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Students supply free tax help

Accounting majors gain experience

*By Howard McEwen
Enquirer contributor*

CRESTVIEW HILLS - Thomas More College accounting majors will be spending their spring Sundays helping low income people and the elderly in Covington and Over-the-Rhine prepare their taxes.

The program is part of the school's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program.

"Client ages range from very young to very old, with a fairly even distribution of ages," said Thomas J. Gilday, CPA, an associate professor at Thomas More. "Almost all clients have adjusted gross income of less than \$40,000, many below \$12,000. A majority of our clients receive refunds, many are eligible for the earned income credit."

Gilday said many concepts are easier for the students to learn when they see them in real life.

"I can lecture about the earned income credit for a week and students might develop a basic understanding of the concept," he said. "In 15 minutes, sitting across the table from a single mother trying to survive on minimum wage, the light really comes on."

Gilday, who started the program at the school 28 years ago, said the VITA program is more than just teaching tax concepts.

"All of us have received a lot of personal fulfillment from assisting others with their tax preparation," he said. "Not only are you enriched by assisting others, but simultaneously, you are able to help our students learn much about taxation and helping others. The entire experience is totally consistent with the mission of the college to 'challenge students to examine the ultimate meaning of life, their place in the world, and their responsibility to others.' "

This year will be senior Blair Trame's second year on the project.

"VITA has helped clear some of the ignorance a kid from the suburbs has for the truly poor of our society," the Taylor Mill native said.

Trame said she has two reasons for participating in the program.

"It gives me a chance to interact with people that I usually wouldn't get a chance to," she said. "Getting to know these people really opens your eyes to the many everyday challenges these people face. It has made me aware of how fortunate I am to enjoy the many blessings and opportunities that I have been given."

"The VITA program also allows me to use my talents and abilities to help others, especially the less fortunate. Service is a vital part of the curriculum of a Catholic college and is strongly encouraged by the college. VITA is a great service opportunity for accounting students."

Junior Melissa Miranda from Petersburg says the experience will help her career after graduation.

"Working with the income levels and situations that we do in VITA, there are many credits and

circumstances that come up that we may otherwise have never been aware of.

"Experience at preparing returns at all levels of income and circumstance is important to a career in accounting, it's what sets you aside from the rest."

However, she was primarily drawn to the program's service aspect.

"I think that working at these particular sites, where the need is greatest, gives you a new perspective of the importance of what we do as volunteers, tax preparers, and accountants," she said.

Additional Facts

If you go

Where: Contact Center, 1227 Vine St., Cincinnati

When: Feb. 22, March 8 and March 22.

Where: Center for Great Neighborhoods of Covington, 1650 Russell St.

When: Sunday, March 1, March 15 and March 29.

Phone: 859-655-8275; fax 859-491-2220

For more information, call 859-344-3405.
