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Finance and Accounting Club

Elgin Community College

BDO Accounting Firm Visit

Francisco Gonzalez (Senior Manager) and Frank Kovar (Experienced Manager) from BDO's Chicago office spoke to the club about careers in public accounting. Both are former community college transfer students (Francisco from College of Dupage and Frank from Harper College) who transferred to NIU before joining BDO.

1.) Speaker backgrounds

- a.) Both started at community college, transferred to NIU, joined BDO, and stayed with the firm ever since
- b.) Both are involved in BDO's campus recruiting and outreach, and said they're passionate about supporting community college students since they know how tough transferring can be

2.) Corporate vs. Public Accounting

- a.) Corporate/Industry: work for one company's internal accounting department (Amazon, Caterpillar); closer to 40 hour weeks; slower, less predictable promotions; consistent day to day work
- b.) Public Accounting: work for a firm serving multiple clients; standard weeks are 40-45 hours, busy season (55+ hrs) January-April with smaller busy stretches throughout the year; start at intern level, promotions typically every 1-2 years
- c.) Public accounting is the traditional starting point for most accounting majors - many senior corporate accounting roles specifically list public accounting experience as a requirement because of the wide variety of exposure it builds

3.) BDO Quick Facts

- a.) BDO USA: 75+ offices (3 in Chicago), 12,000+ personnel, \$2.82 billion in revenue; roughly 43% assurance, 37% tax, 20% advisory
- b.) BDO International: 1,800+ offices, 111,000+ personnel, \$12.8 billion revenue, spans 160+ countries - 5th largest accounting firm globally
- c.) Firm has doubled in size over the past 5 years

4.) Three Career Paths

- a.) Audit
 - i.) Verifies a company's financial statements are accurate and comply with US GAAP; required for public companies, bank loan covenants, non-profits, IPOs, etc.
 - ii.) Team based (staff, senior, manager, partner) - never working alone
 - iii.) Busy season usually in January-April; work happens both in office and on-site at client locations, including some travel
 - iv.) Process: Planning, year-end field work
- b.) Tax
 - i.) More specialized and independent than audit; busy season February-April, plus smaller busy stretches in summer/fall
 - ii.) Mostly office-based; working on several returns at once
 - iii.) Many sub-specialties exist (state/local, partnership, international, etc.)
 - iv.) Tax professionals often make more due to specialization but the work is less team and client facing
 - v.) Can potentially break off and start in independent practice
- c.) Advisory
 - i.) Broadest and most project based path; schedule can be unpredictable - slow periods followed by intense projects
 - ii.) Includes forensics/fraud investigations, M&A due diligence, cybersecurity, AI/data consulting, etc.
 - iii.) Most people don't start here directly - usually spend a few years in audit or tax first then break into advisory once they've built a good foundation

5.) Life in Public Accounting

- a.) Workforce mostly consists of 20-30 yr olds with a high energy and ambitious mindset
- b.) Builds highly-transferable skills such as multitasking, communication, sales,
- c.) Public accountants are revenue generators for the firm (client-facing, selling services); corporate accountants are more of an internal cost center
- d.) Much easier to move from public accounting into private accounting instead of vice versa

6.) Q&A

- a.) Managers typically oversee 2-3 clients at a time at a mid-size firm like BDO
- b.) Clients are not handed to new hires directly - relationships build gradually as you're promoted
- c.) No need to double major to specialize later - that typically happens on the job. However, technology focused electives can help for tech-heavy roles
- d.) Recruiting for internships typically starts when you're a junior (post-transfer)
- e.) Community college transfers may feel behind at first on professional readiness (resumes, interview prep, networking), not academically, but catch up quickly
- f.) Advice for interns: do not be afraid to ask questions and network beyond your immediate team

7.) BDO Programs & Next Steps

- a.) Pathway to Success Program (for students 3+ years after graduation); virtual info sessions (Nov. 10, 2026 and April 22, 2027), BDO office visits (Summer 2027), and a 1:1 mentorship program (Jun-Nov 2027)
- b.) Open internship positions: 2027 Assurance, 2027 Advisory (Claims Recovery) , 2028 Core Tax Services
- c.) Recruiter contact: Ralen Ricardo - ralenricardo@bdo.com

Join us for our next meeting on,

Wednesday, September 30th, 2026