

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) for Spring 2020

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program at Western New Mexico University had a shortened tax season due to the Covid-19 virus and the university changes. While we intended to prepare taxes from February 10th until April 3rd, we shut our doors on March 13th for spring break and did not reopen.

Each year VITA volunteers provide free income tax preparation assistance to low-income, elderly, disabled, and limited English-speaking taxpayers. VITA provides the tax preparation services at no cost to the community and surrounding areas. Taxpayers with an income of \$56,000 or less were eligible for this outstanding service for the 2019 tax season.

Fifteen students prepared and filed tax returns including state, federal, and paper returns and were overseen by two student supervisors. There were a total of 276 federal returns and 279 state returns electronically submitted. Federal refunds totaling \$315,279 were refunded back to the community. State refunds totaling \$81,536 were refunded. The total of the two, state and federal returns, was \$396,815. Included in this total were Earned Income Tax Credits of \$106,836, and Education Credits of \$5,584. The state returns were from various states including New Mexico, Arizona, California, Colorado, and Illinois.

All the students that were involved in the tax preparation were required to become certified through the advanced IRS certification exam and dedicated knowledge of tax laws for 2019. Each of the students/volunteers were certified as a site coordinator. The students/volunteers contributed a total of 580 hours of work within the span of five weeks. According to information provided by Tax Help New Mexico, the value of the services provided by our students equates to a savings of preparation fees totaling \$96,600.

This assistance to the public has been provided by the School of Business at Western New Mexico University in coordination with Tax Help New Mexico. Ashley Montenegro, adjunct professor of Accounting, oversaw the program this year with the support from various faculty and staff and the Central New Mexico site in Albuquerque. Linda McGee initiated this program at Western New Mexico University in 1982 and it continues today. The VITA program provides a generous service to the community, as well as being a great learning experience for its students/volunteers.

Thank You,

Paige Pinto