

Designation Envy

Why CPCU Should Matter to You

Why is the CPCU designation important to claim professionals? This question is best answered by the claim professionals who have achieved the CPCU designation and are active members in the CPCU Society. The American Institute for CPCU has granted more than 65,000 CPCU designations, with most recipients becoming members of the CPCU Society. Since 2000, 30 percent of the new CPCU designees have declared that they are in a claims capacity with their employer. They serve in a range of positions, from adjusters to senior management.

In a survey of 38 of these claim professionals, all cited one or more of the following general categories as the designation's most important factor to them personally:

- ▶ Educational value, both in attaining the designation and in career continuing education offered by the Society.
- ▶ Networking with other claim professionals and non-claim professionals.
- ▶ Help with their careers, either by attaining employment or moving to a better position.
- ▶ Providing instant credibility among other insurance professionals who share a high standard of ethical behavior and integrity.

The Education

The one overwhelming reason cited is the superior education received in both the designation process and the continuing education as an active member of the CPCU Society. Members of the CPCU Society view the program for achieving the designation as an intense learning process, whether attending formal classes or engaging in home study. There are those who believe the education helped them overcome the lack of a college degree. In one case, a member felt the designation helped him achieve his masters degree from a major university. For his CPCU coursework he received credit for

one-third of the semester hours needed for the degree. That individual is now in a management position at a large independent adjusting firm.

Other survey respondents cited the value of the knowledge they gained about the rest of the insurance industry. They learned about insurance operations from sales to underwriting, company finance to auditing, and more. Most importantly, they learned about the management of a carrier — from a small mutual to a major stock company. Respondents also gleaned insights about the business of brokers and agents and how they interact with carriers in both the selling of policies and in representing their clients during the claim process.

Many adjusters indicated that they have a broader understanding of the property and casualty insurance industry, in turn making them a more valuable commodity within the industry. When attending meetings with multiple disciplines represented, their credibility is clearly enhanced because of the designation. As one adjuster stated, "It took me out of the silo of my claim operation and showed me how my piece fit in with the overall operation of the insurance industry." Others indicated they received greater insight as to interactions within the entire company. As a result, they experienced a sense of broadened credibility and confidence when meeting with senior management.

In addition to the educational value of the coursework leading to the CPCU designation, there are various continuing education opportunities. The CPCU Society produces its annual meeting and seminars, rotating between eastern and western locations, and it also offers an annual Leadership Summit. These two venues provide various state approved continuing education (CE) credits that allow its members to meet the total education requirements for both licensing and the maintenance of those licensures. In addition, the Leadership Summit

provides courses to prepare claim professionals for supervisory roles, including an array of management positions. Further, the Annual Meeting and Leadership Summit represent only a fraction of the total educational opportunities made available to claim professionals by the Society. It should be noted that the CPCU Society, its interest groups, and chapters across the country offer a multitude of seminars, symposiums, and webinars.

Of those responding to this survey, 100 percent felt the educational value of achieving the designation — as well as the continuing education after becoming a member of the Society — were, by far, the most important benefit of the CPCU designation. Institute surveys of all members reveal 83 percent of those completing their CPCU believe that earning the designation helped them prepare for their current job responsibilities, whereas 92 percent felt it helped them plan for their long-term goals.

The Networking

During the early 1980s, claim professionals within the Society created the Claims Section, which was later renamed the Claims Interest Group. It is operated by claim professionals across the country. They create one or more of the Annual Meeting seminars as well as other programs at local chapters and in regional areas. This allows them to work with claim professionals of other carriers and share their expertise. Consequently, these members become more engaged in developing contributions to the industry while also benefiting from the opportunity to develop their leadership skills.

The Claims Interest Group also publishes a quarterly newsletter in which the bulk of the articles are produced by the group's members. This allows the members to share their expertise and enhance their professional reputations among peers. They interact with one another to solve problems that arise in the claim

arena on a regular basis. This interaction develops relationships that can be invaluable when positions become available or layoffs occur.

Careers and Employment

Many claim professionals believe the CPCU designation is a critical foundation on which to build a career. Members who have obtained the designation are typically not satisfied with mundane work. They are characteristically willing to accept the challenges of more complex cases.

One claim manager reports that his company views the CPCU designation as a "graduate degree in insurance." This exemplifies the notion that the individual views insurance as a profession, not just a job. A current vice president reported that his company values the CPCU designation to the extent that it is a significant consideration in hiring and promoting. This was not an isolated response. Another member stated, "I just got my current job and was told that the CPCU designation was the deciding factor to the company," while yet another revealed that in changing jobs, the CPCU designation helped him stand out from other applicants.

Of those responding to the survey, 60 percent felt that the CPCU designation helped further their careers or that it was directly related to their current employment. An American Institute survey of all members indicated 72 percent of CPCU completers received a promotion within two years of receiving the designation, and 92 percent say earning the designation helped them prepare for their long-term career goals.

Credibility, Integrity, Ethics

Adherence to unimpeachable levels of credibility, integrity, and ethics faithfully describes members of the CPCU Society. Consequently, the CPCU designation provides virtually instant credibility and engenders an outstanding first impression, which is clearly a head start in any professional relationship. The letters

Claiming Your Destiny

In a membership profile compiled by the CPCU Society, more than 1,100 CPCU designees either have served or are serving as president or chief executive officer of insurance companies. What else are the numbers telling us? A 2008 survey of 678 CPCU members by the American Institute for CPCU revealed the following:

- ▶ 91 percent say earning the designation provided them with increased job opportunities.
- ▶ 87 percent say it improved networking opportunities outside their company.
- ▶ 98 percent say earning the designation was important to demonstrating professional competency levels.
- ▶ 97 percent say it was important to gaining professional recognition.
- ▶ 44 percent say they received a promotion between 6 months and 2 years.
- ▶ 75 percent say it was important to helping them gain a salary increase.
- ▶ 77 percent say it was important to gaining new opportunities in the same functional area.
- ▶ 76 percent say it was important to gaining the ability to move to another company.

"CPCU" hold a mystique that other designations cannot match.

The designation promotes self esteem among its recipients when they attend meetings and while interacting with other industry disciplines. Many adjusters report an enormous degree of respect from members of other disciplines when they meet with an adjuster with the CPCU designation. When one can talk the talk about reinsurance, marketing, underwriting, and accounting, then others involved have instant respect for the adjuster's input. They all are aware that the designation represents broad and objective knowledge of the industry as a whole. Institute surveys of all members indicate 97 percent say it was important as a means to gain professional recognition.

Another benefit is that claim professionals with the CPCU designation are often called upon to testify in legal proceedings. Whether as an expert or incipient witness, while testifying in a deposition or trial or just being part of a mediation process, one who has the designation is immediately recognized. Attorneys highlight the designation when establishing the individual as an expert in the field.

The CPCU designation is the most

widely recognized, valued, and highly respected professional designation in the property and casualty insurance industry. This explains why claim professionals understand the importance in attaining the designation and becoming active members of the CPCU Society. In doing so, professionals will build upon a critical foundation to not only shape a career but also control their own destinies to some extent. ■

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