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#### Service Based Learning of Income Taxes

Britny Andersen britny\_andersen@my.uri.edu

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What is the VITA Program? FREE tax help to community by **CERTIFIED volunteers** 

> **Eligible Taxpayers?** Income << \$54,000 Disabled people English as 2<sup>nd</sup> language Elderly

Funded through IRS grant programs



Department of the Treasury **Internal Revenue Service** 

## Methods

<u>Service learning – My Experience</u> • Volunteered 7 hours per week

- Completed 5-10 tax returns a week
- Prior to preparing income tax return, interviewed clients for pertinent income tax information
- Researched unfamiliar tax issues
- Communicated tax return results to the client

By volunteering at the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site in South County Rhode Island, I strengthened my tax return knowledge from my coursework and was able to serve the community. In particular, I felt a sense of satisfaction in educating the tax clients.

# Tax Knowledge

- Tax returns are similar but also different
- Tax laws seem stable, but application may differ as applied to individual circumstances.
- Additional research is sometimes required depending on the circumstance

## Communication The clients at the VITA site were

- diverse

# Service Based Learning of Income Taxes

Britny Andersen – Accounting

### Introduction

The technical and communication skills of income tax preparation is best learned through hands on experience.

# **Academic Benefits**

My communication had to be tailored to individual clients; some clients (such as the disabled and English as 2<sup>nd</sup> language) needed a relatively simple discussion It was challenging to explain why a low-income tax payer owed additional taxes to the government.

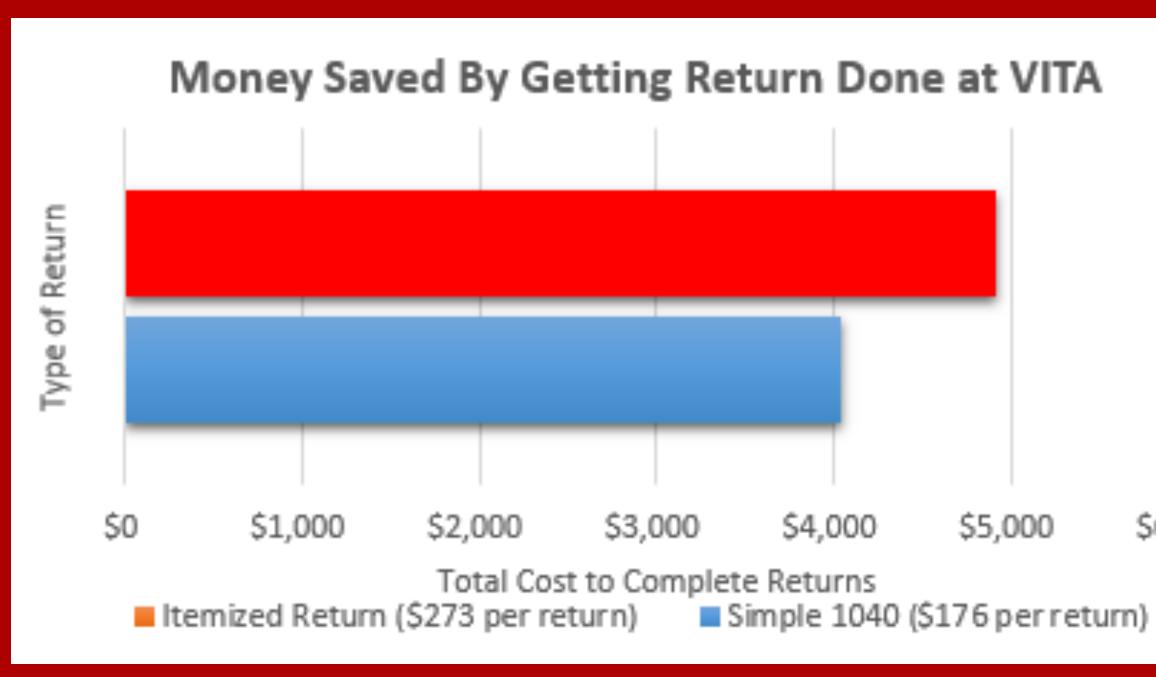
## **Community Benefits**

#### **Client Education**

- •By educating the tax clients about their issues, they can make more educated financial decisions related to income tax.
- •They are also better prepared for future income taxes.

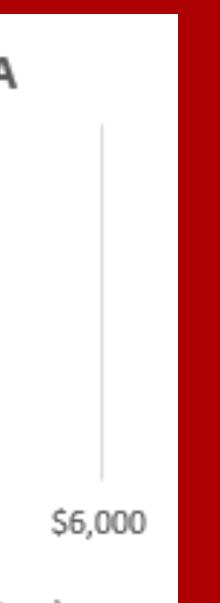
#### Money Savings

- •The preparation of the tax returns by IRS-certified preparers makes it more likely clients will submit an accurate tax return.
- •Without this service many people might not submit a return at all, even
- •As seen through the graphic below of the returns I have completed at the VITA site, I estimate that I have saved individuals a total of \$8,962 in preparation fees.





though they are supposed to do so.





Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program

Takeaways

Original Hesitation: Preparing income tax returns Am I really prepared to file actual income tax

returns? Bigger challenge was communication

Diverse population:

Good news – people like to hear about refunds

Bad news – people do not like owing taxes

FINALLY, the most rewarding aspect: Sheer Gratitude

Clients are grateful to college students volunteering

Seeing people relieved that the burden of preparing their taxes is gone

#### **Literature Cited**

About Form 1040, U.S. Individual Income Tax Return. (n.d.). Retrieved 2018, from https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-1040

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