.5%	30.6%	5.0%	0.458 <i>ns</i>
Percentage identified as Independent	25.6%	25.9%	25.0%	0.9%	0.884 <i>ns</i>

^{*}Significance is indicated at 0.10.

^{**}Significance is indicated at 0.05.

^{***}Significance is indicated at 0.01.

flexibility in work-life balance issues. Only the experimental group views governmental accounting careers as having greater potential for non-monetary benefits.

We note similar findings in Panel C which compares post-survey student perceptions of governmental accounting careers and corporate accounting careers. Specifically, both the experimental group and the control group continue to believe that corporate accounting offers greater potential than governmental accounting for high initial and long-term earnings (*p*-value < 0.01). Only the experimental group views governmental accounting careers as offering more flexibility, job security, and potential for non-monetary benefits than corporate accounting careers. (*p*-value < 0.01).

Based on the results in Table 2, we conclude that H1 is supported, i.e., that students enrolled in a GNP course experience an increase in the favorability of their perceptions of governmental accounting careers. However, we also note that on some dimensions, these students still view public accounting and corporate accounting as having more to offer. Career decisions will therefore depend upon the weight they assign to the monetary and non-monetary benefits they attribute to public, corporate, and governmental accounting.

We adapted the instructions from the PAPI scale developed by Saemann and Crooker (1999) in order to determine whether the experimental group views governmental accounting careers as offering creative and dynamic opportunities more favorably at the end of the semester. The pre-data from both the experimental and control group for the PAPI scale were evaluated using principal components analysis. Our sample size of 238 is in accordance with the recommendations of Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2006).¹² The principal components analysis reduced the number of pairs to 24 (from 36) and suggested two distinctive factors with internal reliabilities ranging from 0.8 to 0.9. The two factors suggested are similar to the factors Structure and Precision identified by Saemann and Crooker (1999). In Table 3, Panel A, we report the differences in pre- and post-surveys for the two groups for the 24 pairs identified using principal components analysis. As indicated, the experimental group began to view governmental accounting careers as more dynamic. For example, the pair of adjectives “Inflexible/Adaptable” reflects an increase of 0.434 in the Likert score, from 2.867 to 3.301, over the course of the semester (*p*-value < 0.01). The lack of increase among the control group in the response to the pairs of adjectives strengthens our support for H2, i.e., that taking a GNP course is associated with an increase in favorable perceptions of governmental accounting careers.¹³

In Table 3, Panel B, we report the differences in pre- and post-surveys for the two groups for the composite factors Structure and Precision. These composite factors are created using an average of the items identified for each factor in Table 3, Panel A. The structure composite factor becomes more positive (i.e., reflecting an increase in the perception that a governmental career is dynamic) between the pre-test and post-test for the experimental group, but not for the control group. However, we also note that the precision composite factor does not reflect a statistically significant change for the experimental group.

4.3. Sensitivity analyses

The purpose of our study was to determine whether students in a GNP course would begin to view careers in this area as more favorable, and the results generally support the related hypotheses. Furthermore, the results support the notion that

¹² Hair et al. (2006) recommend that the minimum sample size for factor analysis include at least five times as many observations as the number of variables to be analyzed. As the number of variables was 36, our sample size meets these recommendations.

¹³ The only statistically significant change within the control group (i.e., the group in the financial reporting class without exposure to GNP) was for the pair of adjectives “Established Rules/New Ideas,” and it reflects a less favorable perception at the end of the financial reporting course, i.e., students perceive governmental accounting careers as offering less opportunity for new ideas than at the beginning of the course.

Table 2
Analyses of pre- and post-surveys.

		Pre-survey	Post-survey	Difference	p-value	
<i>Panel A: Governmental career perceptions pre and post (n = 166 and 72 for experimental and control groups, respectively)</i>						
This job (federal, state, or local government) has the potential for high initial earnings	Experimental group	3.048	3.157	0.108	0.083	*
	Control group	3.153	3.306	0.153	0.252	ns
	Difference	-0.105	-0.149			
	p-value	0.430	0.279			
		ns	ns			
This job (federal, state, or local government) provides financial security	Experimental group	3.970	3.964	-0.006	0.466	ns
	Control group	4.444	3.819	-0.625	0.306	ns
	Difference	-0.475	0.144			
	p-value	0.247	0.204			
		ns	ns			
This job (federal, state, or local government) has the potential for high long-term earnings	Experimental group	3.479	3.530	0.051	0.250	ns
	Control group	3.653	3.694	0.042	0.725	ns
	Difference	-0.174	-0.164			
	p-value	0.205	0.228			
		ns	ns			
This job (federal, state, or local government) provides flexibility in work/life balance issues	Experimental group	3.886	4.000	0.114	0.049	**
	Control group	3.681	3.750	0.069	0.526	ns
	Difference	0.205	0.250			
	p-value	0.105	0.027			
		ns	**			
This job (federal, state, or local government) provides job security	Experimental group	4.012	4.169	0.157	0.017	**
	Control group	4.097	3.889	-0.208	0.039	**
	Difference	-0.085	0.280			
	p-value	0.476	0.016			
		ns	**			
This job (federal, state, or local government) has the potential for high non-monetary benefits	Experimental group	3.837	4.048	0.211	0.003	***
	Control group	3.861	3.708	-0.153	0.218	ns
	Difference	-0.024	0.340			
	p-value	0.848	0.005			
		ns	***			
		Governmental accounting	Public accounting	Difference	p-value	
<i>Panel B: Comparison of governmental and public accounting career perceptions from post-surveys (n = 166 and 72 for experimental and control groups, respectively)</i>						
This job has the potential for high initial earnings	Experimental group	3.157	4.157	-1.000	0.000	***
	Control group	3.306	4.375	-1.069	0.000	***
	Difference	-0.149	-0.218			
	p-value	0.279	0.033			
		ns	**			
This job provides financial security	Experimental group	3.964	4.373	-0.410	0.000	***
	Control group	3.819	4.361	-0.542	0.000	***
	Difference	0.144	0.012			
	p-value	0.204	0.892			
		ns	ns			
This job has the potential for	Experimental group	3.530	4.548	-1.018	0.000	***

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

		Governmental accounting	Public accounting	Difference	p-value	
high long-term earnings	Control group	3.694	4.597	–0.903	0.000	***
	Difference	–0.164	–0.049			
	p-value	0.228 ns	0.579 ns			
This job provides flexibility in work/life balance issues	Experimental group	4.000	2.976	1.024	0.000	***
	Control group	3.750	3.042	0.708	0.000	***
	Difference	0.250	–0.066			
	p-value	0.027 **	0.654 ns			
This job provides job security	Experimental group	4.169	4.102	0.066	0.315	ns
	Control group	3.889	4.153	–0.264	0.043	**
	Difference	0.280	–0.050			
	p-value	0.016 **	0.649 ns			
This job has the potential for high non-monetary benefits	Experimental group	4.048	3.801	0.247	0.003	***
	Control group	3.708	3.889	–0.181	0.193	ns
	Difference	0.340	–0.088			
	p-value	0.005 ***	0.467 ns			
		Governmental accounting	Corporate accounting	Difference	p-value	
<i>Panel C: Comparison of governmental and corporate accounting career perceptions from post-surveys (n = 166 and 72 for experimental and control groups, respectively)</i>						
This job has the potential for high initial earnings	Experimental group	3.157	3.819	–0.663	0.000	***
	Control group	3.306	3.889	–0.583	0.000	***
	Difference	–0.149	–0.070			
	p-value	0.279 ns	0.525 ns			
This job provides financial security	Experimental group	3.964	3.994	–0.030	0.651	ns
	Control group	3.819	4.000	–0.181	0.160	ns
	Difference	0.144	–0.006			
	p-value	0.204 ns	0.943 ns			
This job has the potential for high long-term earnings	Experimental group	3.530	4.108	–0.578	0.000	***
	Control group	3.694	4.222	–0.528	0.000	***
	Difference	–0.164	–0.114			
	p-value	0.228 ns	0.252 ns			
This job provides flexibility in work/life balance issues	Experimental group	4.000	3.813	0.187	0.008	***
	Control group	3.750	3.792	–0.042	0.704	ns
	Difference	0.250	0.022			
	p-value	0.027 **	0.846 ns			
This job provides job security	Experimental group	4.169	3.771	0.398	0.000	***
	Control group	3.889	3.931	–0.042	0.763	ns
	Difference	0.280	–0.159			
	p-value	0.016 **	0.149 ns			
This job has the potential for high non-monetary benefits	Experimental group	4.048	3.699	0.349	0.000	***
	Control group	3.708	3.917	–0.208	0.137	ns
	Difference	0.340	–0.218			
	p-value	0.005 ***	0.047 **			

* Significance is indicated at 0.10.

** Significance is indicated at 0.05.

*** Significance is indicated at 0.01.

Table 3

Analyses of governmental accounting career adjectives.

	Experimental group (n = 166)					Control group (n = 72)				Factor loading	
	Pre	Post	Diff	p-value		Pre	Post	Diff	p-value		
<i>Panel A: Adjective pairs</i>											
Cut & dry/creative solutions	2.386	2.777	0.392	0.000	***	2.236	2.236	0.000	1.000	ns	Structure
Repetition/variety	2.587	2.849	0.262	0.009	***	2.444	2.389	-0.056	0.740	ns	↓
Established rules/new ideas	1.988	2.229	0.241	0.015	**	2.153	1.861	-0.292	0.085	*	
Boring/interesting	3.088	3.285	0.197	0.024	**	2.847	2.736	-0.111	0.375	ns	
Dull/exciting	2.837	3.114	0.277	0.001	***	2.778	2.625	-0.153	0.224	ns	
Stable/dynamic	2.355	2.518	0.163	0.092	*	2.458	2.389	-0.069	0.582	ns	
Standard operating procedures/new solutions	2.271	2.524	0.253	0.009	***	2.278	2.181	-0.097	0.596	ns	
Compliance/innovation	1.771	1.934	0.163	0.047	**	1.958	1.861	-0.097	0.446	ns	
Facts/intuition	1.970	2.133	0.163	0.054	**	1.861	1.986	0.125	0.327	ns	
Monotonous/fascinating	2.705	2.916	0.211	0.011	**	2.444	2.333	-0.111	0.392	ns	
Concrete/abstract	2.304	2.440	0.136	0.122	ns	2.306	2.292	-0.014	0.915	ns	
Logic/imagination	1.928	2.060	0.133	0.107	ns	2.042	1.944	-0.097	0.403	ns	
Routine/unpredictable	2.123	2.187	0.063	0.449	ns	2.167	2.208	0.042	0.782	ns	
Uniform standards/alternative views	2.127	2.289	0.163	0.094	*	2.222	2.208	-0.014	0.934	ns	
Fixed/changing	2.620	2.831	0.211	0.053	*	2.556	2.569	0.014	0.935	ns	
Ordinary/prestigious	2.768	3.012	0.244	0.013	**	2.778	2.653	-0.125	0.349	ns	
Inflexible/adaptable	2.867	3.301	0.434	0.000	***	2.903	3.056	0.153	0.354	ns	
Challenging/easy	2.548	2.416	-0.133	0.151	ns	2.681	2.708	0.028	0.848	ns	Precision
Planned/spontaneous	1.994	2.042	0.048	0.555	ns	2.125	2.000	-0.125	0.379	ns	↓
Practical/theoretical	2.331	2.422	0.090	0.343	ns	2.569	2.472	-0.097	0.608	ns	
Thorough/superficial	2.364	2.199	-0.166	0.079	*	2.181	2.361	0.181	0.202	ns	
Details/overview	2.367	2.494	0.127	0.239	ns	2.514	2.250	-0.264	0.118	ns	
Accurate/imprecise	3.801	3.681	-0.120	0.233	ns	3.931	4.028	0.097	0.490	ns	
Methodical/novelty	2.343	2.440	0.096	0.239	ns	2.592	2.451	-0.141	0.300	ns	
	Experimental group (n = 166)					Control group (n = 72)					
	Pre	Post	Diff	p-value		Pre	Post	Diff	p-value		
<i>Panel B: Two composite factors</i>											
Structure composite factor	2.496	2.694	0.198	0.000	***	2.479	2.432	-0.047	0.506	ns	
Precision composite factor	2.307	2.333	0.026	0.613	ns	2.390	2.284	-0.107	0.202	ns	

* Significance is indicated at 0.10.

** Significance is indicated at 0.05.

*** Significance is indicated at 0.01.

courses matter in shaping students' career perceptions. The noted improvement in the perceptions of governmental careers in the experimental group with the general lack of change in perceptions within the control group provides stronger support than if a control group were not used. However, the selection of a control group presents the challenge of ensuring similarity between the two groups. Table 1 indicates that students are similar, based on demographic characteristics; in separate, untabulated results, we also find that there are no statistical differences between the two groups' perceptions of governmental accounting careers in the pre-survey responses.

We note that the financial reporting course used as a control group is the second of two financial reporting courses and is not a prerequisite for the GNP course, although some students may have taken the financial reporting course prior to taking governmental accounting. As a result, the GNP students (experimental group) are more likely to have completed more coursework. As a sensitivity test, we restrict our sample to a subset of students who have taken eight or more accounting courses, and we replicate the results in Tables 2 and 3. In these untabulated results, we find that the results are qualitatively unchanged among the reduced sample of 191 students (153 in the experimental group and 38 in the control group).

We run two additional sensitivity analyses to ensure that our results are not being driven by gender and work experience. We examine gender because Guy and Schumacher (2009) note an increase in the number of female public administrators, and it is unclear whether this increase is attributable to career fit with personal goals or to gender perceptions of public sector careers. For the questions presented in Table 2, Panel A, we perform t-tests on the pre- and post-survey responses and determine that for five out of six questions, there are no statistical differences between male and female students.¹⁴ In our sensitivity analysis related to work experience, we find no statistical differences between students who have no work experience (n = 105) and students who have work experience (n = 133) for these six questions.¹⁵ The results in Table 2, Panel A therefore do not appear to be driven by gender or work experience.

¹⁴ For Question 4 (whether a career in governmental accounting provides flexibility in work-life balance issues), male students viewed these careers more favorably, both at the beginning and at the end of the semester.

¹⁵ Anecdotally, we note that most students have experience via internships in public accounting (and some in corporate accounting, but very few in governmental accounting). However, we did not capture the type of work experience or internships completed such that we would be able to conduct additional analyses based on work experience.

5. Conclusion

In this study, we demonstrate the potential benefit of offering a GNP course. Over the semester enrolled in an elective GNP accounting course focused primarily on technical content, students began to view governmental accounting careers more favorably, i.e., as offering both monetary and non-monetary benefits as well as dynamic and creative professional opportunities. We note that despite the increase, students in the experimental group continue to perceive careers in public accounting and corporate accounting as offering greater financial benefits than careers in governmental accounting. We also note that because student response to course material is always dependent upon their relationship with the professor, the quality of the materials, and other factors, we cannot state that a GNP course would always have a favorable impact on students' perceptions of governmental accounting careers. However, this study demonstrates that college courses do influence students' perceptions and that it is possible for a GNP course to have a favorable impact, an important finding given the noted aging municipal accounting and finance staff (e.g., [Lewis & Cho, 2011](#)).

There are limitations to our study that may yield opportunities for future research. The students in our experimental group elected to take the GNP course, and the results could be different in an accounting program that requires the course. Such a study would afford the opportunity to rule out as a competing explanation for our results any potential differences between students who elect to take GNP and those who do not. We note that we mitigate this concern in two ways: (1) there are no statistical differences between the control group and the experimental group on any of the demographic questions or in any of the pre-survey questions, and (2) approximately half the students in the control group report the intention to take GNP in a future semester.

The results should also be considered in light of the findings of [Schiffel and Smith \(2006\)](#), who report that qualified GNP faculty are scarce. We note that despite the constraint in finding tenure-track faculty to teach the course, opportunities exist to staff the course with governmental accounting professionals. [Geary, Kutcher, and Porco \(2010\)](#) discuss a pilot program, Partner Teaches Program, designed by a public accounting firm to formalize collaboration arrangements in which firm partners teach accounting courses. Assuming institutions can continue to meet accreditation requirements, using adjunct teachers from practice (either public accounting firm staff with governmental expertise or accountants working directly for government) represents a viable option for addressing this constraint. Offering GNP courses, whether taught by tenure-track or adjunct faculty, has the potential to favorably influence students' perceptions of governmental accounting careers, opening them to consider such opportunities at the entry level or at future points in their careers.

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Appendix A. Scenario survey questions

Instructions: Now think about how you generally feel about the information you read. Circle the response that best fits how you generally feel.

	Use the scale below for these items				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. This job has the potential for high initial earnings	1	2	3	4	5
2. This job provides financial security	1	2	3	4	5
3. This job has the potential for high long-term earnings	1	2	3	4	5
4. This job provides flexibility in work-life balance issues	1	2	3	4	5
5. This job provides job security	1	2	3	4	5
6. This job has the potential for high non-monetary benefits	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B. Perceptions of the governmental accounting profession

B.1. Adapted from [Saemann and Crooker \(1999\)](#)

Instructions: The following are pairs of words. Think of them as opposites. Consider each pair and select the term which you feel best describes the governmental accounting profession and/or the work of a governmental accountant. Use the five-point scale between the terms to express the strength of your opinion in that particular direction.

Creative Solutions	1	2	3	4	5	Cut & Dry
Repetition	1	2	3	4	5	Variety
New Ideas	1	2	3	4	5	Established Rules
Boring	1	2	3	4	5	Interesting
Challenging	1	2	3	4	5	Easy
Dull	1	2	3	4	5	Exciting
Flexible	1	2	3	4	5	Structured
Solitary	1	2	3	4	5	Interaction with Others
Conformity	1	2	3	4	5	Originality
Dynamic	1	2	3	4	5	Stable
Standard Operating Procedures	1	2	3	4	5	New Solutions
Extrovert	1	2	3	4	5	Introvert
Conceptual	1	2	3	4	5	Analytical
Innovation	1	2	3	4	5	Compliance
Intuition	1	2	3	4	5	Facts
Ambiguity	1	2	3	4	5	Certainty
Planned	1	2	3	4	5	Spontaneous
People-Oriented	1	2	3	4	5	Number Crunching
Practical	1	2	3	4	5	Theoretical
Tedious	1	2	3	4	5	Absorbing
Fascinating	1	2	3	4	5	Monotonous
Abstract	1	2	3	4	5	Concrete
Effectiveness	1	2	3	4	5	Efficiency
Imagination	1	2	3	4	5	Logic
Thorough	1	2	3	4	5	Superficial
Unpredictable	1	2	3	4	5	Routine
Details	1	2	3	4	5	Overview
Accurate	1	2	3	4	5	Imprecise
Alternative Views	1	2	3	4	5	Uniform Standards
Changing	1	2	3	4	5	Fixed
Methodical	1	2	3	4	5	Novelty
Record Keeping	1	2	3	4	5	Decision Making
Benefits Society	1	2	3	4	5	Profit-Driven
Prestigious	1	2	3	4	5	Ordinary
Adaptable	1	2	3	4	5	Inflexible
Mathematical	1	2	3	4	5	Verbal

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