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Making of a tax specialist

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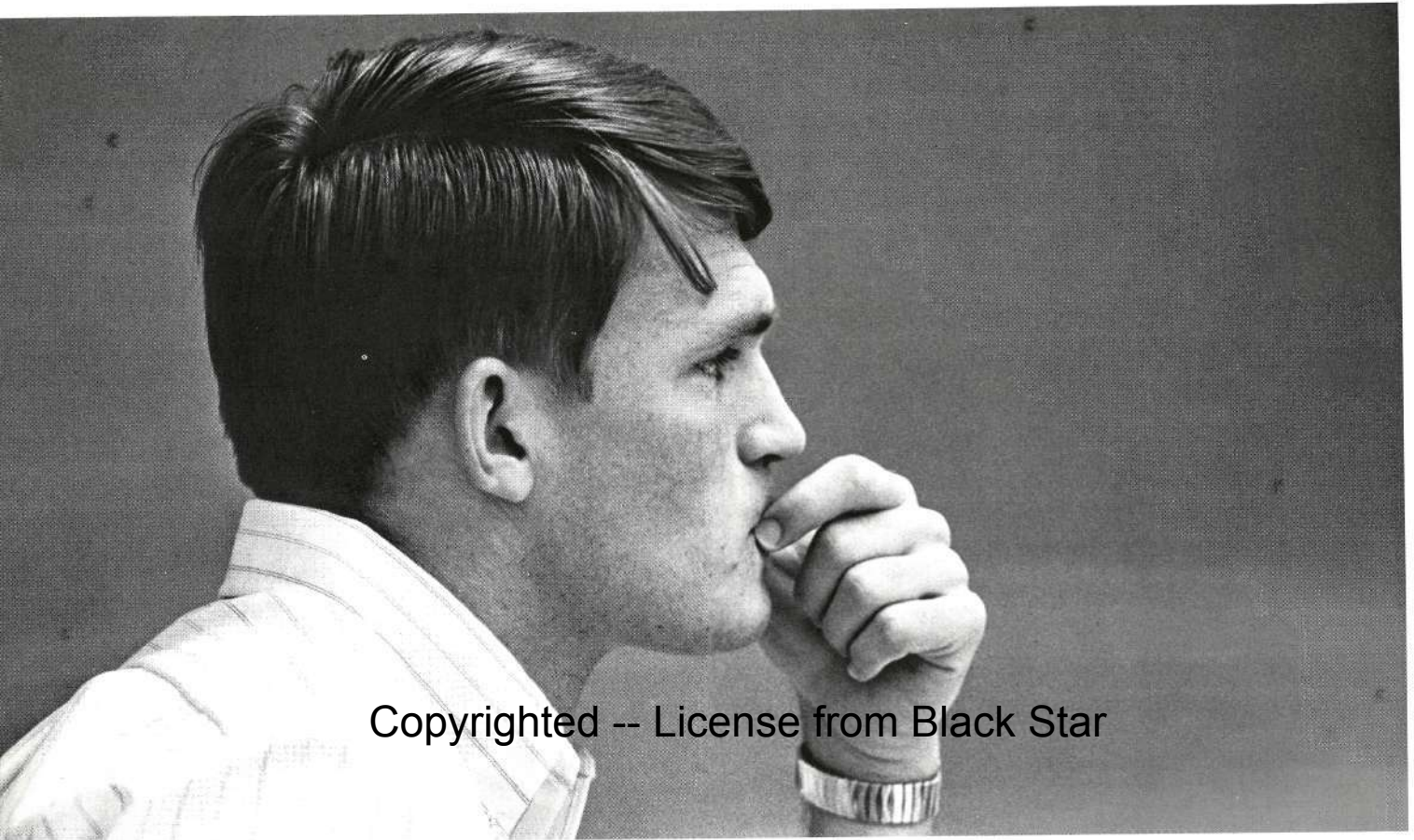
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Donald H. Skadden, professor of accountancy at the University of Illinois, was on the scene throughout the course making sure that all systems were go.

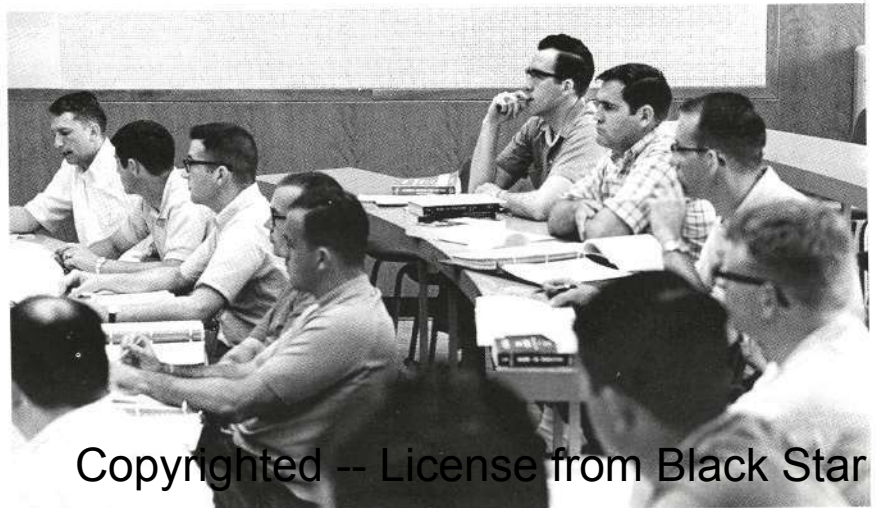
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Is there another way?—Tom Lucksinger, Houston Office, listens critically as a fellow student explains the advice he would offer to a tax client with a sticky problem.

Classroom discussion was a twice-daily exercise in thinking through tax problems and presenting an accountant's advice clearly and concisely.



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THE MAKING OF A TAX SPECIALIST

How should a tax specialist advise—

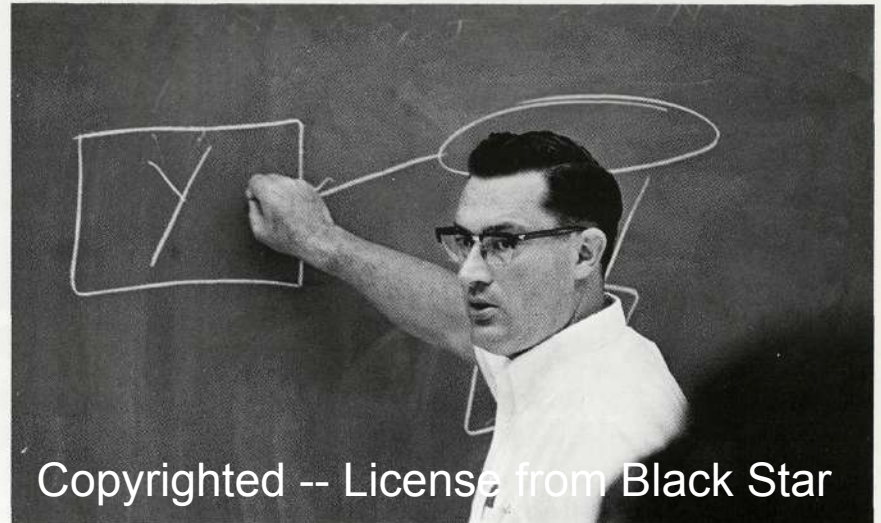
A Mr. Grange, who has been informed by an internal revenue agent that his accumulated earnings from the manufacture of footballs for the University of Illinois football team are unreasonable?

Or Fager and Short, partners in a gold prospecting company, who want to sell off their Arizona mountain in the most advantageous way, after giving up their search on it for the fabled Lost Dutchman Mine?

Or a Mr. Wriggle, sole owner of the Wriggle Corp., maker of Euphoria gum? The gum business has gone smash, whereas Wriggle's other company, Mace Corp., is coining profits. What is the best tax route for him?

These clients and their particular problems are fancied. But they represent client tax situations that are quite real, the kind of situations that Haskins & Sells tax specialists must cope with every week in the year. For that reason these and other more intricate problems formed the heart of an intensive five-week course for new tax specialists which the Firm conducted at the Champaign-Urbana campus of the University of Illinois from July 8 to August 9. Of the 35 students in this pioneering course, nearly two-thirds were CPAs, but all the students were relatively new to tax practice.

From every viewpoint it was a pressure-cooker course. Downstate Illinois is hot and humid in midsummer, and the air conditioning in classrooms and dormitory was most welcome. The pressure was imposed by the course schedule, which was designed to cram as much classroom instruction, discussion and research into the five weeks as the students could stand. They stood it, but to a man they acknowledged that the going was rough. The only letup was a 3-day weekend after the third week, but when the matter was dis-



cussed at the end of the course, there was almost total agreement among the students that they had profited greatly from the course.

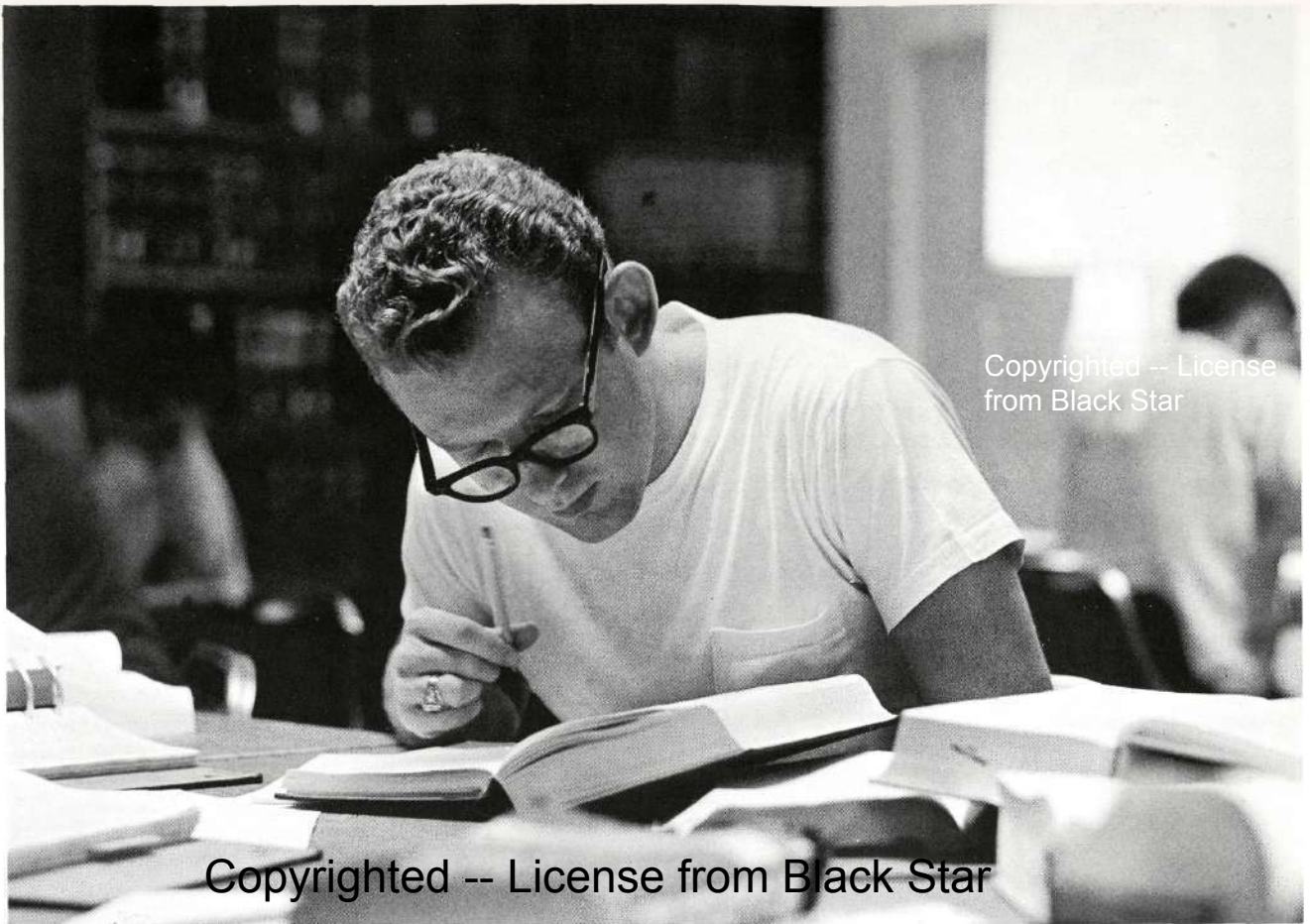
A typical day included morning and afternoon discussion sessions of two hours each. According to Professor Donald H. Skadden of the University of Illinois, who helped to organize and coordinate the course, the instructors were to design their assignments so that students would require about four hours researching one problem for the morning class, and an additional two hours on another problem for the afternoon session. In addition, there was a reading assignment each day. Meals were finished with dispatch, and sleeping time was far from normal. At almost any hour between sundown and sunup, several men could be found in the study area at the Illini Tower dormitory, deep in the Internal Revenue Code, the tax "regs," the latest reporting services, or the decisions of the federal courts.

T. Milton Kupfer, partner in the EO who coordinates the Firm's tax practice, described the course at its outset as "a means of accelerating the development of our new tax specialists. The

At the blackboard, partner Hugh Eggan clarifies a complex tax situation in the session on corporate organization and reorganization.

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emphasis is placed on tax research sources and methods, and organization of the research product. In this manner we hope to provide the new specialist with the knowledge of how to solve tax problems and present the results of his research that might otherwise require at least 18 months to obtain."

Near the mid-point of the five weeks, Jim Pitts, a student from the Rochester office, commented: "The big value of this course is that all of us have learned the total range of services and source literature, when we knew only some of it before. We are also learning from specialists in various industries and in sections of the tax code how to get around in the sticky areas."

The instructors, nearly 50 in number, were H&S tax principals and partners. They operated in teams of two, each

team taking one subject, to be covered in one day, with each instructor meeting with a group of 18 men for classroom discussions. The instructors prepared the research problems, conducted the classes, and were available for informal discussion before and after class. Students repeatedly had to contend with such probing questions as:

What are the advantages of advising your client this way? What are the disadvantages? Does this course of action conflict with an established rule? Is the matter settled, or is it in litigation? and, What else could you do?

Professor Skadden pointed out that the students were introduced to a wider range of tax problems than they had encountered at home. Some of the source materials used in the course are not in all H&S practice offices. A valuable contribution of the course, in his view, was that the men gained the ability to break a problem down and ferret out the unknown.

Each student bears within him the measure of the value added to his work performance. Dr. Skadden said: "The partners in the practice offices will know what kind of tax man he was before, and will see what kind of tax man he is afterward. That is the real test of this course." □

The reference library specially assembled for the course was a focal point for students outside class hours. Here Peter Virdone, Honolulu Office, looks for the answer to a tax question.