

CISA ■ Earning a Certification ■ Can Give Careers a Boost

BY MARIOS DAMIANIDES, CISA, CA

On June 10, 2000, nearly 6,000 information systems professionals from countries and territories around the world will join together in the pursuit of one shared goal – passing the prestigious Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA®) Exam, which is a crucial step toward attaining CTSA certification.

Since 1978, the CISA certification program, sponsored by the Information Systems Audit and Control Association (ISACA), has been recognized as an international standard of achievement among IS audit, governance, control and assurance professionals. With its focus on up-to-date knowledge and competencies, the CISA program helps professionals refine and communicate their ability to identify and control IS-related risks.

“CISA demonstrates a level of proficiency with IT auditing,” said Kevin C. Weaver, CIA, CISA, CPA, director of audit services, Hackensack University Medical Center, New Jersey. “I chose to study and sit for the CISA exam not to become an IT audit specialist, but to round out my skill set and become more familiar with information systems and technology.”

As organizations realize the benefits of encouraging staff to attain expertise in information systems governance, control and assurance methodologies, the number of CISAs worldwide has continued to grow. As of December 31, 1998, there were 12,175 CISAs. Since 1994, the number of CISA exam registrants has increased 96 percent, or more than 19 percent per year.

“This achievement is extraordinary considering that the number of CISAs

reached 10,000 for the first time ever in December, 1996,” said ISACA International President Paul A. Williams, partner, Arthur Andersen Business Risk Consulting and Assurance, London, UK.

Career Development

According to the *IS Audit Benchmarking Study*, more than half (55 percent) of the responding organizations internally recognize the attainment of a professional certification, most often with a monetary bonus, promotion, day off with pay, increased responsibilities and written announcements.

Jona Owitti, who works for Caltex, an oil marketing company, in Nairobi, Kenya, experienced immediate positive career success after passing the CISA exam. “I learned that I passed the CISA exam in the presence of my immediate supervisor,” said Owitti. “He was extremely happy for me. Then a week later he called to tell me I was promoted from audit coordinator to audit manager. I had taken personal vacation time to study for the CISA exam, yet it paid off. I believe my CISA certification corroborated my professional competence and helped justify my promotion.”

CISA certification can increase the chances of job progression and professional compensation levels, too. The *IS Audit Benchmarking Study* found that CISAs are compensated from two to six percent higher than individuals who are not CISAs.

“I feel the certification helped me get my current position,” said Carolyn Jacobson, director, audit services, Munroe Regional Health Systems. “Since I had taken the position of information systems auditor

it was necessary at the time to keep my job. It is wonderful now because every part of business touches computers in some way.”

Hackensack University’s Kevin Weaver agreed on the effect certification can have on careers. “Obtaining the CISA certification can definitely give you the edge over non-certified candidates. If I had two equal candidates and one was a CISA, I would hire the one with the CISA. A CISA is desirable and preferred because it provides a level of recognition. The effort involved in obtaining the certification also demonstrates a commitment to the field of auditing and to IT auditing in particular.”

Ken Hopkins, CIA, CISA, CPA, South Hills Health System, added, “I encourage my staff to take the CISA exam to learn more about information systems auditing. The additional credential is beneficial in enhancing ones career.”

Increasing Demand for CISAs

Part of the CISA certification program’s strength is in its standardization and consistency. By incorporating the knowledge and practices used in information systems departments around the world, it offers the level of experience most important to those charged with IS audit, control and security.

“Getting certification has helped me understand more about the computer segment of auditing,” said Jacobson. “The knowledge gained provided a foundation for future learning.”

In the UK, for example, CISA is recognized as a primary qualification for computer auditors, according to Derek J. Oliver, CISA, CFE, FIAM, CEO of

Ravenswood Consultants Ltd., Essex, England. "CISA certification is a basic essential for all senior IS audit positions."

In Mr. Oliver's personal experience, the CISA designation played a strong role in his career advancement. "After my employer was taken over by a US-based international group my CISA designation helped me retain my job and rapidly advance to principal auditor and head of the UK audit group," said Oliver. "CISA's international status and CE requirements designate holders as truly qualified and experienced."

Exam Preparation

To familiarize CISA candidates and others interested in taking the CISA exam, ISACA offers representative exam questions (www.isaca.org/examsamp.htm) that help provide an understanding of the type and structure of the questions that typically appear. This CISA Sample Question Challenge offers an online sample of 25 study questions. The system will score a user's answers and give explanations for errors.

In addition, many ISACA chapters hold CISA review sessions. "I reviewed (for the CISA exam) with a group of about 15-20. It was a great help to have the energy and support of the group," noted Jacobson.

Another study tool is the *CISA Review Technical Information Manual*, a dynamic resource revised annually. As the premier study resource for the CISA exam, it incorporates the most up-to-date knowledge from experts around the world.

The *CISA Review Technical Information Manual* and its companion *CISA Sample Questions, Answers and Explanations Manual and Supplements* are available for purchase through the ISACA Bookstore. Spanish and Japanese language versions of the *CISA Review Technical Information Manual* are being developed by chapter members and are expected to be available in March 2000.

New for the 2000 exam is the CISA Question, Answer and Explanation CD-ROM which includes all 400 questions included in the questions and answers manual and supplements. The CD-ROM

also features *IS Audit & Control Journal* articles referenced in the new *CISA Review Technical Information Manual* and enables candidates to pull random exams and specify the number of questions or specific domains they wish to review.

According to Ravenswood Consulting's Oliver, "The *CISA Review Technical Information Manual* explains what the exam is trying to achieve and what will be expected of the candidate. It is difficult to teach experience, the essential element of CISA qualification, but candidates must grasp the need to demonstrate understanding of an issue and the manual helps."

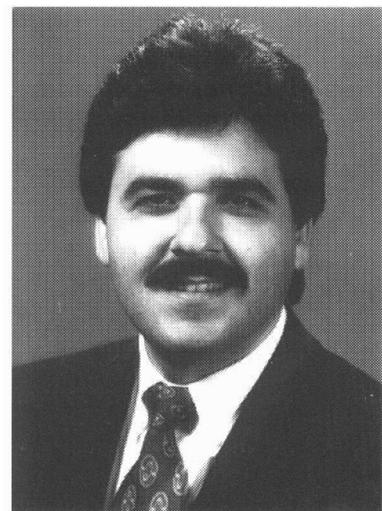
Continual Education

Increased challenges in the field have raised the measuring bar of expertise. Before being eligible for CISA certification, professionals must pass the CISA exam, have the equivalent of five years of IS audit, control or security experience, and abide by the ISACA Code of Professional Ethics. In addition, all CISA certified professionals must comply with the continuing education policy to ensure their skills are kept current. For the past five years, more than 93 percent of all CISAs have remained certified.

"CISA certification should not be considered as an end but only as a beginning," said Bob Darlington, audit specialist, Canadian Pacific Railway, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. "Attaining a designation means that one has understood the concepts for proper control in an information systems environment. The real challenge is to apply those concepts to ensure that proper controls are implemented within products that have varying levels of sophistication. This requires that IS audit professionals keep up to date in the ever-changing technological environment.

"The CISA certification requirement to have a minimum amount of training each year is critical, especially because major changes take place every month," added Darlington. "Without continuous training, a CISA-certified professional could be out of date within an extremely short period of time."

According to Ernesto Aguilar, CISA,



Marios Damianides, CISA, CA is an *eRisk Solutions* partner in the Dallas, Texas, office of *Ernst & Young*. He has more than 16 years experience in information systems with a focus on security and controls and enterprise systems management. He has served as chairman of the CISA Test Enhancement Committee, and is currently chair of the CISA Certification Board. Damianides is a certified information systems auditor; a chartered accountant, a certified public accountant, and has a masters degree in information systems.

Chase Manhattan Bank, "I think continuing education is one of the many highlights of CISA. Meeting the recertification and continuing education requirements are important steps to keeping pace with the most recent advances in technology, business practices, and our global village environment. This represents a true challenge."

The 2000 CISA exam will be administered on June 10, 2000, in nine languages in more than 170 locations around the world. The early registration deadline is February 18 and the final deadline is April 3.

Contact certification@isaca.org or call (847) 590-7474 or (847)590-7471 for further details about CISA certification.