

Advice from a faculty member

Practical knowledge keeps studies on the right track

Written by Foster Yim



Lam Chak Yan, Michael

Lecturer

Sacred Heart Canossian College of Commerce

There is generally thought to be a gap between academia and the practical world. However, students can bridge this gap by attaining the practical AAT qualification, since practical knowledge of real-life work experience is embedded in its syllabuses. Michael Lam, Lecturer from Sacred Heart Canossian College of Commerce (SHCCC), tells us the reasons why he recommends that his students obtain the AAT qualification and how it helps them progress their careers.

Tell us about your background.

I received my tertiary education in Canada, and majored in economics. Back to Hong Kong, I worked as an accounting personnel in a bank. The work not only enhanced my accountancy knowledge; it also aroused my interest in pursuing a long-term career in the field. I stayed in the banking industry for around five years before I moved into for my second career, in education, teaching at Hong Kong School of Commerce for two years then moving to SHCCC in 2002.

What made you join the teaching profession? What do you enjoy the most about teaching?

Teaching has always been my interest. When I was working in the bank, I was involved in part-time teaching on a regular basis. As my passion towards education grew day by day, I decided to fully indulge it. Though the private sector offers a more dynamic working environment and better benefits, I still love to see my students grow from one stage to another. This gives me great satisfaction.

How does your previous work experience help your teaching?

I find it easier to explain practical know-how and common 'tricks and traps' to students as I have real life experience from the commercial world. This helps students digest the theories and concepts which I explain using current issues. For example, when filing a tax return, categorizing entries differently can yield very different results – the skilful use of miscellaneous expenses or disbursements can help save tax. Through some interesting real-life examples, students can stay focused and understand my illustrations.



Briefly describe your teaching life in SHCCC.

SHCCC was formerly a secretary training school. It now offers a wide range of certificate, advanced diplomas, and professional diploma courses in various business disciplines. I am responsible for teaching management accounting, Hong Kong taxation, and finance subjects. I usually teach 15 to 18 hours per week.

Besides teaching, I need to take care of school administrative work, counselling and work placements. Some may find these extra duties tedious, but I enjoy doing them as they are important to my students' future development. I also enjoy communicating and interacting with students, and this brings a lot of vitality to my life and career.

Are there any outstanding students who have impressed you?

SHCCC graduates live up to their employers' expectations. I have heard many good comments from employers, especially when it comes to our students' reliability and obedience to rules and instructions. Two salient examples come to mind. A final year student was offered a permanent position after graduation by her summer employer in view of her outstanding performance. As a result, she changed her study plan from undertaking a full-time top up degree programme to a part-time one. Another graduate told me excitedly that she had been assigned more and more important duties in her company despite of her lack experience on joining. She was a student with superb accounting software skills. These are just some of the encouraging examples of what our students can achieve!

We know that you encourage your students to acquire the AAT qualification and register with the HKIAAT before graduation. In your opinion, what kind of benefits can the AAT qualification bring to your students?

AAT is an all-round accounting qualification. Candidates need to learn not only about accounting but also about related subjects including law, auditing and taxation. The AAT qualification equips students with a strong foundation in accounting and prepares them for a much wider and brighter future in terms of career opportunities. From what I have observed, those who only obtain an elementary accounting training and qualification usually end up in the posts they first entered, such as account clerks or data entry clerks, whereas AAT graduates, although they may start at the same junior position, are always able to progress upward. The AAT qualification is also a ticket to further education. Many of my students use the AAT qualification to pursue a top-up degree.

What is your advice for accounting students in Hong Kong?

In terms of study, I would recommend the AAT qualification without hesitation. It provides a good articulation route, and hence is highly beneficial to progression in an accountancy career. In preparing for the professional examinations, students should practice questions frequently, familiarizing themselves with the mode and mood of the examination. This works! Students should also equip themselves with different skills which can set them apart from their counterparts. Like the outstanding students which I mentioned previously, having superb accounting software skills is an edge as these are in high demand by many companies nowadays.