On October 26, 2011, I interviewed Wes Fachner, who is currently self-employed as a Certified Public Accountant at Fachner & Layman. Through this interview, I learned a lot about Mr. Fachner’s professional background, how the SJSU MST program benefitted him as a student and as a professional, and what advice he has for MST students and candidates.

The primary reason Mr. Fachner pursued an MST degree was that it was recommended by his former employer. He left his job there and enrolled full-time in the SJSU MST program. This program gave him a strong marketing tool as a tax professional; without an MST degree, he could not have been a successful tax practitioner. Otherwise, how would he have been able to read the Code, or be able to research court cases to find answers to questions from his clients? After obtaining an MST degree, Mr. Fachner started teaching individual income taxes at UCSC Extension in Silicon Valley, a position he still holds today; without an MST degree, he never would have held this position.

As a partner at Fachner & Layman, Mr. Fachner’s primary duties include advertising and marketing, maintaining proper staffing, updating the firm’s website, and continually updating his knowledge through the continuing education program. In addition, Mr. Fachner is also responsible for reviewing and signing all tax returns that leave the office. However, what makes him successful as a partner are his networking skills, which he gained through the MST program.

During his time at the MST program, Mr. Fachner networked with his fellow students. When he formed his own company as a sole proprietor 12 years ago, he shared an office with MST alums. Together, he interacted with his alums as his business grew. Although he has gone his separate way, Mr. Fachner still considers networking his most essential tool. For his firm to thrive, Mr. Fachner reaches out to clients by actively participating in several groups in the Silicon Valley, including: Silicon Valley Bar Association, Santa Clara County Estate Planning Council, Tax & Trust Estate Committees, California Society of CPAs, and the Institute of Management Accountants. In addition, he also co-teaches with one of his fellow SJSU MST alums at the UCSC Extension so that students there are learning two different perspectives from two different instructors.

What I also learned from Mr. Fachner was his favorite areas of taxation. Mr. Fachner enjoys individual taxes since he teaches this class, and because individuals are often affected by current changes in tax laws. Another area of taxation that Mr. Fachner enjoys is trust and estate taxes since this area of taxation is not a well-understood area. Being knowledgeable in this area has made him more marketable and thus, helped him attract more clients. While it is possible to complete an individual income tax return on Turbo Tax, the same cannot be said for trust and estates returns. He has found that the increasingly aging population spikes up the demand for estate and trust taxation work.
I also learned about the advantages and disadvantages of working in the taxation field from Mr. Fachner. He told me that tax professionals will always have work since the government needs revenue. However, competitors such as H&R Block can make it difficult for small public accounting firms to charge appropriate fees. Mr. Fachner beats this competition by charging a minimum fee not only to help clients prepare returns but also to assist them in future tax planning. Finally, pros and cons of working in the taxation field include that tax professionals must stay current with the tax laws because Congress will always enact a new law or the courts will change interpretation or application of specific tax laws.

The final stages of the interview focused on Mr. Fachner’s recommendations to MST students. For an MST candidate to make themselves known to potential employers, Mr. Fachner recommends that they become an intern, go to any networking events tailored for young professionals, use the resources that Professor Nellen has, and volunteer through the CalCPA Society. To be successful in the MST program, students should be able to research, think strategically since every situation is different, and most importantly, be dedicated to continuous learning. Finally, some words of wisdom: never give up, and realize that the SJSU MST program is only the beginning.

2016 - We are saddened with the news of Wesley’s untimely death in December 2015. He was an outstanding professional, role model and freely gave his time to help his fellow practitioners and emerging professionals. We miss him very much.