Forensic Accounting: An Anglo-American Comparison – Forensic Accounting in the U.S.A.

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The purpose of this paper is to discuss the state of forensic accounting ¹ in the United States as part of a series comparing forensic accounting in Anglo-American countries. For comparative purposes it is necessary first to establish the legal, geographic, political, and economic background of forensic accounting in the U.S. This is followed by a review of the Constitutional, judicial, legal, and regulatory framework of forensic accounting in the United States. Finally, the forensic accounting profession² and the forensic industry³ in the United States is reviewed.

The Legal, Geographic, Political, And Economic Background of Forensic Accounting in the U.S.

The following is taken from the CIA Factbook (CIA Factbook, 2013) unless otherwise stated.

The United States of America consists of 50 states, one district (Washington, D.C., the capital), and 14 territories. The predominate legal system is based on common law derived from the English common law at the Federal level. State legal systems are also based on English common law with the exception of Louisiana, which is based on the Napoleonic Civil Code. There are three branches of government at both the Federal and state levels, Each branch is independent of the others.

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¹ Here, the term "forensic accounting" is a generic term which includes the narrower terms of "fraud examination" and "financial crime investigation."

² In this paper, the term "forensic accounting profession" refers to the suppliers of forensic accounting services; specifically, those who hold a certification in forensic accounting.

³ In this paper, the term "forensic accounting industry" refers to the corporations that supply forensic accounting certifications, or as Williams (2002) refers to it, the "credentializing industry."

The Executive Branch consists of the President and a Vice President elected by the people. The President serves for a term of four years with a maximum of two terms.

Within the Executive Branch, there are 15 executive departments which together constitute the Cabinet. The most important departments for forensic accounting are the Departments of Justice, Treasury, and, since 9/11, Homeland Security. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is under the jurisdiction of the Justice Department while the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department. (See References for government websites.)

In addition, there are hundreds of Commissions, including the Securities and Exchange Commission. Since 2002, the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PBAOB), which is under the SEC, establishes auditing standards for auditors that audit the financial statements of companies that issue securities to the public and regulates who may perform the audits.

The Legislative Branch consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Each state elects two Senators who serve for six years. Each state also elects representatives who serve for two years. The number of Representatives is based on the state's population as determined by the census taken every 10 years.

The Judicial Branch consists of 94 District Courts (trial courts), 13 Courts of Appeal, and the Supreme Court, as well as specialty courts such as tax courts. Federal courts only adjudicate cases in which the U.S. is a party, or involving the constitutionality of a law; the laws and treaties of the U.S.; ambassadors and public ministers; disputes between two or more states, or between citizens of two or more states (provided it meets certain conditions); admiralty law; and bankruptcy cases (Federal Courts, 2013).

The U.S. economy is based on free-market competition, although almost every sector is subject to various regulations at either the Federal or state level. As a result, the market determines the supply and demand for products and services. The economic system, along with the rights of the states as explained below, are of paramount importance in determining the nature of the forensic accounting profession and the forensic accounting industry in the U.S.

As explained in greater detail in the following section, one exception to free-market competition concerns the public accounting profession. The states regulate the licensing of public accountants. In general, although it varies from state to state, obtaining a license to practice public accounting requires four to five years of education, passing examinations, and fulfilling an experience requirement. (For requirements of each state, see NASBA, 2013). The supply of public accountants is therefore restricted. On the demand side, only auditors who are licensed by a state and registered with the PCAOB may audit financial statements of public companies. Thus, both supply and demand in the public accounting are simultaneously regulated, creating an unparalleled distortion in the market (Huber, 2014a).

Constitutional, Judicial, Legal and Regulatory Framework of Forensic Accounting in the U.S.

Constitutional and Judicial Issues

The U.S. Constitution was adopted in 1789. The power of the Federal government is one of enumerated powers. The Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (known as the Bill of Rights) states, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people." (Tenth Amendment, 2013). Therefore, not only does the Federal government have no inherent power to regulate professions or corporate law unless it falls under one of the powers specifically delegated to the

Federal government, such as Interstate Commerce,⁴ it is explicitly prohibited from doing so by the Tenth Amendment.

The Rules of Federal Courts are established by law as enacted by the Congress, and by the various courts. The Supreme Court determines rules for all Federal courts which are then enacted into law. Each Federal court also adopts its own rules, as long as they are not in conflict with Supreme Court Rules. Local rules are not law.

The Federal Rules of Evidence (FRE) as amended from time to time were adopted by the Supreme Court and enacted by Congress as law in 1972. The FRE, as interpreted by the Supreme Court, determines who may testify as an expert in a Federal Court.

Rule 702 states:

Rule 702. Testimony by Expert Witnesses. A witness who is qualified as an expert by knowledge, skill, experience, training, or education may testify in the form of an opinion or otherwise if:

- (a) the expert's scientific, technical, or other specialized knowledge will help the trier of fact to understand the evidence or to determine a fact in issue;
- (b) the testimony is based on sufficient facts or data;
- (c) the testimony is the product of reliable principles and methods; and
- (d) the expert has reliably applied the principles and methods to the facts of the case. (FRE 702, 2013)

Rule 703 states:

Rule 703. Bases of an Expert's Opinion Testimony. An expert may base an opinion on facts or data in the case that the expert has been made aware of or personally observed. If experts in the particular field would reasonably rely on those kinds of facts or data in forming an opinion on the subject, they need not be admissible for the opinion to be admitted. But if the facts or data would otherwise be inadmissible, the proponent of the opinion may disclose them to the jury only if their probative value in helping the jury evaluate the opinion substantially outweighs their prejudicial effect. (FRE 703, 2013)

These Rules were subsequently interpreted in two landmark cases: <u>Daubert v. Merrell</u>

<u>Dow Pharmaceuticals</u> ⁵(509 U.S. 579, 1993), and <u>Kumho Tire Co. v. Carmichael</u> 526 U.S. 137,

⁴ Article I, Section 8. "The Congress shall have power to...regulate commerce with foreign nations...and among the several states..."

1999, 131 F.3d 1433, reversed). <u>Daubert</u> established the parameters for permitting and limiting the testimony of expert scientific testimony in Federal cases.

"Faced with a proffer of expert scientific testimony under Rule 702, the trial judge, pursuant to Rule 104(a), must make a preliminary assessment of whether the testimony's underlying reasoning or methodology is scientifically valid and properly can be applied to the facts at issue. Many considerations will bear on the inquiry, including whether the theory or technique in question can be (and has been) tested, whether it has been subjected to peer review and publication, its known or potential error rate, and the existence and maintenance of standards controlling its operation, and whether it has attracted widespread acceptance within a relevant scientific community. The inquiry is a flexible one, and its focus must be solely on principles and methodology, not on the conclusions that they generate"

<u>Kumho</u> expanded the <u>Daubert</u> ruling to cover non-scientific testimony, including by forensic accountants.

"We also conclude that a trial court *may* consider one or more of the more specific factors that *Daubert* mentioned when doing so will help determine that testimony's reliability. But, as the Court stated in *Daubert*, the test of reliability is "flexible," and *Daubert*'s list of specific factors neither necessarily nor exclusively applies to all experts or in every case. Rather, the law grants a district court the same broad latitude when it decides *how* to determine reliability as it enjoys in respect to its ultimate reliability determination."

State courts determine their own rules for admitting or limiting scientific or non-scientific testimony by experts. Some follow the <u>Daubert/Kuhmo</u> rules, while others do not.

Legal and Regulatory Issues

As a result of the Tenth Amendment, the Federal government is powerless to regulate the professions. For example, each state regulates the licensing of Certified Public Accountants (CPAs). Each state defines the practice of public accounting, prohibits the practice of public accounting by those who are not licensed, and determines the qualifications for obtaining a

⁵ One can track <u>Daubert</u> cases on the Internet at *Daubert Tracker*, http://www.dauberttracker.com/

license to practice public accounting. A state grants the public accounting profession⁶ a legal monopoly to those who are allowed to audit financial statements of public companies (Fogarty and Parker, 2010). Being licensed in one state does not necessarily permit a CPA to practice in another state, although there is usually reciprocity.

The Federal government does not regulate the licensing of CPAs or the practice of public accounting, but it does regulate who may audit the financial statements of companies that issue securities to the public. The Securities Act of 1933 (15 U.S. Code § 77a) and the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (15 U.S. Code § 78a) together require that companies that issue securities to the public have their financial statements audited by independent accountants while at the time restricting those who may audit them to auditors who are registered with the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB, 15 USC § 98). Prior to 2002 the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) established Generally Accepted Auditing Standards (GAAS) for publicly traded companies. The PCAOB was created in 2002 following the collapse of Enron and Arthur Andersen as part of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002. The PCAOB now determines GAAS.

While the states regulate public accounting, neither the states nor the Federal government regulate either the forensic accounting profession or the forensic accounting industry. As a result, anyone can call him or herself a forensic accountant, fraud examiner, or any similar title, subject only to not using "public" and "accounting" in the title, and not violating the copyright or trademarks of other organizations.

The following section discusses the profession and the industry.

⁶ For example, New York State Education Law Article 149, Public Accountancy, §7400 defines public accounting as: "public accountancy services which all require the independence of licensees: a. any audit to be performed in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards or other similar standards, developed by a federal governmental agency, commission or board or a recognized international or national professional accountancy organization, that are acceptable to the department in accordance with the commissioner's regulations."

Forensic Accounting in the United States

The Profession

One need not be a public accountant to be a forensic accountant. There is no minimum educational requirement, no examination requirement, and no experience requirement. The corporations that issue the certifications in forensic accounting set their own standards and requirements for eligibility for certifications, with the codes of ethics, standards of practice, and eligibility requirements of some corporations stricter than those of other corporations. Several corporations do not disclose their legal status, or the qualifications of their officers and directors, resulting in forensic accountants' misunderstanding the legal status, and the qualifications of the officers and directors, of the corporations from which they received certifications. (Huber, 2011, 2013c, 2013d) This misunderstanding is compounded by forensic accountants' failure to investigate the corporations prior to receiving their certifications (Huber, 2013a). The confusion is particularly problematic when those to whom the certifications are issued are citizens of other countries. Lack of familiarity with U.S. laws and the corresponding lack of regulations over the industry can result in those from other countries obtaining certifications that do not align with their personal or professional expectations. Due to the failure of the market to enable participants to make fully informed decisions, I have called for the regulation of the profession and the industry (Huber, 2013b).

Since the forensic accounting profession and the forensic accounting industry are unregulated, anyone can call him- or herself a forensic accounting. However, merely holding oneself out as a forensic accountant lacks the symbolic capital necessary for a forensic

⁷ This is not to say that such misperceptions do not occur in the U.S. Huber (2013a) has clearly shown they do. However, it is more likely occur with citizens of other countries.

accountant to be successful (Williams, 2002). Therefore, many have chosen to acquire the necessary symbolic capital by obtaining a degree or certificate in forensic accounting.

There are approximately 155 colleges or universities in the U.S. that have degree programs in forensic accounting, majors or minors in forensic accounting, or certificates in forensic accounting (Seda, & Peterson-Kramer, 2014). Education alone, however, may be insufficient establish one as a forensic accountant. Therefore, many have chosen either to supplement a degree with a certification, or to forego a degree and obtain only a certification. There are many who hold multiple certifications in forensic accounting (Huber, 2014b).

The domains of the forensic accounting profession are both broader and deeper than the domain of public accounting profession, which by law is limited to auditing,⁸ although there are some obvious parallels and overlaps. The certifications listed below are not listed in any particular order.

Although not a forensic accounting corporation⁹, the AICPA¹⁰ issues a forensic accounting certification – Certified in Financial Forensics (CFF). (One must be a CPA to be eligible to receive the CFF since membership is restricted to licensed CPAs.). According to the AICPA, the domains for the CFF include the following: CPA Professional Responsibilities in Civil and Criminal Matters; Laws, Courts and Dispute Resolution; Reporting, Experts and Testimony; Bankruptcy, Insolvency and Reorganization; Computer Forensic Analysis; Economic Damages Calculations; Family Law; Financial Statement Misrepresentations; Fraud Prevention, Detection and Response; Valuation (AICPA, 2013c). The AICPA also issues certifications in business valuation and IT which are not specifically focused on courts and evidence.

⁸ Many firms, particularly the Big 4, offer services other than auditing. However, as a profession public accounting refers only to the auditing of financial statements. A license is not required to engage in other services such as tax.

⁹ The term "forensic accounting corporation" is used, rather than organization, to emphasize the nature of the industry. The organizations that issue forensic accounting certifications are corporations.

¹⁰ The corporations that issue the certifications are discussed in the next section.

The Master Analyst in Financial Forensics (MAFF, previously Certified Forensic Financial Analyst, CFFA) domains include Economic Damages; Matrimonial Litigation; Bankruptcy, Insolvency, and Restructuring; Business Valuation in Litigation; Business and Intellectual Property Damages; Forensic Accounting; and Fraud Risk Management (NACVA, 2013). NACVA also issues certifications in valuation which are not specifically focused on courts and evidence.

The Forensic CPA (FCPA) does not have domains *per se*. The examinations for the certification are based on textbooks. Examinations cover the following texts: Criminal Interrogation and Confessions, Corporate Fraud Handbook, Financial Investigation and Forensic Accounting, Forensic and Investigative Accounting, and Principles of Fraud Examination (FCPA, 2013).

The Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE) certification is focused only and entirely on all aspects of fraud – prevention, detection, and response. In the U.S., CPAs are not specifically responsible for detecting fraud during an audit of financial statements. They must only "plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement, whether caused by error or fraud" (PCAOB, 2013). The domains of the CFE include Business Law; Accounting; Communications; Computer Science; Behavioral Ethics; Taxes; and Auditing (ACFE, 2013).

The domains of the Cr.FA include: Fraud auditing, Asset misappropriation scams, Alternate dispute resolution, Rules of evidence, Government auditing techniques, and IRS Valuation Guidelines (ACFEI, 2013).

Like the CFE, the Certified Financial Crime Specialists (CFCS) is quite narrow. It focuses on such things as Financial Crime, Money Laundering Controls and Investigation,

Ethical Responsibilities and Best Practices; Financial Crime Investigation; Fraud Detection and Investigation; Money and Commodities Flow; Tax Evasion and Enforcement; Asset Recovery; Compliance – Programs and Controls, Global Anti-Corruption Compliance and Enforcement, International Regulations and Standards, and Data Security and Privacy (ACFCS, 2013).

The Certified Fraud Specialist (CFS) has no domains on which candidates must complete an examination (ACFS, 2013). There is at this time, no examination.

The Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialist (CAMS) is another narrowly focused certification. Its domains are limited to anti-money laundering detection and enforcement (ACAMS, 2013).

The next section discusses the corporations that issue the certifications.

The Forensic Accounting Industry

Although Williams (2002) defines the forensic accounting industry in broader terms¹¹, he traces the evolution of the industry and its institutionalization in its current form. His analysis is limited to Canada, but it has parallels to that of the U.S. experience. The industry shifted from "a formal and relatively narrow litigation support function closely aligned with the investigative mandates, capacities, and functions of the public police, to a wide range of independent investigative, analytical, and consulting services directed exclusively towards the corporate market" (p. 162). In the U.S. lawyers constitute the largest number of users of forensic accounting services (Davis, Farrell, & Ogilby 2010).

As with the profession, so with the industry. Forensic accounting corporations¹² are not regulated under either Federal or state laws. Forming a corporation that issues certifications in

¹¹ "[The] forensic accounting and investigation (FAI) industry...span[s] the boundaries of law, accounting, business, and the economy..." (p. 1).

¹² "Forensic accounting corporation" refers to a corporation, either for-profit or not-for-profit, that exists to issue forensic accounting certifications.

forensic accounting or fraud examination involves nothing more than filing articles of incorporation with the state (usually the Secretary of State for the state) and paying a nominal filing fee. Subject to certain limited restrictions, such as the use of names ("bank" and "insurance," for example, are prohibited unless other stringent requirements are met), incorporators are free to use any combination of words in the title of the corporation, including, "forensic," "fraud," "accounting," and words with similar meanings. ¹³

Once incorporated, the corporation is free to begin issuing certifications and to establish any, or no, criteria (e.g., education, experience, examinations) for obtaining the certification. No state imposes minimum qualifications for incorporators, officers, or directors, to form or operate a forensic accounting corporation. The officers and directors of some of the corporations have neither education, nor experience, in forensic accounting or fraud examination. Furthermore, as discussed below, forensic accounting corporations may be either for-profit or not-for-profit. As a rule, for-profit forensic accounting corporations do not disclose the fact that they are for-profit.

There are at least six corporations in the U.S. that issue certifications in forensic accounting or fraud examination. Each of the corporations and their certifications are discussed below, and excerpted from Huber, 2011, 2013c, 2013d, and 2014a. The corporations are not listed in any particular order.

For-Profit Forensic Accounting Corporations

The *National Association of Certified Valuation Analysts* (NACVA), was incorporated in Utah in 1991. It issues several certifications in valuation in addition to the MFFA. The numbers of certificants is unknown.

¹³ Several states also prohibit not only the use of the title of "investigator," but also performing the functions reserved to private investigation, by anyone who is not a licensed private investigator. Private investigation is a licensed profession, and private investigators strongly lobbied their state legislators for laws prohibiting performing the functions or using the title. This has in some cases limited the ability of forensic accountants and fraud examiners from performing their duties. For additional information, see Drew, 2013,

The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) issues the CFE. It was incorporated in Texas in 1989 as a for-profit corporation. A second, not-for-profit corporation with the same name was incorporated in Texas in 1996. The number of CFEs is approximately 60,000 (ACFE, 2013).

The *Forensic CPA Society, Inc.* (FCPAS) was incorporated in Washington State in 2005. It issues the FCPA. The number of certificants is unknown.

American College of Forensic Examiners International (ACFEI)_{sm} is the name that is stated on its webpage, but is not actually a corporation. It is a group of for-profit corporations and one-not-for-profit corporation. The original for-profit corporation was incorporated in Missouri in 1992. It issues also forensic certifications in Survival Mindset, Nursing, and others. (It previously issued certifications in Dentistry and Homeland Security, but those are no longer shown on its webstite.) It issues the Cr.FA. The number of Cr.FAs is unknown. (ACFEI, 2013).

The Association of Certified Financial Crime Specialists (ACFCS) issues the CFCS. It was incorporated in Florida in 2011 as a for-profit corporation. It was recently acquired by BAR-BRI, a company that prepares bar review materials for those preparing to sit for the bar exam. (NationalJurist, 2014)

The Association Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists (ACAMS), which issues the CAMS, is currently a wholly-owned subsidiary of Warburg Pincus LLC, a private equity firm (Warburg Pincus, 2013). It was originally incorporated in Florida in 2001 by the incorporator of the ACFCS.

Not-For-Profit Forensic Accounting Corporations and Certifications

The *American Institute of Certified Public Accountants* (AICPA) is not a forensic accounting corporation; i.e., its purpose is not to issue certifications of any kind. Its membership consists solely of, and is limited to, CPAs. Its mission is "to provide members with the resources, information, and leadership that enable them to provide valuable services in the highest

professional manner to benefit the public as well as employers and clients (AICPA, 2013a). Its origins date back to 1887, prior to the first law was adopted licensing CPAs. ¹⁴ There are over 750,000 CPAs. There are 2,328 CFFs listed in the AICPA directory (AICPA, 2013b). It is incorporated in Washington, D.C.

Association of Certified Fraud Specialists (ACFS) was incorporated in California in 1993. This is the only not-for-profit forensic accounting corporation. The ACFS issues the CFS. The numbers of certificants is unknown.

Ancillary Institutions for Forensic Accounting

There are also several "institutions" that support the profession and industry. The Forensic and Investigative Accounting section of the American Accounting Association consists of members of the AAA who teach or research forensic accounting (FIA, 2013). The Journal of Forensic and Investigative Accounting, hosted by Louisiana State University, publishes practical and academic research articles and case studies in forensic accounting (JFIA, 2013). The Journal of Forensic Studies in Accounting and Business, hosted by George State University, also publishes practical and academic research articles and case studies in forensic accounting (JFSAB, 2013).

Discussion

Each of the Big 4 firms, as well as hundreds of other firms, has dedicated divisions focused solely on forensic accounting. With the annual revenue in the U.S. in forensic accounting in 2012 of \$4.6 billion, and an expected annual growth rate of 6.8% to \$6 billion by 2017 (Tysiac, 2012), it is easy to see why there are so many for-profit forensic accounting corporations and why the demand for forensic accounting certifications is growing. It also explains the hostility between the corporations (Huber, 2013b). When there is an increase in

¹⁴ New York State was the first state to license CPAs in 1896.

demand, or an increase in the quantity demanded, there is an incentive for new entrants into the market to try to capture part of the surplus.

"The services and functions performed by the industry are variable, diverse, and more responsive to the profit motive than any true sense of commitment to a body of professional work...and the stakes of the field are extremely high and carry the potential for significant material (financial) and symbolic (symbolic capital) returns" (Williams, 2002, 186).

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the legal, geographic, political, and economic background of the United States in order to establish the context of the forensic accounting profession and forensic accounting industry. The purpose is to provide a greater understanding of the current state of the profession and industry compared to the state of the profession and industry in other countries.

The forensic accounting profession and forensic accounting industry are both well established in the U.S. However, due to the nature of the legal and economic systems, they are both unregulated, resulting in a high degree of variability with a corresponding misperception in the market with respect to the status and reputation of the various forensic accounting certifications and the corporations that issue them.

The growth in forensic accounting revenue is greater than overall GDP growth. There is thus an incentive for new entrants into the market which, absent regulation, can add to market misperception. The potential for misperception and confusion is greater for citizens of other countries who obtain U.S. forensic accounting certifications.

Although there are ancillary institutions, there has been relatively little research into the profession and industry.

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