

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) for Spring 2021

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program at Western New Mexico University prepared taxes from February 15, 2021 through May 17, 2021. The program operated differently this year as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. VITA provided a drop-off/pick-up service of completing tax returns due to the limited numbers of volunteers. A bulk of the operations took place on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 8:30 am- 12:00pm noon. Furthermore, in efforts to keep students and faculty safe the program abided by University policies and protocols.

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 \$57,000 or less were eligible for this outstanding service for the 2020 tax season.

Seven students prepared and filed tax returns including state, federal, and paper returns and were overseen by student manager Paige Pinto. There were a total of 260 federal returns and 259 state returns electronically submitted. Federal refunds totaling \$270,943 were refunded back to the community. State refunds totaling \$63,364 were refunded. The total of the two, state and federal returns, was \$333,307. Included in this total were Earned Income Tax Credits of \$60,172, and Education Credits of \$19,129. 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 2020. Each of the students/volunteers were certified as a site coordinator. The students/volunteers contributed a total of 567 hours of work within the span of nine weeks, not including the period from April 18, 2021 through May 18, 2021. For the month following, student manager Pinto took care of the remaining tax returns and reports. According to local information it costs around \$150.00+ to file a simple tax return. The value of the services provided by our students equates to a savings of preparation fees estimated to be around \$92,050.

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 director Jeffery Ledbetter. Laurie Barfitt, professor of Accounting, oversaw the program this year with the support from staff at 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

6/30/2021