Congratulations on being elected president of the California Board of Accountancy for 2020. What are some of the things on the CBA’s agenda for this year?

Thank you so much. It is an honor to be elected as president of the CBA. I look forward to helping ensure the CBA continues to build on its solid legacy of consumer protection.

This year, the CBA will continue to grow its outreach program to students and licensees. We appreciate our collaborative relationship with CalCPA, in particular for your help in reaching the next generation of CPAs. We plan to increase communications via email with our licensees, with an early goal of sharing timely reminders of our license renewal requirements.

In addition, we are pursuing a change in the law through the state Legislature that would allow applicants to sit for the Uniform CPA Exam prior to degree conferral. This will help students nearing completion of their education to get started on the exam earlier—if they believe they are ready for it.

Another key goal is to continue the multi-year development of our Business Modernization Project, which will overhaul the technology that supports our licensing and enforcement programs, and help improve our customer service.

While this is only your second year as an appointed member of the CBA, you have served more than 15 years on various CBA advisory committees. How has your prior service helped prepare you for your role as CBA president?

Throughout my years of service to the CBA, I’ve seen that each year brings new issues and challenges to tackle. During my work here, I have learned the ins-and-outs of licensing qualifications, peer review and our enforcement programs; and, how they have changed over time. While the foundations of the profession are still firmly anchored, the environment in which we operate continues to evolve.

I was fortunate to chair two of the CBA’s advisory committees, and was the first committee chair to implement our oversight of the peer review program. My time on these committees has taught me that we must be ready and willing to embrace what’s on the horizon, but with a keen eye for how things will impact our clients, the consumers of our state.

What would you tell someone who is thinking about serving on a CBA committee? Where is the biggest need?

We would welcome your service, as we are often looking for capable licensees to support our work to protect consumers. Our committees assist the CBA in licensing, enforcement and oversight of the peer review program. We have vacancies on the Qualifications Committee (QC) and the Enforcement Advisory Committee (EAC). The QC reviews the experience of certain applicants for licensure and the EAC advises us on our enforcement activities. Visit cba.ca.gov to learn more.

You serve on Cal Poly Pomona’s Accounting Department Advisory Council and have spent time working with future CPAs and accounting professionals. How have accounting curriculums evolved, especially with increased integration of new technologies?

Well, certainly the emergence of recent technological advances in accounting, such as leveraging the capabilities of the Internet and predictive data analytics, are developments that have forced educators to work quickly to update their curriculum. But, the element of change has always been a factor in our profession, whether it comes from technology or updates in professional standards, ethical requirements or many other areas.
The Accounting Department at Cal Poly Pomona has made several curriculum changes over the years in response to technological changes and how they affect the accounting profession. More specifically, the department added a new Data Analytics in Accounting class as its capstone class and Restructured its Accounting Information Systems class to include more work with SAP (an enterprise resource planning software) and discussions on data flows and Blockchain technology.

The new data analytics class gives students hands-on experience to apply what they have learned in various accounting areas to real-world data sets. Students learn about analytic techniques used with Big Data in practice and how to visualize and interpret their results in Tableau, a data visualization software. New technologies have impacted and will continue to impact accounting curriculums across campuses.

The CBA has undertaken significant business modernization efforts to streamline some of its processes for licensure and renewal. How are these going and what more can CPAs expect?

The CBA’s Business Modernization Project is expected to bring many benefits for licensees and consumers. The project is still in its development phase, but once complete it will lead to a better user experience for licensees, consumers and other stakeholders. In particular, we are looking forward to providing new online services that will facilitate the application and renewal processes. The project will streamline our internal processes and bring an evolutionary jump in our customer service. As this project progresses, we will keep licensees informed through our newsletter, UPDATE.

At the beginning of this year, the CBA increased its renewal and initial licensure fees. Why was this necessary?

Put simply, our costs have been exceeding revenues and, without increasing our revenue, the CBA’s reserve fund in future years would reach an unacceptably low level. For nearly 10 years, the CBA was fortunate to offer reduced fees to its licensees and applicants; and for a two-year period, those fees were as low as $50. In prior years, the CBA had a much higher reserve amount and, by law, we were required to lower our fees to draw down the reserve. We understand that fee increases can raise a lot of questions, so we sent out a letter to our licensees earlier this year discussing that and other changes in the law that took effect in January.

You have attended regional and annual meetings of the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA). What are some of your takeaways from those meetings?

Attending NASBA meetings is informative and rewarding, and presents an opportunity to meet CPAs from around the country and hear their perspectives on the issues affecting the profession.

In November, I attended NASBA’s annual meeting in Boston, where we heard from a number of speakers on a variety of key and emerging topics. One important item is the CPA Evolution initiative, which is a NASBA and AICPA joint effort to consider a new model for CPA licensure. This project has been reviewing the CPA licensure model and looking for areas of improvement so the skills and competencies required for today’s CPAs are reflected in the structure of the license.

The impact of technological changes on the profession is a major driving force behind this effort. If you want to follow the conversation, visit evolutionofcpa.org.

The discussion on potential changes to the structure of the CPA license is still in an early stage and whatever may come is uncertain and a long way off. But, attending NASBA meetings helps me, and leaders in other states, to build relationships with those involved with this and other important issues.

Disciplinary and enforcement actions are big pieces of how the CBA works to make sure consumers receive quality accounting services from CPAs they can trust. What are some of the trends you are seeing in disciplinary actions taken by the CBA?

During each CBA meeting, board members meet in closed session to discuss and decide upon proposed discipline against licensees who violate the law or professional standards. It is a solemn responsibility that we take very seriously and is at the heart of our consumer protection mission.

In recent meetings, we’ve seen audits that fail to comply with professional standards, and gross or repeated acts of negligence. Discipline often occurs for actions involving fiscal dishonesty, breach of fiduciary duty and discipline from the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board or SEC.

What’s your advice for a recent graduate looking to break into the CPA profession?

I would urge them to take serious their preparations for the Uniform CPA Exam. In 2019, the passage rate in California was about 52 percent.

In addition, I would encourage they seek a mentor who is active in the area of public accounting of interest to them. It may be a bit cliché, but who you know can really make a difference. A good mentor will help you learn about the profession, teach you how to relate to clients and begin building your professional network.

Outside of your practice and work with the CBA, what are some of your hobbies?

In my free time I like to travel and spend time with friends and neighbors at community events. I enjoy freshwater lure fishing, weight/strength training, kick-boxing, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and reading true crime and psychological thriller novels. 

www.calcpa.org