

# features

## Students reach out to the community during tax season

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It is that time of year again. Spring is around the corner, the snow is melting, and tax season is starting. Luckily, the Ashland University accounting department is here to help with tax filing this season for members of the Ashland community.

“From the community perspective, they’re getting a free service, completely free,” Dr. Victoria Kaskey, chair of the accounting and management information systems department, said.

The students of the accounting department are servicing those in the area who are ready to file their taxes as part of their coursework for accounting.

The students are required to complete a certain amount of community hours, Kaskey said.

“We are very into any type of experiential learning, so this was just one of those benefits. It’s a win-win for everybody, for the community, [and] the students get that experience.”

This is the second year that students from the accounting department are offering this service to people on the Ashland University campus and in the community. These services will be available starting February 12.

“It’s a government grant from the IRS” that allows them to do this, Kaskey said. “We got the paperwork rolling and here it is.”

The program was awarded two certificates for its success last year. Accolades included exceeding the expected amount of completed tax returns and a less than one percent reject rate.

“It’s one of the best things you could have done for the class,” Tonya Beachy, a senior majoring in accounting, said. “It makes you much more marketable.”

Kaskey brought the program with her to Ashland University and initiated it last year. She is doing it again as it proved successful previously.

“When I was a student at Baldwin Wallace, we had the program. So, when I came to Ashland ten years ago, it had always been in the back of my mind as something

to start. When I became chair two and a half years ago, it was one of my goals to bring it to campus,” Kaskey said.

The free tax filing is part of the curriculum for an accounting class on campus in which the students participate fully in the event to get hands on experience that can benefit them later on in their professional lives.

It was a new program last year, Beachy said. Ashland University wanted to try a new, hands on experience for the students. “I was personally excited...[to] sit down

“I am a big believer in you need to try as many things as possible, so that you know what you like and what you don’t like,” Kaskey said. “If they go in there and they decide they don’t like it, that’s just as valuable...it’s almost like a trial period for their future.”

Beachy said that she has been an intern for an accounting firm prior to this program getting started. Being part of the class and the event benefited her in the work she does for her internship.

“I heard about it in class, we were going to try something new,”

p.m. in room 108 of the Dauch College.

“They [the students] are preparing the returns,” Kaskey said. “They’re not watching, they’re actually doing it. They’re meeting with the client; the client sits right next to them and they prepare the return with that actual client.”

The student-prepared tax returns are then approved by a supervisor. This allows them to learn the skills of speaking with clients and the skills of preparing the returns and doing the accounting.

“They have to greet the client,

their phone, but it’s free and even more people should take advantage of it.”

Students in the accounting class that volunteer for the event receive the materials from the IRS and are trained volunteers for tax return filing.

“They don’t have to purchase any materials for it,” Kaskey said. “The IRS provides everything...they don’t have to pay for the textbook, they don’t have to pay for the software, none of it.”

The IRS provides what would be needed for a person to be trained



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This is the second year Dauch students are offering tax preparation services for free.

with the client directly,” she said.

It is almost an internship in the eyes of the student, Kaskey said. “They are truly experiencing what they would be doing if they were preparing tax returns.”

Not only does this event bring the students together with the faculty, community members and other students that come in for their services, but it gives them a glimpse into their future and what their profession could look like.

Beachy said. “I am huge fan of the program, everyone [in accounting] should give it a go at least once.”

According to the Internal Revenue Service website, calendar year filers are the most common and the date to file this year is April 15. As the deadline approaches, the accounting department will be taking walk in appointments on Tuesdays from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Thursdays from 4 p.m. to 8

ask them their name, shake their hand, which is overall part of that business...that overall we want them to learn,” Kaskey said.

The program is available to people in the community but also to students on the campus of Ashland University who may need returns prepared.

Students don’t think about it as much, Beachy said.

“It’s something their parents may take care of or they just do it on

in field. They are receiving training, paying only the necessary tuition for the class.

“If it’s something that fits in your schedule, do it,” Beachy said. “Students who haven’t done an internship, this gives them an edge.”

The program aims to connect students and the community by teaching through hands on, real world experiences.

“I’m all for real world experience and this is it,” Beachy said.



PICTURES USED UNDER FAIR USE GUIDELINES FROM CREATIVE COMMONS

For any students or community members who may have more complicated taxes to file this season, there are a number of online tax preparation services which file more advanced forms for free, including TurboTax, Credit Karma, and Efile.com.