

## College of Business accounting students offer tax assistance

by Matt Hietpas - Thursday, January 24, 2013

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/24712/college-of-business-accounting-students-offer-tax-assistance/>

As the forms and documents arrive in mailboxes across the country, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh accounting students are again preparing to help people tackle their income taxes.

In the coming weeks, UW Oshkosh accounting students will volunteer to prepare free electronic filing of federal and state income tax returns for taxpayers earning less than \$50,000 per year as part of an IRS-supported Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.

VITA program services will be offered at the Oshkosh Area Community Pantry, 2551 Jackson St., every Saturday (except on March 30 due to Easter) starting Feb.2 from 9:15 a.m. until 12:15 p.m. The service will be available through April 13; tax day is Friday, April 15.

VITA is a partnership between the Winnebago County UW-Extension, United Way, UW Oshkosh College of Business and Oshkosh Area Community Pantry with each providing a service in order to make the tax assistance program function.

“UW Oshkosh Accounting students and Professor (Peter) Westort and Marianne, his wife, participate in the face-to-face orientation at UWO with IRS, UW-Extension and United Way representatives,” said Sue Panek, Oshkosh Area United Way executive director. “They promote the volunteer opportunity to the students and are the collective life-blood to the project as they provide the feet-on-the-ground (or fingers-on-the-keyboards) volunteers who prepare and file the returns with the taxpayers.”

Westort said about 15 to 20 students –mostly those studying accounting--volunteer each year. The volunteers get trained online in order to provide tax assistance.

“They have to pass a couple of tests to make sure they really do taxes if they are going to volunteer and help people,” said Westort, who is also an ex-IRS agent. “My job is quality control. The program calls for, when the tax return is all done, somebody else to review it so that it’s done correctly.”

According to Panek, the goals of the program are two-fold. First, the program works to find every tax credit possible for those eligible. The program is also designed to give students a high-impact learning experience in their field of study.

“I have seen students become more confident in their ability to work with clients--they have improved their knowledge and accounting skills with regard to tax preparation, and it gives them valuable experience to put on their resumes,” she said. “I also think it makes them feel good for doing something so positive for another person.”

From 2009 to 2011, the VITA program and the Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) program volunteers gave back the equivalent of more than \$1.2 million -- a total factoring the dollar amount saved to prepare

taxpayers' returns, the amount of credits reclaimed for taxpayers and the number of volunteer hours amassed, calculated as paid hours, Panek said.

Students interested in getting help with taxes on campus are encouraged to go Sage Hall computer lab on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 4 to 8 p.m. starting mid-February.

“Something that we are going to try for the first time this year is a facilitated self-help where people prepare their own taxes,” Westort said. “Students, for free, can sit down and access an online preparation program to prepare their taxes with one volunteer available to answer questions. For students who feel very comfortable with computers and software, it’s a good deal. For a lot of the clients we serve down at the food pantry, I don’t think they are comfortable with going and doing it themselves so it serves a different market.”

An appointment is needed to utilize the VITA program; make an appointment with Oshkosh Area United Way by calling (920) 651-3060.

Learn more:

- [UW Oshkosh College of Business](#)
- [Oshkosh Area Community Pantry](#)
- [Oshkosh Area United Way](#)