



UNH Accounting Students Help Others And Themselves

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DURHAM, N.H. - Lauren Freedman, an accounting major at the University of New Hampshire, wasn't sure which area of accounting she wanted to pursue upon graduation, but a volunteer experience assisting low-income residents file their taxes has turned out to be just what she needed to help her make the decision.

Freedman, vice president of the UNH Accounting Students Association, will pursue a career as a tax accountant after she graduates this May thanks, in part, to her volunteer experience with the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA).

More than 20 students, all accounting majors with UNH's Whittemore School of Business and Economics, have become certified tax preparers with VITA, a collaboration among the university, Internal Revenue Service, Northeast Credit Union and the Creating Assets, Savings, and Hope (CASH) Coalition of Southeastern New Hampshire.

"The success of efforts like the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance site is firmly based on the foundation of continuing to draw in young, smart and interested people like we've found in the students of UNH. From my point of view, that of community action, they embody the spirit of looking to themselves, asking what it is they've got to offer, finding the right opportunity and committing to give of their time and their expertise," said Patte Ardizzoni, community relations and marketing director with Rockingham Community Action, which is a member of the CASH Coalition of Southeastern New Hampshire.

The VITA program offers free tax help to low-income residents who need help preparing their own tax returns. The UNH students providing the help are graduates and undergraduates who are IRS VITA-certified to help prepare basic tax returns.

"The CASH Coalition of Southeastern New Hampshire is fortunate to have so many UNH accounting students volunteering their time with VITA at Northeast Credit Union this year. It's a win-win, really. It's a win for the community since more volunteers allow that many more low-income families to benefit and get ahead financially. It's a win for students, too. They have the opportunity to apply the technical skills they've learned and build upon professional skills they'll need where ever their chosen career takes them. Their enthusiasm and energy is infectious," said Ramona Dow, vice president of marketing and strategic initiatives with Northeast Credit Union.

Freedman started volunteering with VITA as a junior.

"As a junior I was nervous to volunteer for this program because I had just started taking my core accounting classes. I didn't know how prepared I would be without taking a tax class. Once I started, VITA showed me that I knew more than I thought, and I was completely capable of helping the clients with their taxes," Freedman said.

With so many career opportunities available to accounting majors, Freedman was unsure of which direction to take until her VITA experience. Her decision to pursue a tax accounting

career was due, in part, to how she felt after helping people file their taxes.

"After each taxpayer I would meet with, they would thank me so much for helping them and say how 'I would never be able to do that on my own.' I'm happy that I can help those people, especially when many are eligible for a significant refund," Freedman said. "I know that I am making a difference with each taxpayer I meet. Without these resources, some clients would not understand how to properly complete their tax return and then not receive their refund."

"This has been an incredible experience for me. Not only is it helpful for the community, but I am also gaining experience in the field of work I enjoy and am pursuing after graduation," she said.

The VITA program offers free tax return preparation assistance at Northeast Credit Union in Portsmouth, Tuesdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Fridays, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and Saturdays, 9 a.m. to noon, until March 14, 2009. Individuals with an income below \$22,000 or a total household income below \$42,000 qualify.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 11,800 undergraduate and 2,400 graduate students.

PHOTOS

Cutline: Lauren Freedman, a senior at UNH majoring in accounting, has been a volunteer with the VITA program for two years. Her work with the VITA program has been instrumental in helping her decide to pursue a career as a tax accountant when she graduates in May.

Link: http://www.unh.edu/news/img/wsbe/lauren_freedman.jpg

Cutline: UNH students Nicole O'Connor (left) and Lauren Freedman (right) prepare tax documents for a VITA client.

Link: <http://www.unh.edu/news/img/wsbe/vita.jpg>

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