Volunteer Tax Clinics

Winnebago Indian Reservation

The Situation –
• Low income taxpayers are entitled to an earned income credit (a refundable, negative income tax) of up to $5,666
• Paid tax return preparers have provided short term loans and prepaid debit cards using the refunds as collateral
• Some of these loans result in interest rates over 100%
• The Winnebago, NE community was especially vulnerable to these exorbitant loans

The Response –
• Creighton accounting and law students, and alumni from accounting and law, decided to sponsor a tax preparation clinic in Winnebago, NE
• The IRS has a program called VITA – Volunteer Income Tax Assistance – that coordinates free tax return preparation for low income taxpayers
• A partnership was created with the IRS, Ho-Chunk, Inc. (a for-profit corporation affiliated with the Winnebago Nation), and St. Augustine Indian Mission
• Creighton partners included the Department of Accounting, Beta Alpha Psi, and the Business Law Society
• Students in Accounting 343, Federal Income Tax, are required to participate in VITA as a course service learning component
• Volunteers need to pass several examinations and undergo training

Cultural Interaction and the Clinics –
• Clinics were held in 2010, 2011, and are scheduled for 2012
• Students interacted with members of the Winnebago Nation in cultural exchanges the night before the clinics, sharing a traditional meal, hearing stories about the Winnebago People, and dancing together with the Kateri Drum and Dancers group
• In 2010, 25 volunteers served over 40 clients by preparing returns with refunds exceeding $150,000
• In 2011, over 75 clients were served by over 30 volunteers and refunds exceeding $250,000 were generated

Ignatian Elements –
• Low income clients receive a valuable service at no cost
• Volunteers share their talents with low income people
• Students are required to prepare a reflection paper
• Participants learn more about another culture

The Spirit of Creighton –
• Collaborating across academic units and with community groups
• Reinforcing resilience in attitude in the low-income clients served
• Generous sharing of professional knowledge for the betterment of society
• Healing the wounds of economic challenges

For additional information, contact Dr. Tom Purcell at tpurcell@creighton.edu or 402-280-2062

Sponsored by the Creighton University Jesuit Community, in association with the Dougman Center for Ignatian Spirituality.

Kateri Drummers and Dancers leading members of the Winnebago community and volunteers in traditional Winnebago dances.

Volunteers assisting clients with tax returns in Winnebago

All Things Ignatian