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Meet the Gen Z grads reviving accounting—colleges are reporting near-perfect placement rates at $80K starting salaries

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Once seen as boring and synonymous with tax season dread, accounting is now attracting Gen Z with high demand, near six-figure salaries, and near-guaranteed job offers.
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Amid record anxiety about the future of work—and growing warnings about the potential erosion of white-collar careers—one unlikely field may be getting the last laugh.

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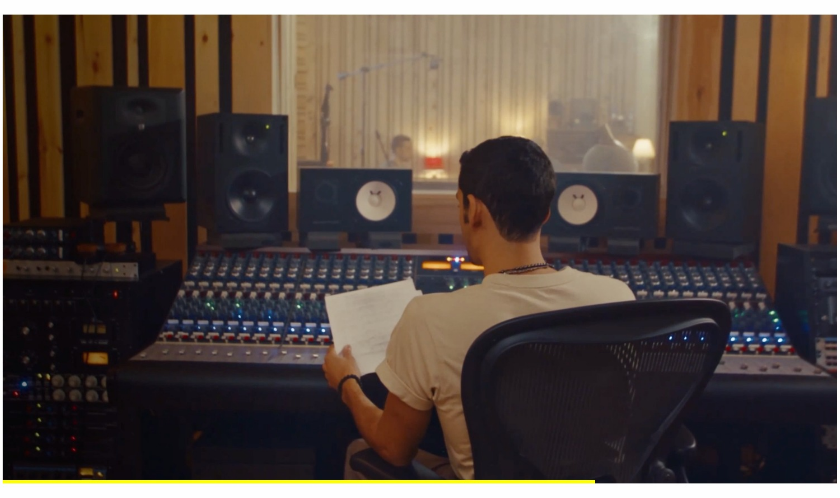

Accounting, long stereotyped as dull and tedious, has struggled for years to attract young talent. On top of a greying workforce, more than 300,000 accountants left the profession between 2019 and 2022, leaving firms scrambling to fill roles—and, in some cases, contributing to costly reporting errors.

Now, that narrative is starting to flip.

Lower barriers to entry, more conversations about burnout and work-life balance, and the growing use of artificial intelligence to handle repetitive tasks are helping reshape the profession's image. At the same time, Gen Z workers—more pragmatic about job security and pay—are taking a fresh look.

The result: a quiet resurgence in accounting, with young professionals flowing into a field offering stability, strong demand, and increasingly, lucrative starting salaries.

Take 24-year-old Jack Blazevich. After finishing his degree at the University of Iowa in late 2024, he had a job offer lined up immediately as an assurance associate at PwC in Chicago, making nearly six figures. Though he chose to delay his start until September 2025 to pass all four sections of the CPA exam, it was not out of necessity, but because he could afford to.

"I have not talked to another accounting person who has a degree in accounting who cannot find a job," Blazevich told *Fortune*.

Austin Price, working in technology risk assurance at EY, graduated from Brigham Young University last spring and had a similar experience.

"For many of my classmates, it felt like we were recruiting firms just as much as they were recruiting us," Price said. "We had the luxury of choosing from multiple offers rather than worrying about whether we'd land a job at all. This allowed us to be deliberate about finding the right fit."

Their experiences stand in stark contrast to the broader job market, where many recent graduates are sending out dozens—sometimes hundreds—of applications. Accounting majors, by comparison, are fielding steady demand, with entry-level salaries hovering around $80,000.

Accounting is delivering near perfect-outcomes at many universities

The appeal of accounting has been more than stability for Blazevich—it's about optionality.

"When you major in accounting, and you study accounting, you are learning the language of business," he said.

"I have that flexibility. Accounting people can go to HR, sales, marketing... but finance and HR people, they cannot go into accounting."

University outcomes reflect that advantage. At Blazevich's alma mater—the University of Iowa—95% of the class of 2025's accounting graduates secured a job or continued their education, with median salaries of $75,000.

Similarly, at the University of Texas—ranked No. 1 in accounting by U.S. News & World Report—96.5% of master's in professional accounting graduates report accepting a job within six months of earning their diploma, with median salaries of $80,000. At the University of Illinois' Gies College of Business, ranked No. 3, 97% of accounting undergraduate students in the class of 2025 achieved what the school calls "successful outcomes"—meaning a job or further education—with a median salary of $82,000.

Kristina Wright, a senior career services director at Gies, said that in the wake of shifting trade winds, accounting firms have become more targeted in their recruiting strategies, and thus many students are finding success with the networks they build through internships, for example.

"Accounting is probably one of the industries where we still see really strong employment, and our students are probably less impacted by the current market," she told *Fortune*.

As a whole, the profession's pipeline is showing signs of recovery. About 55,000 students graduated with a bachelor's or master's degree in accounting in the 2023–2024 academic year, a decline of 6.6% compared to the prior year, according to the American Institute of CPAs. But that drop is notably smaller than the 9.6% decline in 2022–23 and the 7.4% slide in 2021–22, suggesting the freefall may be leveling off.

Broader enrollment data points even more clearly toward a rebound. Total postsecondary accounting enrollment hit 313,397 students in 2025, up from 293,759 the year before, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Many entry-level accounting roles require only a bachelor's degree, though candidates looking to sit for the CPA exam typically need 150 credit hours, which many fulfill through a master's or a combined five-year program.

AI may be reshaping the job market—but for accountants, it's making the job easier

Artificial intelligence—often framed as a threat to white-collar work—is quietly reshaping accounting in ways that may actually make it more attractive.

Rather than replacing jobs, AI is increasingly handling the most tedious parts of the job: data entry, transaction reconciliation, and organizing financial records. That shift is freeing early-career professionals to spend more time on analysis and client-facing work. A report from Stanford's Graduate School of Business found that accountants who use AI support more clients per week and close monthly books 7.5 days faster than those using traditional methods, while spending 8.5% less time on back-office processing.

Ruth Mavashev has seen this firsthand.

At just 26, she's earning $113,000 as a CPA at a boutique tax firm—a career she arrived at circuitously. After graduating with a finance degree from Arizona State University in 2021, she accepted a role as an accounting specialist at an insurance company and "fell in love" with the work. She went back to school for a master's in accounting and hasn't looked back.

While the busy tax season has brought long hours—around 50 a week—Mavashev sees it as a sign of the profession's health, not a drawback: "It's very, very rewarding. It feels like you're playing your part in making the economy better," she told *Fortune*.

Blazevich, for his part, isn't losing sleep over AI rendering his skills obsolete. If anything, he sees the versatility of accounting as a built-in safety net.

That confidence isn't entirely misplaced. A recent Anthropic study found AI could theoretically handle over 90% of tasks in math and business roles—putting accounting, which sits at the intersection of both, squarely in its sights. But in practice, adoption has been slower. Researchers point to legal constraints, technical hurdles, and the continued need for human oversight.

In accounting, especially, that human layer is hard to remove. A CPA's signature carries legal weight, client relationships are built over years, and even small errors can trigger regulatory scrutiny.

"At the end of the day, there is going to need to be some human being signing off, or at least reviewing what the AI did," Blazevich said. "If the accounting labor market shrinks, there's still going to be a [broader] labor market."