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Finance and Accounting Club

Elgin Community College

Eide Bailey Accounting Firm Visit

Heather Birkett (Partner, CPA for 32 years) and Zoe Lind (Associate - 2 years with the firm, started as a tax intern) from Eide Bailey's Great Lakes regional office (Schamburg) spoke to the club about careers in tax and assurance at a large regional accounting firm.

1.) Speaker Backgrounds

- a.) Heather: CPA for 32 years, partner at Eide Bailey, previously worked in real estate industry before public accounting; local to South Elgin
- b.) Zoe: Started as a tax intern, converted to full-time after graduating, has been with the firm about 2 years; local to the area as well
- c.) Both are involved in recruiting and encouraged signing up via QR code for updates on internship opportunities

2.) About Eide Bailey

- a.) Top 20 accounting and advisory firm, based out of Fargo, North Dakota (founded 1917), grew largely by acquiring smaller firms while keeping their client relationships intact
- b.) More than 100 years in business; 50+ offices across the U.S. and India; 35,000+ staff members, \$761 million in net fees
- c.) Regional offices include Schamburg, Akron, and Cleveland - the first three offices east of the Pacific (most others are in the western U.S.)

- d.) Staff retention: 86% (2024), 85% (2025), 85% (2026) - described as reflecting a strong and supportive culture

3.) Mission, Purpose, and Values

- a.) “One connected firm” - connectivity helps serves clients and each other solve complex challenges
- b.) Purpose: Foster impactful doing by growing people, elevating clients, and strengthening communities
- c.) Values: Integrity, meaningful relationships, people, authenticity, culture, trust
- d.) Interns consistently say “authenticity” is the value that resonates with them most

4.) Service Mix (2026)

- a.) 43% tax services, 31% audit & assurance, 26% advisory/other
- b.) Advisory includes niche areas like fixed assets , tax-exempt organizations, international tax, business valuations, and M&A

5.) Two Main Parts: Audit and Tax

- a.) Assurance/Audit
 - i.) Verifies that a company’s financial statements are accurate - if a company claims \$20M in revenue, auditors sample records to confirm it, protecting investors/banks from false information
 - ii.) At the end of an audit, auditors issue a letter stating if they’re satisfied the numbers are valid and accurate
 - iii.) Eide Bailey’s Schaumburg office does **not** currently have an audit team (it’s tax only) - nearest audit internship would be in Akron, Ohio
 - iv.) Audit is team-based - people work together in open/collaborative office spaces, each person assigned a piece (ex. Fixed assets, cash, revenue recognition)
 - v.) Each audit takes roughly 200-250 hours total to complete; first-year associates typically do client rotations, review financial statements, and try a variety of industries

- vi.) Associates are usually scheduled on audits sometimes 6+ months in advance
- vii.) Biggest early-career challenges cited: deadlines - leaning on your team and resources helps a lot

b.) Tax

- i.) More individualized work than audit - associates might sit near each other all day without directly collaborating, since everyone is working on different returns
- ii.) Work comes from a “shelf” system (FIFO) - associates pull whatever return is next and work through it - corporate returns, partnership returns, trusts, individual returns, payroll tax returns, etc.
- iii.) Returns are leveled by difficulty - first-years start with simpler returns and work up to more complex ones over time
- iv.) Complexity depends on factors like numbers of investments, K-1s, number of properties, number of states filed in, stock sales, and number of adjusting entries needed
- v.) Associates do a self-review, then send work to a reviewer, then it moves to signing
- vi.) A lot of day-to-day communication happens between other interns/associates since no two people work on the same return
- vii.) Firm also offers an internal “exchange program” - associates can apply to try a different department for 6-8 weeks to explore other interests

6.) Specialization & Industries

- a.) Eide Bailey doesn't force specialization early - many leaders describe “zigzag” careers across departments before settling where they're happiest
- b.) Can specialize by industry (healthcare, tax-exempt organizations, manufacturing, affordable housing, agribusiness, construction & real estate, dealerships, education, energy, financial services, gaming, government, insurance, nonprofit, retail, telecommunications & electric, wholesale distribution) or by entity type (partnerships, high-net-worth individuals, etc.)

- c.) Employee resource groups available: Veterans, Diversified, Pride, Women at Eide Bailley, etc.)

7.) Advisory/Consulting Services (Broad Overview)

- a.) Very broad category - examples include: Business valuations/M&A matchmaking (helping find buyers/sellers for a business), forensic accounting (finding hidden assets in divorces), expert witness testimony, HR consulting (helping clients find a CFO), and IT/ERP systems consulting

8.) Work-Life Balance & Busy Season

- a.) Tax deadlines: April 15th is the big one, but also May 15th, July 31st, September 15th, October 15th, November 15th, depending on the entity type
- b.) Busy stretches: January–April (main), with mini busy seasons in July/August and September/October for extended returns
- c.) Eide Bailly's charge-hour goal during tax season was around 55 hours/week last year - considered lenient on how you hit your hours (early riser vs. night owl schedules both work) as long as the work gets done
- d.) "Charge hours" = time spent on billable client work; associates log hours manually (no AI time-tracking system)
- e.) Compared to Big 4 experience (one speaker's background): Big 4 associates often work 1,200–1,600 hours of overtime per year; Eide Bailly, as a mid-market firm, is less extreme - "not killing myself to prove it" since there's less internal competition for advancement
- f.) Remote work is available for full-time associates (not interns) - company provides laptop; associates get an annual "lifestyle spending" allowance to buy home office equipment (monitors, keyboards, desk, etc.)

9.) Interviewing and Hiring Expectations

- a.) No deep accounting knowledge expected going in - training exists specifically to teach the firm's tools and processes (3-day training in Ohio where all the new interns learn the same software together)
- b.) Interview style: Behavioral/getting-to-know-you questions (ex. Describe a role you had in a group project) - not technical "prove you're a genius questions"
- c.) Full-time hire criteria - good attitude, willingness to learn, eagerness to take on projects

10.) Skills & Internship/Position Info

- a.) Skills they look for: work experience, extracurriculars, teamwork, communication skills, etc.
- b.) Internships open to juniors and seniors, full and part-time opportunities
- c.) Associate positions: for new college grads who are CPA eligible, full-time
- d.) Spring internships run roughly 30-40 hours/week, flexible around class schedule

11.) Open Roles - Great Lakes Region

- a.) Application deadlines: Ohio 9/30/26, Illinois 10/14/2026
- b.) Accounting Intern (Akron/Cleveland) — Spring 2027, Tax and Assurance
- c.) Accounting Intern (Schaumburg) — Spring 2027, Tax only
- d.) Business Valuation Intern (Akron/Cleveland) — Spring 2027
- e.) Apply at www.eidebailly.com/careers/early-careers
- f.) Questions: cknarr@eidebailly.com

Join us for our next meeting on,

Wednesday, October 7th, 2026