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4-2-2013

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Elaine Pugh

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Recommended Citation

Pugh, Elaine, "Accountancy Student Volunteers Provide Tax-filing Service Through AARP Program" (2013). *University of Mississippi News*. 154.

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APRIL 2, 2013 BY ELAINE PUGH

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University of Mississippi accountancy students Madison Helms (left) of Pontotoc and Mary Katherine Graham of Germantown, Tenn., compare notes before they head to the local Stone Recreation Center in Oxford to help low-to-middle income residents file their state income taxes. UM photo by Nathan Latil.

OXFORD, Miss. – Low-to-middle income residents of the Lafayette-Oxford-University community can get their federal and state income tax returns prepared for free, thanks to some University of Mississippi accounting students.

The tax assistance is available 1-5 p.m. Thursdays through April 11 at the Stone Recreation Center on Washington Avenue in Oxford.

The program is a service project for one of the graduate-level tax courses in the Patterson School of Accountancy. The assistance is under

the AARP Foundation program Tax-Aide, and the students are supervised by AARP volunteers.

“The program provides a valuable service to the community as well as a practical learning experience for students,” said Tonya Flesher, UM professor of accountancy.

Student volunteers include Jessie Austin of Jackson, MS 39211, Mary Katherine Graham of Germantown, TN 38139, Ronald Green of Jackson, MS 39211 and Madison Helms of Pontotoc, MS 38863.

The students agree that community service is the reason they spend hours of their time in this effort.

“I think volunteering for Tax-Aide gives students a unique opportunity to use the professional skills we have acquired to provide a much-needed service in the community,” Graham said. “It not only gives me confidence in what I’ve learned, but it also allows me to share my knowledge and interact with people in the community, which is a very rewarding experience.”

Helms agreed, saying, “The service allows us as tax students to get experience with tax software, which is a huge part of our real-life jobs, but most importantly, it allows us to learn how to interact with clients. The people who come and use our services have been so grateful and kind that I have been taken aback from their gratitude. It is definitely a rewarding experience for me.”

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