

Students offer free tax help

BY SHIHARA MADUWAGE
For the Index

Beta Alpha Psi is helping Truman students and the Kirksville community file taxes free of charge through the annual Voluntary Income Tax Assistance program.

Associate professor of accounting Alan Davis, the VITA adviser, said the program, which concludes at the end of March, provides assistance filing both state and federal income taxes to students and Kirksville residents.

He said the members of BAP, an international scholastic and professional organization for Financial Information Professionals, and graduate and undergraduate accounting students prepare the tax returns.

Davis said BAP is preparing for the last session on March 26 from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The deadline for sending the taxes is April 18.

Davis said VITA is sponsored by the Internal Revenue Service and is the only VITA in this part of Missouri.

The IRS provides the software for filing taxes and BAP provides the labor to help the community free of charge.

"We saw a large growth in VITA volunteers in 2008, so we decided to more aggressively market," Davis said. "And since then [the attendance] has been stable."

Davis said it was mostly the Kirksville residents who used the program this year.

He said he estimates about 70 percent of their clients this year will be residents whereas in the past,

it has been a fairly equal divide between students and the community. He said it might be due to the availability of free online resources which can help students with their tax returns.

Davis said the main advantage of the VITA program is that the service is free. Most of their clients are low-to-middle-income earners and can't afford to pay for the service, Davis said.

"We provide a very good service for international students," Davis said. "[USA] has treaties with many different countries so rules for international students are so much more complex. We are the only ones who can tell them what to do."

He said some local accounting firms even direct clients to VITA because some tax returns are not worth the firm's time and effort.

"One of the things is that we try not to compete with the local CPAs," Davis said. "So we have a screening process for tax returns that are too complicated because we don't want to take business away from the local accountants."

He also said it is a win-win situation because not only do they help the clients but the VITA program also equips accounting students with practical experience for their future. He said this year they have about 60 volunteers who assist with preparing taxes.

Davis said each year he evaluates the quality of the program with his volunteers and looks for ways to improve the program for the next year.

Senior Jennifer Kalla, vice president of VITA, said

this year there were three training sessions for the volunteers to practice filing taxes and to get familiar with the software used for the process. She said as the main innovation this year, they introduced a video to make the training more effective.

Kalla also said since last year, they have utilized volunteer coordinators as well as greeters and tax assemblers, which is a big improvement.

"The volunteer coordinators look at the client's information and go through and check the documents," Kalla said. "Then they match that return with a volunteer who has the expertise to handle that return."

She said the major challenge they face is coordinating with volunteers' schedules.

"The only problems we come across are when clients come to us and they don't have the information we need to do the return or their information is too complicated for us to handle," Kalla said. "Sometimes we might not catch [that] we have a problem until we are further in the process."

She said so far the program has run very smoothly without any problems or complaints from the clients.

Senior volunteer Ivana Tjung said she is in charge of publicizing the event as well as helping with the training process, besides filing taxes.

"For me, because I like tax, it is really fun," said Tjung. "You get to know how to work in the real world. You also meet the client. ... I think they are satisfied with our service, that is why they come to us," Tjung



Submitted by Shihara Maduwage

Students work on taxes earlier this week in Violette Hall as part of the Voluntary Income Tax Assistance Program that members of Beta Alpha Psi are participating in.

said. "Most of the time, some couples come every year so I think we have a good response."

Tjung said when she filed her taxes with VITA, it saved time and the returns are less likely to have errors because the program is strictly supervised.

She said as an international student she thinks the program is very useful because there are different rules for international students.

Steven Sorhus, certified public accountant at Harden Cummins Moss & Miller,

LLC said the VITA program is a great way to get assistance for those who can't afford the services of a professional CPA.

He said HCMM targets a different segment of clients than the VITA program and therefore VITA doesn't take business away from HCMM.

"The demographics of the clients are different enough that it doesn't hurt us," Sorhus said. "The tax filing of clients who recognize that they need a CPA are typically more complex. On the other hand, VITA helps those with much simpler

tax returns, who are just not comfortable doing it on their own and just need a helping hand."

He said even though it is students who prepare tax returns for the clients, they are supervised by qualified professors, so accuracy is not a problem.

"If they didn't have that professional supervisory role I wouldn't recommend them [VITA] to anyone," Sorhus said. "But since the students are supervised, I think it is reliable."

(Additional reporting by Sally LaJoie.)

Website ranks Truman residence halls 14th

Mizzou ranks second on list, Truman earns 3.9 points on 5-point scale

BY ELIZABETH KOCH
Staff Reporter

Truman is ranked 14th on the "14 Schools with the Best Overall Dorms" list on CampusSplash.com's new division, DormSplash. Truman received a 3.9 on a five-point scale.

The first "Dormy Award" lists, released March 1, are compiled from approximately 7,400 student reviews. Students rank room size, cleanliness, parking, location/convenience, bathrooms, kitchens, study environment, resident attractiveness, social scene and the hall staff.

Allan Gannett, CampusSplash co-founder, said he hopes DormSplash assists students in making housing decisions.

Any four-year public or private school was eligible to make the ranks, Gannett said. Georgia State University was ranked the best overall dorm in the country

with 4.3 points, and the University of Missouri-Columbia was second with 4 points. Washington University in St. Louis received 3.9 points, at 10th.

John Gardner, director of Residence Life, said although he is excited for Truman's presence on the list, it is not fully accurate because Truman's ranking is based off of less than 30 student reviews.

The 15 schools with the most respondents range from 287 to 81 student respondents.

"It's so hard to compare one school to another school and one living environment to another living environment," Gardner said. "I look at it more as we scored a 3.9 out of a five-point scale, and I think that's pretty good."

Gardner said he hopes students are honest in their feedback so Residence Life can use that information in the future.

Residence Life issues surveys throughout the year on different topics, and the Educational Benchmarking Inc. satisfaction survey is issued in November. Feedback is generally positive, Gardner said.

"We're certainly a competitive

school," he said. "I think especially with renovations to our physical facilities, now we not only have a first class program with a great student staff, a great living and learning environment, but now we have the first class facilities to parallel with that."

The DormSplash rating will not affect housing in any way, he said.

Senior Aimee Vander Wal said she heard about Truman's ranking on DormSplash from some of her friends. Vander Wal transferred to Truman from William Woods University, where she lived in two different residence halls. No residence halls at William Woods received a Dormy Award.

Although the residence hall she first lived in was "questionable," there were some aspects of it that were better than Truman's residence halls, Vander Wal said.

"I will say something about [those rooms]," Vander Wal said. "They had space in those rooms — ridiculously more than Truman. It was kind of a shock coming to Truman and seeing the size of the double rooms."

She said the other dorm she lived in was nicer than those at Truman, a main reason being the size and set-up of the community style bathrooms.

Vander Wal said one contributing factor to the quality of living at William Woods was the smaller size.

But Vander Wal said she thinks the ranking accurately reflects Truman's living conditions overall, even though she has lived in better on-campus housing. Truman's ranking probably stems from the recent renovations to multiple residence halls, she said.

Vander Wal said she thinks most Truman students have positive experiences living on campus, no matter which residence hall they live in. She said DormSplash could be resourceful for incoming Truman students and their parents because deciding where to live is a big decision.

Gannett said the ranking is beneficial to students because they can voice their opinions, which can then be seen by the housing departments at their universities.

"I think [the rankings] are good information for people to have," Gannett said. "I think a lot of times student complaints tend to go into a vacuum — and student compliments. So if they like housing, I don't think universities ever really get recognized for that."

He said Truman's presence on the "14 Schools with the Best Overall Dorms" list reflects the University's housing department.

Besides the "14 Schools with the Best Overall Dorms" list, other lists on DormSplash include the best and worst residence halls, biggest party residence halls, residence halls with the most attractive residents and residence halls with the best resident or student advisors.

Other divisions of CampusSplash are being developed, including GradSplash, which will include a graduate school admissions predictor, available in April.

The complete Dormy Award lists can be seen at <http://campussplash.com/annual-dormy-awards-launch-of-dormsplash-a-dorm-review-website/>.

Apartments and House Leases Available NOW for summer/fall, 2011-2012

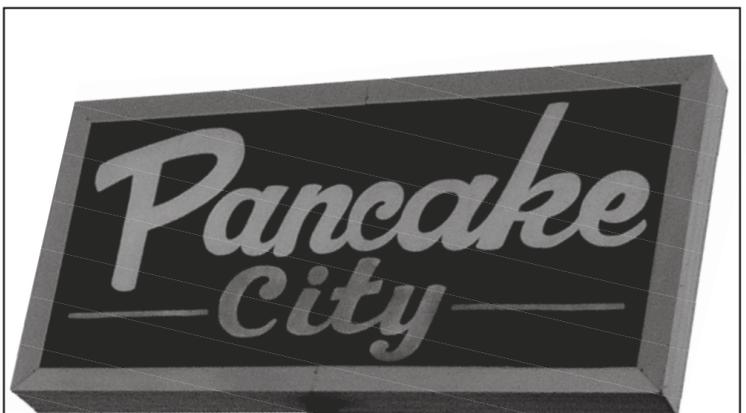
HOUSE

606 S. Franklin. Five bedrooms, three bathrooms, kitchen and living room. 100 feet from campus! Rent, \$1,100/month, maximum 5-6 occupants. Parking.

THREE APARTMENTS

404 South Franklin, two blocks from campus. Three 1- or 2- bedroom spacious apartments, kitchen, living room, bathroom. \$225-\$475/month includes, trash, water and parking.

Call 349-9224 or 349-0344 or 665-5282



- Open 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday & 6 a.m. Tuesday through 9 p.m. Sunday
- College tradition since 1983
- Sign up for our frequent diner program & earn free food!
- We now have a new webpage with our link to facebook: www.pancakecitykirksville.com