Journal of Current Practice in Accounting and Finance (JCPAF)
Volume.14, Number 1; January-2023;
ISSN: 2836-9584 | Impact Factor: 7.16
https://zapjournals.com/Journals/index.php/Accounting-Finance
Published By: Zendo Academic Publishing

THE MAGNETIC APPEAL OF FORENSIC ACCOUNTING: UNDERSTANDING THE PROFILE OF INTERESTED STUDENTS

[1]Conway, A.C, and [2]Rouse, R.W.

Article Info

Keywords: forensic accounting, student profile, interest, background experiences, personality traits, college students, recruitment, accounting courses.

Abstract

The supply of well-prepared students for forensic accounting is low, largely due to the limited number of universities offering courses focused on forensic accounting. To understand the profile of a student interested in forensic accounting, a survey was conducted among college-aged students to determine what personal interests, educational experiences, and backgrounds correlate with an interest in forensic accounting. The study found that forensic accounting is interesting to students regardless of their major or interest in accounting, and there is much excitement and interest among students in forensic accounting, which could aid in recruiting students into forensic accounting courses. Additionally, the study identified types of background experiences or personality traits that correlate with an interest in forensic accounting. Finally, the study aimed to determine whether forensic accounting tasks and experiences are inherently interesting to students. The results offer exciting and positive news for the future of forensic accounting, as students desire more coursework in this field.

INTRODUCTION

Forensic accounting is defined as the use of accounting theories, principles, or analyses in legal action, often through expert witness testimony. Forensic accounting involves the application of accounting, finance, economics, statistics, law, research, and investigative methods in the collection, analysis, and communication of findings (Rufus et al., 2015). With the growing complexity of organizational environments and technology advances, forensic accountants are becoming increasingly prevalent and have roles distinct from other types of accountants. Additionally, there is evidence of considerable growth in forensic accounting careers (AccountingWeb 2002), yet there are a limited number of accounting programs offering forensic accounting

[1] University of Tennessee at Martin
[2] University of Tennessee at Martin

courses. The programs that do provide forensic accounting courses share a similar struggle. The content of their forensic accounting courses, unlike other accounting courses, has less standard structure or objectives. Forensic accounting is often discussed simultaneously with auditing because both disciplines commonly involve tasks related to preventing or detecting fraud. Because of this, students interested in forensic accounting are usually prepared the same as students interested in traditional auditing. However, forensic accounting differs from traditional auditing, and students' preparation for this specialty should reflect that. Auditors typically take a standardized approach to their work, while forensic accountants must determine which areas, people, or functions of the organization require attention. Auditors work forward from the source of an economic event to its representation in the financial records. Forensic accountants often work backward, using incomplete information to uncover an issue. Because fraud is usually hidden, this process can be difficult and time-consuming and requires that forensic accountants possess advanced knowledge of fraud schemes and data analysis techniques to apply to their investigations (Smith, 2015). Since a different mindset and skillset is called for in forensic accounting versus auditing, tax, or other subspecialties of accounting, it is of interest to the forensic accounting profession to know what influences students to choose the subspecialty. In this paper, I investigated who expresses an interest in forensic accounting and whether inherent personality, interests, educational, and/or life experiences influenced an individual's desire to become a forensic accountant. The study focused on accounting students and explored what factors play a role in an accounting student's career interests, specifically the interest in forensic accounting. It also gauged students' interests in forensic accounting tasks and students' inherent level of professional skepticism. I studied whether the interest in forensic accounting is correlated with a student's interests and experiences both outside and inside the classroom, the student's level of inherent professional skepticism, or a combination of all the variables mentioned.

The first goal of this study was to see how widespread interest in forensic accounting is amongst college students. The second goal was to identify types of background experiences or personality trait, or personal interests that are correlated with an interest in forensic accounting. The results from this could reveal experiences and exercises educators could provide to introduce the idea of forensic accounting to accounting students. This study's third goal was to understand better whether forensic accounting tasks and experiences are inherently interesting to students. Since forensic accounting courses are often electives in an already crowded accounting curriculum, this knowledge could aid in recruiting students into these classes and perhaps into accounting in general. While there has been much research focused on forensic accounting, missing within the research are academic studies devoted to understanding why students are interested in forensic accounting over other specialties. As the demand for forensic accountants continues to grow and the possibility that students trained in forensic accounting might lend value to the audit profession, understanding student interest in forensic accounting is becoming more important in academia. For example, educators could include issues with fraud embedded to increase student interest and retention in accounting courses.

Several factors could potentially explain why an accounting student is interested in forensic accounting. Perhaps the tasks forensic accountants perform are inherently interesting; maybe they have had courses in forensic accounting that included forensic accounting tasks. Perhaps students arrive at the classroom with a prior interest in white-collar crime, criminal investigation, or courtroom performance. It is also possible students who express an interest in forensic accounting have higher levels of inherent skepticism. Prior research has shown professional skepticism is crucial for forensic accountants, auditors, and other accountants. SAS No. 99 (a standard that requires accountants to look for fraud in financial statements) reminds auditors they need to overcome biases and natural tendencies—such as overreliance on client representations—approach audits with a skeptical attitude and questioning mind (Ramos, 2003). A questioning mind is necessary for uncovering fraudulent activity and one of Hurtt's characteristics for building out her professional skepticism scale (a 30-item questionnaire with individual

items scored on a scale from 1-6 that yields a skepticism score). In this study, I also use the Hurtt scale to explore whether a questioning, skeptical personality is what differentiates students with an interest in forensic accounting from other accounting students.

The contribution the research could add is three-fold. First, determining overall interest in forensic accounting tasks could be valuable to the field. If there is high interest, perhaps some of those tasks could be incorporated into accounting courses to increase student engagement. Second, learning whether a student's background, such as an interest in law enforcement, specific educational experiences, life experiences, or other demographic data, contributes to the student's interest in forensic accounting will enrich understanding of who is attracted to the field. If so, recruiting forensic accountants can be more finely tuned to search for those who best match the results. Third, students interested in forensic accounting may be inherently more skeptical. Knowing where accounting students stand on the professional skepticism scale can be used in academia to identify students' best fit for a career path in forensic accounting. More experiential learning can be embedded into accounting programs, allowing future accountants to begin adjusting and enhancing their professional skepticism skill set before joining the workforce.

To carry out the research described above, I distributed a survey to undergraduate and graduate accounting students at the University of Tennessee at Martin, the University of Georgia, and the University of North Texas to answer these questions. Dr. Cindy Durtschi, my dissertation chair, serves as the Ledger and Quill Professor of Accountancy and past Director of the MS in Audit and Advisory Services Program at DePaul University. The University of Tennessee at Martin is where I currently work as an Assistant Professor of Accounting. The accounting students surveyed varied in terms of degree progress and program. Some had taken forensic accounting courses; many had not. Also included in the survey were examples of forensic accounting tasks and auditing tasks to understand better student interest in such tasks and the frequency at which students have been exposed to these tasks in the classroom or through internships.

Demographic questions focused on the student's background, such as inherent interest in forensic accounting, crime podcasts, TV, and movies related to crime or the courtroom. Finally, I included questions about career interests and the Hurtt professional skepticism scale to assess their inherent level of skepticism. Correlations were run between expressed career interests, skills, tasks, life experiences, interests, and intrinsic levels of skepticism.

The results from this study were fascinating. Not only is forensic accounting a subject students of all majors find appealing, but there is clearly a desire from many students to learn more about this field in the classroom. The survey results also offered better insight into the profile of a student who finds forensic accounting interesting and how they choose to spend their free time. While the results do not answer every question about who is interested in forensic accounting, they do confirm that the interest is there and within it is much excitement among students when it comes to this discipline.

In the next section of this paper, I will talk briefly about the literature that exists in this field beginning with reviewing what forensic accounting is and how it has evolved over time and the subsequent research that has resulted. Then, I will provide a summary of how the hypotheses tested in this study were developed and talk about the research method utilized. Finally, I discuss the results of my analysis. All figures, tables, and references are included at the end of the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What Is Forensic Accounting?

Over the last few decades, the literature focused on forensic accounting that has emerged has, for the most part, aligned with the changing scope of concerns surrounding the topic. Several articles have focused on the need for traditional accountants to incorporate forensic accounting activities into their day-to-day work. There is also considerable research devoted to expanding the overall definition of forensic accounting and the roles that forensic accountants play in today's working world.

Forensic accounting, also called investigative accounting or fraud audit, combines forensic science and accounting. Forensic science, according to Crumbley (2003), "may be defined as the application of the laws of nature to the laws of man." He describes forensic scientists as examiners and interpreters of evidence and facts in legal cases and offers expert opinions regarding their findings in a court of law. In this case, accounting is the science resulting in examining and interpreting financial information.

Forensic accounting is a rapidly developing area of specialization in accounting. Therefore, forensic accountants are becoming increasingly more demanded within the accounting profession as more and more companies depend on them to avoid joining the list of past financial scandals. The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) has called forensic accounting one of the "hot" new careers in accounting. It indicates there will be a shortage of fraud professionals in the next decade (AICPA, 2004).

Forensic Accounting and Fraud

Forensic accounting has been pivotal in the corporate agenda after several financial reporting scandals resulted in the loss of public trust and vast amounts of money. As a result, many companies took the initiative to significantly improve their internal control and accounting systems (Ganiyu, 2013). This movement toward a more effective system increased the demand for forensic accountants as forensic accounting is an integral investigative tool for detecting fraudulent activity (Baird and Zelin, 2009).

Much of this area's research has focused on forensic accounting and how it can be utilized to detect fraud. Ganiyu found that forensic accounting services can help deter fraudulent activities when operating with the proper resources but do not curb fraudulent activities. One study concluded that because audit authorities find themselves understaffed and overloaded with work, integrating forensic accounting and fraud audits into government audits could reduce errors and negligence and help detect fraud (Long, 2018). Forensic accounting is constantly evolving as the world continues to advance technologically. Today's forensic accountant must be able to perform an array of investigative assignments while producing work that can be communicated in the courtroom (Stevenson 2015).

There are some studies on forensic accounting traits from an academic stance that provide a foundation for this study's research. One study compared the performance of students who had taken a course in forensic accounting to a control group of untrained students and a panel of fraud experts. The results showed that the students who took a forensic accounting course reacted to an unusual transaction similarly to the fraud experts signifying that forensic accounting education potentially sensitized the students to fraud and raised their level of skepticism (Durtschi 2011). This provides insight into why forensic accountants are in such demand for detecting fraud. They possess a level of skepticism that allows them to ask the right questions to discover the occurrence of fraudulent activity. Another study surveyed fraud and forensic professionals for their observations of the necessary skills and characteristics for forensic accountants and the education and training requirements deemed essential (McMullen 2010). The results revealed that most respondents found all the skills investigated in the study are potentially significant, but much more research in this area is necessary.

Forensic Accounting Education

Buckoff and Schrader's study (2000) found that adding a course in forensic accounting to the curriculum can significantly help the institution, students, and employers of accounting graduates. This same study found that most of the participating institutions in their research responded that providing a course in forensic accounting is only somewhat valuable to their overall accounting program. A 2002 study by Rezaee revealed that undergraduate and graduate accounting students felt forensic accounting offered exciting and fulfilling career opportunities but felt forensic accounting was not viewed as a necessity within the accounting curriculum. Many studies on forensic accounting education provide data to support the "demand" for forensic accounting courses. Still, few studies dive into how to satisfy this demand. Thus, forensic accounting coverage in today's accounting curricula is unclear (Rezaee et al., 2004). This study will seek to understand better what factors play a role in an accounting student

finding a career in forensic accounting interesting. The results could help academics design and implement courses and programs focused on forensic accounting to attract students who fit best in this specialty.

What Is Professional Skepticism, and How Is It Measured?

Over the years, there has been a lack of precision in using the term "professional skepticism," and professional standards and academic settings are guilty of remaining neutral when pressed for clarity surrounding the topic (Nelson 2009). This lack of clarity has made it challenging to make decisions regarding accounting research studies that speak to professional skepticism. Hurtt proposes that professional skepticism is a multi-dimensional individual characteristic that can be a trait (a relatively stable, enduring aspect of an individual) and a state (a temporary condition aroused by situational variables). In her 2003 study, she lays out the definition of professional skepticism in three layers: a questioning mind, suspension of judgment, and a search for knowledge. Hurtt developed and tested a comprehensive instrument to measure professional skepticism (2003). The result is a 30-item scale designed to measure professional skepticism. This scale is focused on the multi-dimensional characteristics of skeptics, which combine to determine a person's level of *trait* skepticism. This then leads to certain behavioral choices. This scale has been used extensively to assess the level of skepticism auditors should possess, but there is minimal research applying Hurtt's scale to forensic accounting. Her skepticism scale is used in this study to analyze levels of professional skepticism among students in accounting courses to determine if any correlation between interest in forensic accounting and inherent skepticism exists.

Skepticism is a necessary skill for forensic accountants (McMullen and Sanchez, 2010). Still, minimal research has been devoted to how professional skepticism is developed and how closely related it is to a student's career choice. Most research involving professional skepticism looks at those already working as accountants. The Hurtt Professional Skepticism Scale measures the trait skepticism of auditors (Hurtt 2010). Fullerton and Durtschi found internal auditors who had scored higher on the professional skepticism scale desired more information when confronted with fraud symptoms than those with lower scores. Their study presented some of the first empirical evidence of the significant connection between skepticism characteristics and fraud detection abilities.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

All accounting students are not the same. A student interested in a career in traditional auditing does not necessarily have an interest in forensic accounting. The factors that led to an accounting student choosing audit, tax, or some other specialty over forensic accounting are not fully understood. Without a better understanding of why students are drawn to forensic accounting, academics do not know how to attract future forensic accountants. Students studying accounting who are interested in forensic accounting may differ from those interested in other accounting subspecialties. However, it is unclear how characteristics or experiences correlate with the student's choice. The courses a student has taken and the exposure to specific tasks in those courses could spark the interest in a forensic accounting career. Although professional skepticism is a necessary skill for forensic accountants, could students with a higher level of inherent professional skepticism be more inclined to desire a future in forensic accounting? All the above may play a role in a student's career desire for forensic accounting. Students could be making their career choices based on the courses and topics they enjoyed learning about in their education. Additionally, a student with a higher level of inherent professional skepticism might be more attracted to a career that allows them to put their questioning mind to use. I have developed the following five hypotheses based on this reasoning.

Hypothesis 1a and 1b

The first area to be explored is how widespread is the interest in forensic accounting in college students.

H1a: *Forensic accounting is inherently interesting to college-aged students.*

H1b: *There is a positive relationship between students who express an interest in forensic accounting and those who have not taken a forensic accounting course.*

Hypothesis 2a, 2b, and 2c

The second area to be explored is the type of background, personality, and interests of students who find forensic accounting appealing. Understanding the personal interests of students who are considering forensic accounting for their career will help universities develop activities, or case competitions that could potentially recruit students into forensic accounting and accounting in general.

H2a: *There is a correlation between students interested in forensic accounting and those who enjoy listening to true crime podcasts.*

H2b: *There is a correlation between students interested in forensic accounting and those who enjoy watching television shows and movies about true crime.*

H2c: *There is a correlation between students who rank high on the skepticism scale and those interested in forensic accounting.*

Hypothesis 3a

The third area to be explored is whether there is a positive relationship between students who show an interest in forensic accounting and those who exhibited a high interest in doing forensic accounting and audit tasks (see Table 1 and Table 2).

H3a: *Students who show an interest in forensic accounting have a high interest in doing forensic accounting and audit tasks.*

TABLE 1 FORENSIC ACCOUNTING TASKS

1.	Assisting in legal proceedings, including testifying in court as an expert witness and preparing visual aids to support trial evidence
2.	Performing interviews and leveraging techniques designed to elicit sufficient information
3.	Assess loss and potential damage awards
4.	Apply tax law knowledge
5.	Work closely with law enforcement officers and agencies
6.	Conduct and assist with internal and external investigations
7.	Valuations of firms for legal disputes.

TABLE 2 AUDITING TASKS

1.	Collating, checking, and analyzing spreadsheet data
2.	Examining company accounts and financial control systems
3.	Gauging levels of financial risk within organizations
4.	Checking that financial reports and records are accurate and reliable
5.	Ensuring that assets are protected

The results from this research could be helpful in academia to better meet student interests in accounting which may in turn, direct more students toward an accounting major. Prior research confirms the need for accounting programs to emphasize and embrace forensic accounting (Gabriele 2008). Without concrete evidence of the benefit of a forensic accounting course, an adjustment to course requirements is unlikely to happen. The results could also be helpful in the hiring and recruiting process to ensure candidates selected are the best fit for a forensic accounting or audit role.

RESEARCH METHOD

Data Collection

To better understand what variables play a role in a student having interest in a career in forensic accounting, a survey was administered to 293 business students currently enrolled at the University of Tennessee at Martin, the

University of Georgia and the University of North Texas. Students at varying points in their programs were surveyed.

Data from this survey was collected and categorized into three areas. The first area focused on determining the inherent level of interest in forensic accounting each student had. Students were asked to select areas of accounting that would be interesting for their career. For this question, they could select multiple options. The remaining data collected for this area of focus asked students if they had ever taken or were currently taking a forensic accounting course. If they answered "no", they had not taken a forensic accounting course, they were asked if they would be interested if one were available.

The second area of focus was whether certain interests and personality characteristics related to an interest in forensic accounting. Students were asked if they listed to true crime podcasts and if they watched true crime television shows and/or movies. If they answered "yes" to either of these questions, they were asked to provide how many hours per week they engage in this activity. The maximum amount they could select was "6 hours". Additionally, students were asked to answer the questions contained in the skepticism personality scale developed by Hurtt (2003) to determine their inherent level of skepticism. The answers for these questions were based on a 6-point Likert scale anchored by "1" for "strongly disagree" to "6" for
"strongly agree."

The third area of focus surveyed students to determine their level of interest in certain job tasks. Students were presented a list of seven typical forensic accounting tasks and five typical auditing tasks and asked to rate their interest in performing them as part of their job. The answers for these questions were based on a 6-point Likert scale anchored by "1" for "not interested at all" to "6" for "very interested."

Demographic Data

In addition to the survey questions above, the respondents supplied demographic information. Students were asked about their major of study. The options were "Accounting" or "Other". They were also asked to select their class level from a list of options. Lastly, students were asked to provide information about the job they planned to take after graduation or had already landed. They were given a list of options (Big 4 Accounting Firm, Corporate Accounting, Private Business, Other). See Table 3.

TABLE 3 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

	Accounting	**Other**				
Major	243	50				
	Freshman	**Sophomore**	**Junior**	**Senior**	**Graduate**	**Other/invalid**
Class Rank	1	34	63	87	88	20
	Big 4/Public Accounting Firm	**Corporate**	**Private Business**	**Other**		
Job after graduation	157	33	42	61		

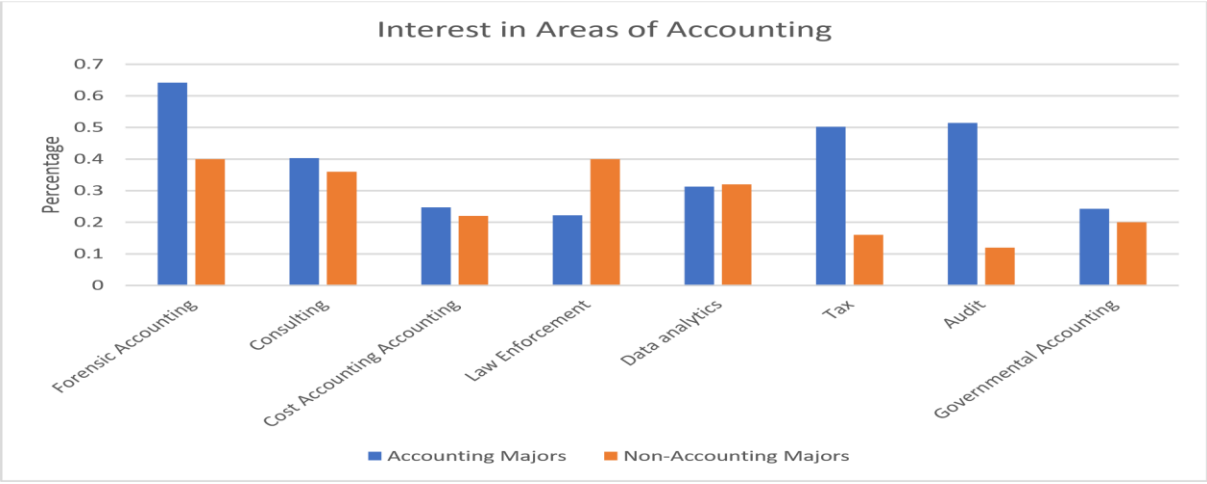
RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results to Hypothesis 1A and 1B

Hypothesis 1A states that forensic accounting is inherently interesting to college-aged students. To test this hypothesis, respondents were asked to select areas of accounting they found interesting for their career. They were allowed to select as many areas as they liked. The options given were forensic accounting, consulting, cost accounting, law enforcement, data analytics, tax accounting, audit (internal or external), and governmental accounting. The results revealed that forensic accounting was the most popular area of accounting among accounting majors and tied as the most popular along with law enforcement for nonaccounting majors (see Figure 1). A total of 293 students were surveyed (243 accounting majors, 50 nonaccounting majors). The 243 accounting majors made 750 selections when answering this question which comes out to an average of 2.68 areas of interest per student. The non-accounting majors made 109 selections when answering this question an average of 2.18 areas of interest per student.

Sixty-two percent (62.2) of the students majoring in accounting selected forensic accounting as an area they found interesting for their future career. The next two areas that were the most widely selected by accounting majors were audit (51.4 percent) and tax accounting (50.2 percent). Sixty-two percent of accounting major students who displayed an interest in forensic accounting also selected audit when answering this question on the survey. This is not surprising as audit is the area of accounting most closely linked to forensic accounting. This also supports the idea that many students who are considering a career in audit would also appreciate coursework that incorporated forensic accounting material. Forty percent of the students not majoring in accounting who participated in this survey selected forensic accounting and law enforcement as the two areas they found the most interesting. Overall, 60 percent of the students who participated in the survey answered that they found forensic accounting interesting as a possible career. The t-test results (see Figure 1) show the percentage of accounting students who express an interest in forensic accounting is significantly higher than any other accounting subject. Not only do the results support hypothesis 1A, but they also reveal that forensic accounting is a specialty of the accounting discipline that even those not pursuing an accounting degree find intriguing. Interest levels in other areas of accounting were much lower among the non-accounting major students. For forensic accounting to attract so many of these students suggests it is the ideal course to potentially grow the major and increase enrollment at universities. Nearly half (45 percent) of the non-accounting majors who find forensic accounting interesting also find law enforcement to be a career they would enjoy. Perhaps, this finding could encourage more collaboration between criminal justice and accounting at universities. A student not wanting to major in accounting could still take a forensic accounting course if it aligned with their overall career goals and interests.

FIGURE 1 STUDENT RESPONSE TO WHAT AREAS OF ACCOUNTING WERE OF INTEREST TO THEM, BY ACCOUNTING MAJOR, OR OTHER MAJOR



t-Test: Two Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	Interested in Forensic Accounting	Not Interested in Forensic Accounting
Mean	0.006363636	0.743589744
Variance	0.101298701	0.192307692
Observations	176	117
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	196	
t Stat	3.030742121	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.001384406	
t Critical one-tail	1.652665059	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.002768812	
t Critical two-tail	1.972141222	

Difference between Forensic Accounting and Other Areas	P value	t-stat	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
Consulting	**0.000114**	-3.740763	252	99.99%
Cost Accounting	0	-5.196964	214	100%
Law Enforcement	0	-5.306107	208	100%
Data Analytics	0.000002	-4.699496	230	100%
Tax	0.009845	-2.345881	276	99.02%
Audit	0.017045	-2.129483	279	98.30%
Governmental Accounting	0	-5.208978	213	100%

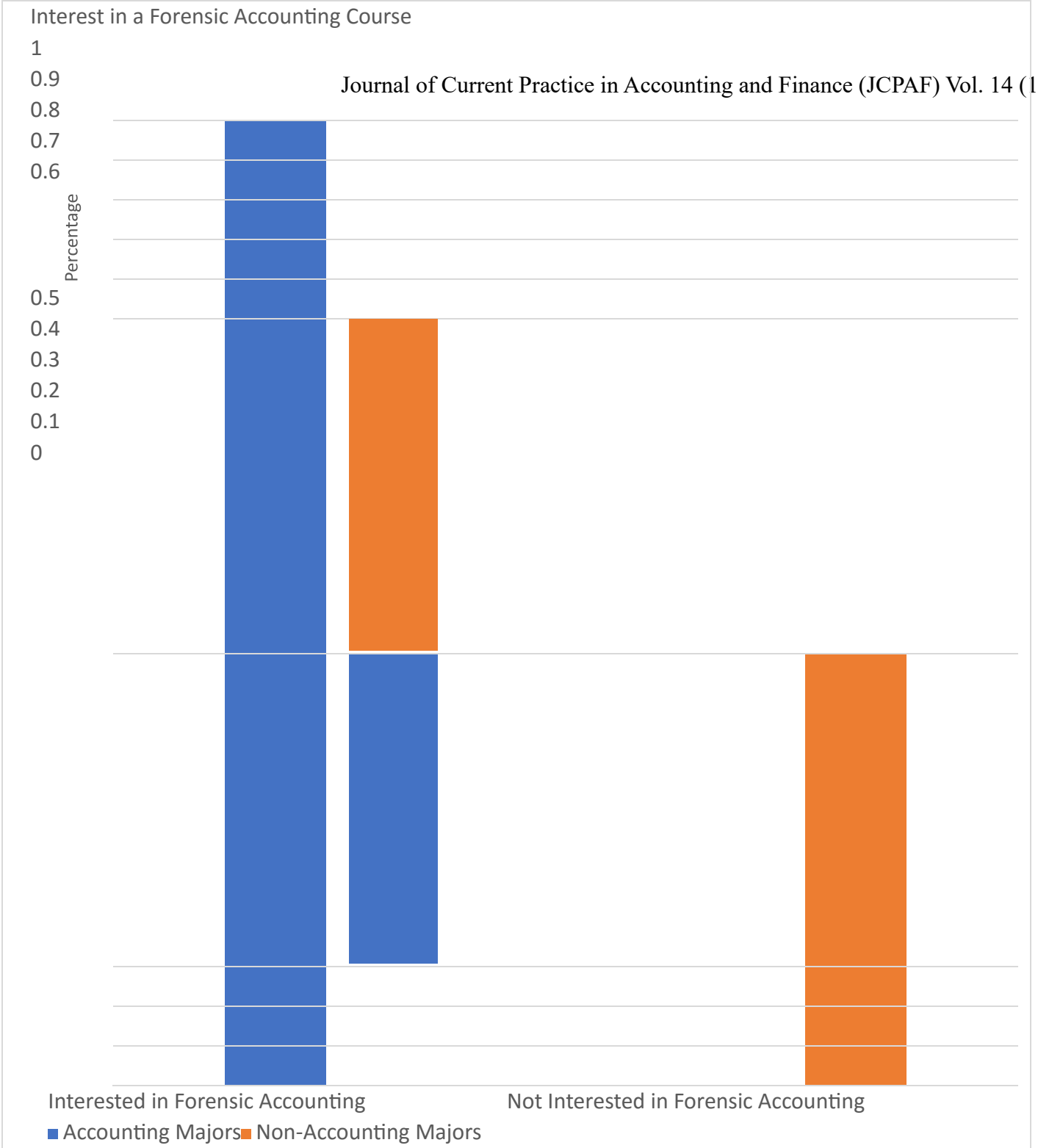
Hypothesis 1B states that there is a positive relationship between students interested in forensic accounting and those who have not taken a forensic accounting course. Since most of the students who participated in this survey had not ever taken a course in forensic accounting, this hypothesis was developed to reveal whether there is a desire to work in forensic accounting even without exposure to the subject in college. If found to be supported, the results for this hypothesis could also strengthen the argument for more accounting programs to include a forensic accounting course within their curricula. To test this hypothesis, students were asked if they had taken or were currently enrolled in a forensic accounting course. If they answered "no", they were asked if they would be interested in taking one if it were offered. Of the 293 students surveyed, 203 had never taken a course in the subject. The students were broken out into two groups—those who expressed an interest in forensic accounting and those who had not expressed an interest. The results from H1A were used to categorize each student into one of the two groups. Of the respondents who were categorized as having interest in forensic accounting as a career and were also accounting majors, 100% answered that they would be interested in a forensic accounting course if it were offered. For the non-accounting majors within this category, 84.2 percent expressed interest in taking a forensic accounting course if it were offered. When looking at the group of students who did not express an interest in forensic accounting for their career, the idea of taking a forensic accounting course if it were offered was still well received. Ninety-eight percent of the accounting majors and 40 percent of the nonaccounting majors indicated they would take the course if available. This is incredibly telling of the significant amount of interest in

forensic accounting that extends even outside of the accounting department. Overall, hypothesis 1B is supported illustrating the demand for more forensic accounting courses to be available to college students. Offering a forensic accounting course would not only attract accounting students with a variety of career plans, but it would also appeal to certain non-accounting majors. While this hypothesis focused on the students who had not taken a forensic accounting course, it is important to add that there were 90 students who responded that they had or were currently taking a course in forensic accounting. Students who had taken or were taking a forensic accounting class were then asked if they enjoyed the class. Of those 90 students, only one student responded that they did not enjoy the class. Next, students were asked what they found was the most engaging activity in this class. Thirty-two (31.11) percent reported that they most enjoyed *class presentations*. Twenty-four percent most enjoyed the *lectures* while eighteen percent most enjoyed *case studies*. For the complete results, please see Table 4. It should be noted that many these students were mid-way through their first forensic accounting class. From this, it can be assumed that students who are interested in forensic accounting remain interested after taking a forensic accounting course.

TABLE 4
STUDENTS WHO HAD TAKEN A FORENSIC CLASS CHOSE ONE ACTIVITY THEY FOUND MOST ENGAGING IN THEIR CLASS.

1.	Class Presentations	31.11%
2.	Lectures	24.44%
3.	Case Studies	18.89%
4.	Readings	14.44%
5.	Simulations	5.56%
6.	Other	4.44%
7.	Experiential Learning	1.12%
8.	Role Play	0%

FIGURE 2 STUDENT INTEREST IN TAKING AN ACCOUNTING COURSE



Results to Hypothesis 2A, 2B, and 2C

Hypothesis 2A states that there is a correlation between students interested in forensic accounting and those who enjoy listening to true crime podcasts. To test this hypothesis, students were asked if they listened to true crime podcasts in their free time. If they answered "Yes" to this question, they were then asked to provide approximately how many hours per week they spend listening to this content. This hypothesis was developed based on my personal preferences. I find true crime podcasts fascinating. It is not the graphic details or horror of the case that intrigues me, rather it is learning about the investigative techniques utilized to solve a case. Because of this, I theorized that this personal preference might be a commonality amongst others interested in forensic accounting. The results for this hypothesis were informative. Of the 293 students surveyed, 177 expressed interested in

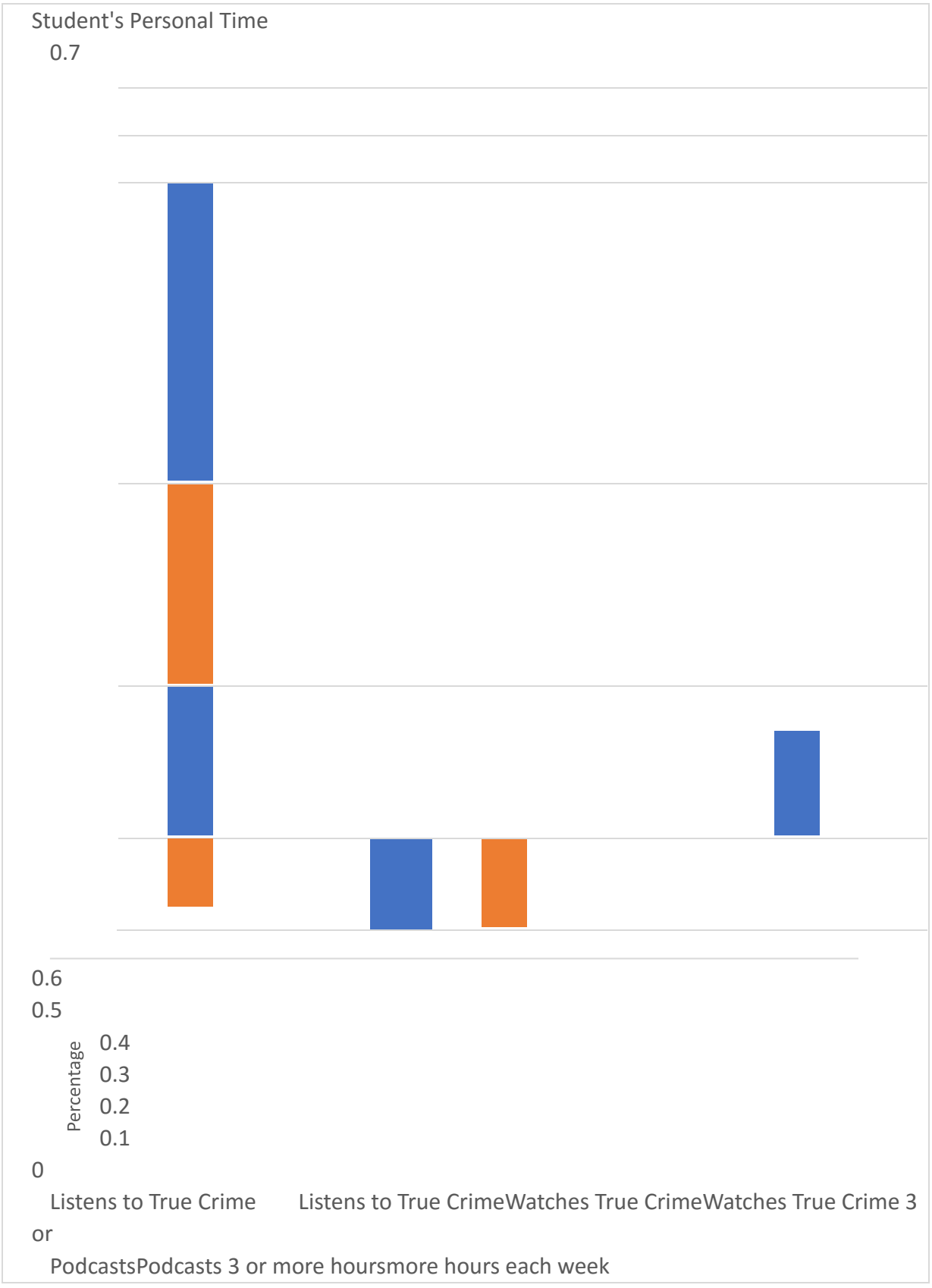
forensic accounting. Thirty-two (32.20) percent of students interested in forensic accounting admitted to listening to true crime podcasts with 10.17 percent revealing they engaged in this activity for three hours or more each week. While these results show that the majority of student's interest in forensic accounting do not listen to true-crime podcasts, they do listen more frequently than students who did not express an interest in forensic accounting (14.66 percent ever listen with only 3.45 who listen three or more hours a week).

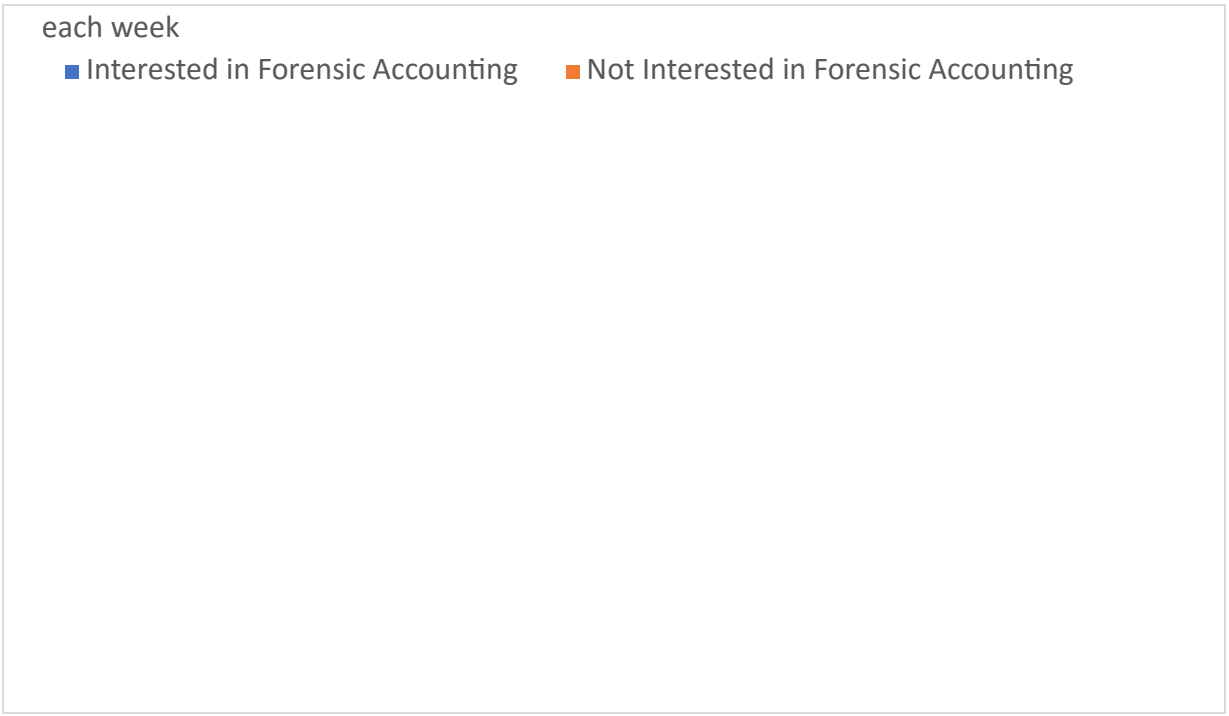
In summary, of the 293 total responses, only 73 indicated they listened to true crime podcasts in their free time with 22 of these students listening for three hours or more each week. Seventy-two percent (72.72) of the students who listen for three hours or more were interested in forensic accounting. Ultimately the data suggests that the college students surveyed do not listen to podcasts much in their spare time which could be due to several reasons: time, access, etc. However, the ones that do listen to true crime podcasts are often also students who find forensic accounting interesting. The t-test results (see Figure 3) show that the students who are interested in forensic accounting are significantly more likely to spend their personal time listening to true crime podcasts. Overall, hypothesis 2A is supported.

Hypothesis 2B states that there is a correlation between students interested in forensic accounting and those who enjoy watching television shows and/or movies about true. To test this hypothesis, students were asked if they watched true crime television shows and/or movies in their free time. If they answered "Yes" to this question, they were then asked to provide approximately how many hours per week they spend watching this content. This hypothesis was developed similarly to hypothesis 2A. Of the 293 students surveyed, 177 students expressed an interest in forensic accounting. Sixty-four (64.41) percent of students interested in forensic accounting answered that they do watch true crime television and/or movies with 22.60 percent sharing they engaged in this activity for three hours or more each week. Interestingly, 43.10 percent of students who did not express an interested in forensic accounting responded that they watched true crime television and/or movies with 18.97 percent stating they watched this type of content for three hours or more each week. (See Figure 3).

In summary, the results for this hypothesis reveal that interest in forensic accounting and watching true crime television shows and/or movies appear correlated. The most telling piece of information that came from this hypothesis testing was that every student who responded "yes" to watching true crime television shows and/or movies for three hours or more each week also had an interest in forensic accounting. This could imply that any student who watches true crime television shows and/or movies for three or more hours per week would find a career in forensic accounting interesting. However, not all students interested in forensic accounting can be found watching true crime television and/or movies for three hours or more each week. The t-test results (see Figure 3) show that the students who are interested in forensic accounting are significantly more likely to spend their personal time watching true crime television shows and/or movies. Overall, H2B was supported by the results.

FIGURE 3 DIFFERENCES IN HOW STUDENTS SPEND THEIR PERSONAL TIME


Student's Personal Time
0.7
0.6
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0
Percentage
Listens to True Crime or Podcasts
Listens to True Crime Podcasts 3 or more hours
Watches True Crime
Watches True Crime 3 more hours each week



t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	Listens to True Crime Podcast	Does not Listen to True Crime Podcast
Mean	0.894736842	0.881355932
Variance	0.095864662	0.105461394
Observations	57	118
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	116	
t Stat	0.263662518	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.396253893	
t Critical one-tail	1.658095744	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.792507785	
t Critical two-tail	1.980626002	

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	Watches True Crime	Does not Watch True Crime
Mean	0.875	0.903225806
Variance	0.11036036	0.088841883
Observations	112	62
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	

df	138	
t Stat	-0.573973464	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.283460043	
t Critical one-tail	1.655970382	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.556920087	
t Critical two-tail	1.977303542	

Listens to True Crime Podcast				
Difference between interest in Forensic Accounting	P value	t-stat	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
Not interested in Forensic Accounting	**0.000041**	-4.177164	71	100.00%
Watches True Crime TV/Movie				
Difference between interest in Forensic Accounting	P value	t-stat	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
Not interested in Forensic Accounting	**0.000006**	-4.532456	160	100.00%

Hypothesis 2C states that there is a correlation between students who rank high on the skepticism scale and those interested in forensic accounting. To test this hypothesis, student's responses to the Hurtt Skepticism Scale were divided at the mean into high and low responses. If a student's response scored above the mean, the student was classified as a "high-skeptic". If a student's response scored below the mean, the student was classified as a "low-skeptic". The mean score for all 293 students was 115. The mean score for students who expressed an interest in forensic accounting was 123. The mean score for students who did not express an interest in forensic accounting was 102. This difference was significant at 1.34E-05 (p-one tailed test). See Figure 4).

In summary, students, regardless of major, who ranked high on the skepticism scale tended to also be those students interested in forensic accounting.

This result could be helpful for universities planning to incorporate a forensic accounting course in their program. Many will likely introduce the course as an elective option and could decide to promote this elective course over others to students who rank higher on the skepticism scale. Additionally, if the enthusiasm and interest shown in this study's results are indicative of the interest level other students at different universities will have, then the course might become competitive. Knowing the skepticism score of potential students for the course could be useful if only a limited number can register. Overall, H2C was supported by the results.

FIGURE 4 DIFFERENCE IN HURTT SKEPTICISM MEASURE

----------	**Not interested in Forensic Accounting**	**Interested in Forensic Accounting**
Mean	101.8113208	122.5706125
Variance	2131.221204	471.0077684
Observations	106	177
t Stat	-4.35071432	
P(T<=t) one-tail	1.34E-05	

Results to Hypothesis 3A

Hypothesis 3A states that students who show an interest in forensic accounting have a high interest in doing forensic accounting tasks. Table 1 contains tasks that are routinely performed by forensic accountants. This list was developed by reviewing prior literature (Dhar and Sarkar, 2010; Crumbley, 2007) discussing forensic accounting and detailing the variety of responsibilities a forensic accountant will likely have. This list was also reviewed by Dr. Cindy Durtschi, who is a professor and researcher in the field of forensic accounting, to confirm it appropriately captured the broad job tasks of a forensic accountant. Table 2 contains tasks that are routinely performed by traditional auditors. This list was developed by working with Dr. Mary Geddie, a now retired Assistant Professor of Accounting who worked as an auditor prior to teaching the main auditing course offered at the University of Tennessee at Martin. Dr. Geddie provided input and reviewed the final list to ensure it accurately covered the job tasks of an auditor. Since many of the auditing tasks could be part of a forensic accountant's daily work, it made sense that a student potentially interested in forensic accounting would also find auditing tasks interesting.

To test this hypothesis, students were asked to rate their level of interest on a scale of 1 to 6 (1= Not Interested, 6 = Very Interested) for each of the twelve tasks. Interest level was then categorized as low or high. An interest level selection of "1" or "2" was considered uninterested. An interest level selection of "3", "4", "5", or "6" was considered interested.

293 students participated in the survey. Of the 293 students that participated, 177 expressed an interest in forensic accounting as a potential career and these students were used to test this hypothesis. Figure 5 focuses on the seven forensic accounting tasks shown in Table 1. Over 50 percent of all forensic accounting tasks received a moderate to a high amount of interest from the students who had expressed an interest in forensic accounting. This reinforces the idea that students interested in forensic accounting also find the typical job tasks of a forensic accountant to be intriguing. The task with the lowest interest was valuations, which most likely reflects the fact that they have not been introduced to this task as used by forensic accountants.

FIGURE 5 INTEREST STUDENTS HAVE IN FORENSIC ACCOUNTING TASKS

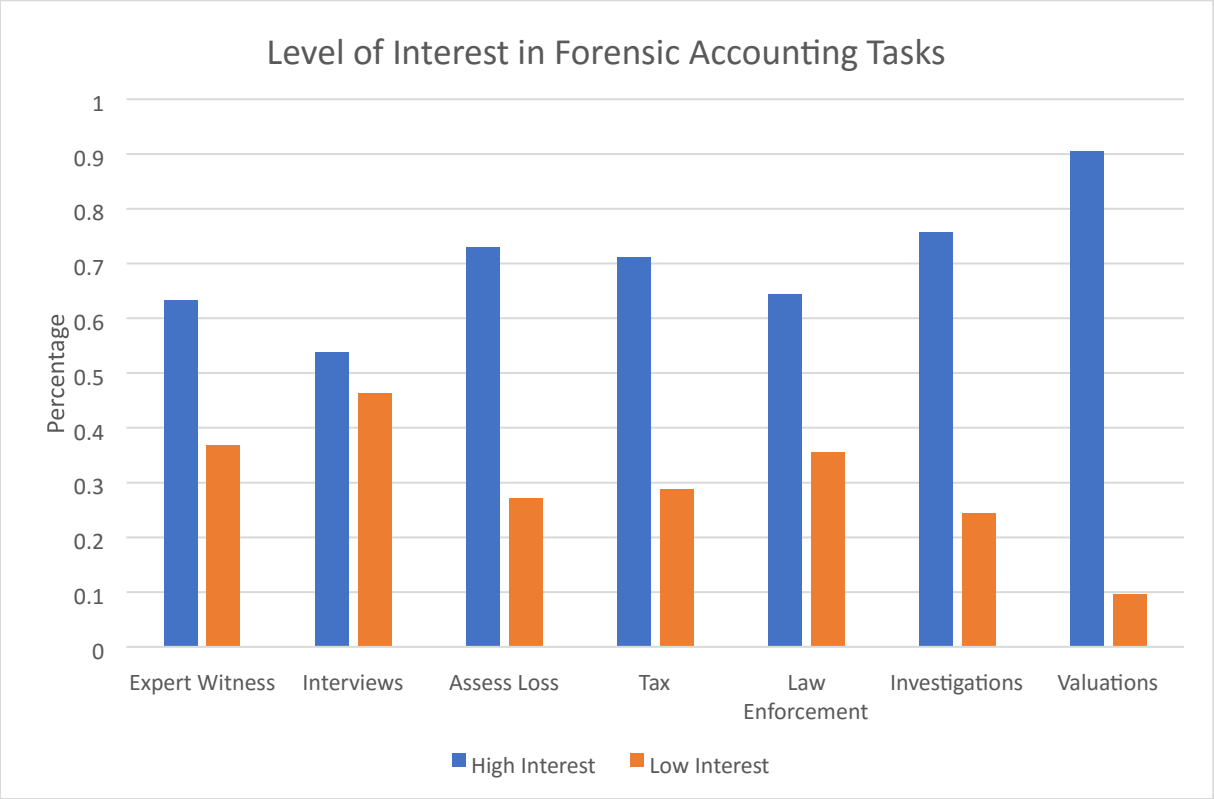
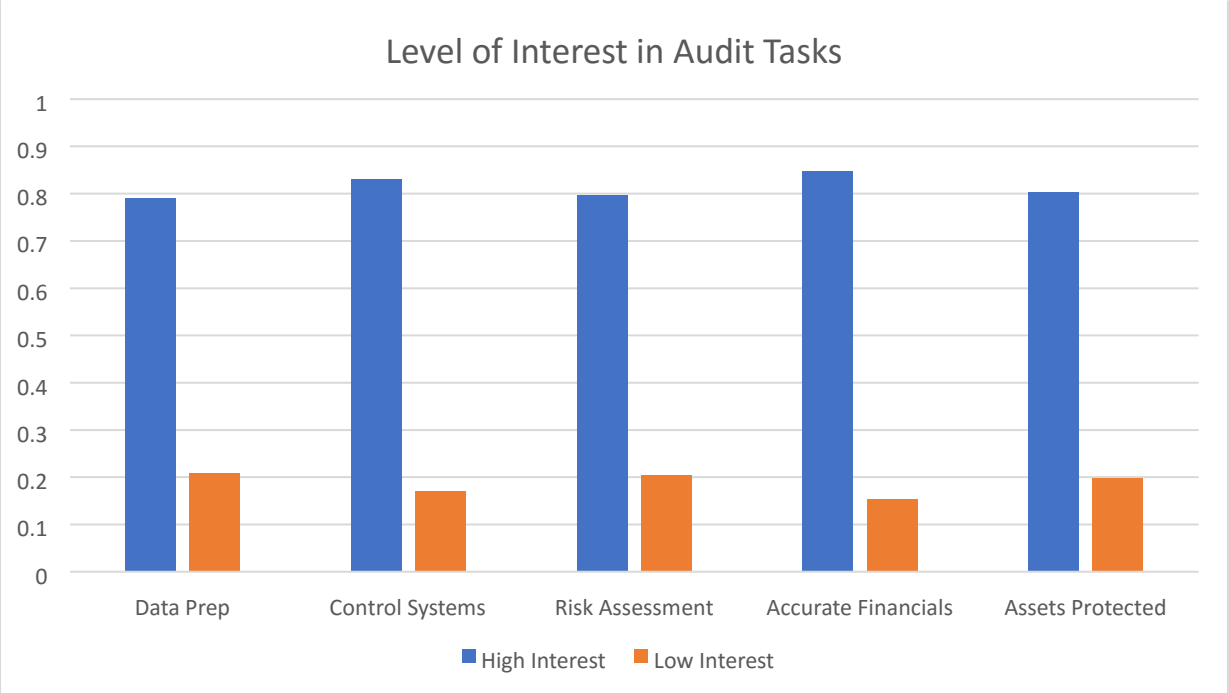


Figure 6 focuses on the five auditing tasks shown in Table 2. Once again, students show a large amount of interest in the five tasks shown. Very few of these students who expressed an interest in forensic accounting had a low interest in these audit tasks.

In summary, the results for this hypothesis suggest that students who are interested in a career in forensic accounting do find the tasks routinely performed by forensic accountants and auditors to be tasks they would enjoy doing as a part of their daily work. Students responded with a higher interest level to the auditing tasks compared to the forensic accounting tasks indicating that an interest in audit and a career in forensic accounting are closely related. Among the students interested in forensic accounting, only forensic accounting task 2 (*Perform Interviews*) came close to receiving a majority of low interest level scores. The t-tests (see Figure 6) show that students who are interested in forensic accounting are more likely to show a high level of interest in all of the listed tasks except for performing interviews. Overall, hypothesis 3A is supported.

FIGURE 6 INTEREST STUDENTS HAVE IN AUDITING TASKS



Difference between High and Low Interest Expressed	P value	t-stat	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
Expert Witness	0.000394	-3.416449	175	99.96%
Interviews	0.164742	-0.977879	175	83.53%
Assess Loss	0	-5.535826	175	100%
Tax	0	-5.190134	175	100%
Law Enforcement	0.000153	-3.683838	175	99.98%
Investigations	0	-6.082627	175	100%
Valuations	0	-8.359719	175	100%
Data Prep	0	-6.690919	175	100%
Control Systems	0	-7.340894	175	100%
Risk Assessment	0	-6.788563	175	100%
Accurate Financials	0	-7.591397	175	100%
Assets Protected	0	-6.883775	175	100%

Limitations of This Study

The results from this study are preliminary, and much more empirical work needs to be done related to the variables that heighten and correlate with a students' interest in forensic accounting. The limitations of this research that may restrict the generalizability of the results include a small sample size, surveying many students who have never had an opportunity to take a course in forensic accounting. Additionally, some of the variables tested were based off my interests and assumptions and potentially not reflective of all the factors that can spark a students' curiosity about the field of forensic accounting. Nevertheless, this study does provide some of the first evidence evaluating a students' interest in forensic accounting and relationships between personal interests, educational experiences, and inherent level of skepticism.

CONCLUSION

While there is still much more to learn about what variables play a role in a student displaying an interest in forensic accounting, this study has taken an important step towards that understanding. Forensic accounting careers are growing rapidly. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), growth in the accounting and auditing career is expected to be 7 percent from 2020 to 2030. In 2021, there were nearly 1.4 million accountant jobs, and the projected growth could add 96,000 new positions across the country. The growth of all forensic accounting jobs is anticipated to correspond with this rate. Still, not enough accounting programs offer courses in forensic accounting and those that do share a similar struggle of lack of structure within these courses. Thus, it is critical for academic and practitioner purposes to have a better idea of what type of student is going to lean more into this field and also how to encourage that leaning.

The survey results collected for this study confirmed that there is widespread interest in forensic accounting even among students not currently majoring in accounting. There is also evidence that implementing a forensic accounting course would excite many students and be well attended by a variety of majors and career goals. While the results of this study aimed to better understand the personalities and likes of students interested in forensic accounting, there are still many questions and variables to investigate. This study did reveal that many students who are interested in forensic accounting also spend time each week watching true crime television and/or movies. It also revealed that a student interested in forensic accounting is inherently more skeptical when assessed using Hurtt's Skepticism Scale. Finally, the results showcase that interest in forensic accounting has some depth as many of the students responded positively to the forensic accounting and auditing tasks they were presented. It is evident that interest in forensic accounting is there and continuing to grow. Additionally, the demand for forensic accountants is also following a similar pattern. Implementing a forensic accounting course is paramount for the discipline to keep up with interest and demand. While the introduction and development of a new course is not a simple task, it is one in this case that would yield favorable results, positive feedback, and overall benefit the students, universities, and the accounting profession.

Much more needs to be understood about the variables that factor into a students' interest in forensic accounting, but this research provides a foundation that can built upon by looking into more variables and in more detail. The results of this study offer a starting point for future studies as well as provide universities insight into beginning to incorporate a forensic course into their current accounting curricula.

REFERENCES

AccountingWeb. (2002). *Financial scandals turn forensic accounting into a hot job*. Retrieved from http://www.accountingweb.com/cgi- bin/item.cgi?id=78110&d=659&h=660&f=661

Ajao, O.S., Olamide, J.O., & Ayodeji Temitope, A. (n.d.). *Evolution and development of auditing*.

Anderson, A.W. (2012). *The Characteristics of a Successful Auditor*.

Arens, A.A., Elder, R.J., & Beasley, M.S. (2016). *Auditing and assurance services* (Global Edition). Pearson Education UK.

Buckoff, T.A., & Schrader, R.W. (2000). The Teaching of Forensic Accounting. *Journal of Forensic Accounting*, *1*(1), 135–146.

Carnes, K.C., & Gierlasinski, N.J. (2001). Forensic accounting skills: Will supply finally catch up to demand? *Managerial Auditing Journal*, *16*(6), 378–382. https://doi.org/10.1108/02686900110395514

Carpenter, T.D., Durtschi, C., & Gaynor, L. M. (2011). The Incremental Benefits of a Forensic

Accounting Course on Skepticism and Fraud-Related Judgments. *Issues in Accounting Education*, *26*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.2308/iace.2011.26.1.1

Cohen, J.R., Dalton, D.W., & Harp, N.L. (2017). Neutral and presumptive doubt perspectives of professional skepticism and auditor job outcomes. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *62*, 1– 20.

Conway, A.C., & Rouse, R.W. (2002). This Is a Job for Superman: Calling in a Forensic Accountant. *Journal of Corporate Accounting & Finance*, *13*(4), 23–28. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcaf.10066

Crumbley, D.L. (2009). So what is forensic accounting. *The ABO Reporter*, *9*.

Dhar, P., & Sarkar, A. (2010). Forensic accounting: An accountant's vision.

Enofe, A.O., Okpako, P.O., & Atube, E.N. (2013). The Impact of Forensic Accounting on Fraud Detection. *European Journal of Business and Management*, *14*.

Fullerton, R., & Durtschi, C. (2004). The Effect of Professional Skepticism on the Fraud Detection Skills of Internal Auditors. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.617062

Gabriele, J.A. (2008a). An Empirical Investigation of the Relevant Skills of Forensic Accountants. *Journal of Education for Business*, *83*(6), 331–338. https://doi.org/10.3200/JOEB.83.6.331-338

Gray, D. (2008). Forensic Accounting and Auditing: Compared and Contrasted to Traditional Accounting and Auditing. *American Journal of Business Education (AJBE)*, *1*(2), 115–126. https://doi.org/10.19030/ajbe.v1i2.4630

Hahn, B., Rufus, R., & Miller, L. (2015). *Forensic Accounting, Global Edition*. Pearson.

Hurtt, R.K. (2010). Development of a Scale to Measure Professional Skepticism. *AUDITING: A Journal of Practice & Theory*, *29*(1), 149–171. https://doi.org/10.2308/aud.2010.29.1.149

Hurtt, R.K., Brown-Liburd, H., Earley, C.E., & Krishnamoorthy, G. (2013). Research on auditor professional skepticism: Literature synthesis and opportunities for future research. *Auditing: A Journal of Practice & Theory*, *32*(Supplement 1), 45–97.

McMullen, D.A., & Sanchez, M.H. (2010). A preliminary investigation of the necessary skills, education requirements, and training requirements for forensic accountants. *Journal of Forensic & Investigative Accounting*, *2*(2), 30-48.

Mircheska, K., Karadjova, V., Blazheva, S., Malakovska, M., & Nikolovski, P. (2020). The Importance of Forensic Audit and Differences about Financial Audit. *International Journal of Sciences*, *54*(2), 11.

Nelson, M.W. (2009). A Model and Literature Review of Professional Skepticism in Auditing. ***AUDITING****: A Journal of Practice & Theory*, *28*(2), 1–34. https://doi.org/10.2308/aud.2009.28.2.1

Nunn, L., McGuire, B.L., Whitcomb, C., & Jost, E. (2006). Forensic Accountants: Financial Investigators. *Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER)*, *4*(2), Article 2. https://doi.org/10.19030/jber.v4i2.2631

Peterson, O.K. (n.d.). *Forensic Accounting and Fraud: A Review of Literature and Policy Implications*. 19.

Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB). (2018). *Due Professional Care in the Performance of Work*. AS 1015.

Ramos, M. (2003). Auditors' responsibility for fraud detection. *Journal of Accountancy*, *195*(1), 28–36. Rezaee, Z. (2002). Forensic accounting practices, education, and certifications. *Journal of Forensic Accounting*, *3*(2), 207–223.

Rezaee, Z., Crumbley, D.L., & Elmore, R.C. (2004). Forensic accounting education: A survey of academicians and practitioners. *Advances in Accounting Education*, *Forthcoming*. Simeunović, N., Grubor, G., & Ristić, N. (2016). Forensic Accounting in the Fraud Auditing Case. *European Journal of Applied Economics*, *13*(2), 45–56. Business Source Complete.

Smith, G.S. (2015). The past, present, and future of forensic accounting. *The CPA Journal*, *85*(3), 16.