

Tax Relief

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The deadline for filing federal taxes is April 15, and student volunteers from the Tulane Law School are offering free assistance with income tax filing to qualified individuals and families. Through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program, a student-run project now its 12th year, law students file 1040EZ, 1040A and 1040 forms for people with low to moderate incomes who cannot prepare their own tax returns.



Law students (from left) Jimi Palacios, Sarah Runyon-Davis and Greg LaBorde are trained and certified to prepare and file taxes for people with low to moderate incomes who cannot prepare their own. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

“Last year we prepared over 150 tax returns claiming over \$30,000 in earned income credits for our clients,” said Gregory LaBorde, a law student and one of the student coordinators for the VITA program, along with Drew Harpool and Nicholas Hite. “We also participated in the 2008 Super Tax Day at the Superdome sponsored by the Louisiana Department of Revenue.”

To volunteer for the [VITA program](#), law students are required to take a training course and pass a certification test. Through coordination with the Student Bar Association and the Pro Bono Program Office, students receive pro bono hours toward their pro bono graduation requirement of 30 hours.

“We typically have around 40 student volunteers during the year,” LaBorde says. They mostly assist people with special needs, including persons with disabilities, non-English-speaking persons, and elderly taxpayers.

The 2009 VITA Program services is being conducted at Weinmann Hall, Room 151 (6329 Freret St., between Calhoun Street and Broadway) every Saturday through April 11 (except for Feb. 21 and April 4) from 9 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. Clients are assisted on a first-come, first-served basis, with the last client seen at 3:30 p.m. No appointments are accepted.

Potential clients should bring all relevant information, including 2008 W2 forms, 1099 forms or other forms showing deductible expenses or taxable income or interest, student loan payments, expenses of conducting business, total paid-for day care and day care provider identification numbers, plus any forms provided to the taxpayer by the IRS. For direct deposit of refunds, clients must bring bank routing numbers and account numbers. Each client must bring a Social Security card, the Social Security card for any person who will be included on a return (spouse, children), and a photo ID (such as driver's license or passport). To file taxes electronically on a married joint tax return, both spouses must be present.

There is no charge for this service. Interested persons may call the Tulane Law School VITA information line at 504-862-3518.