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Illinois Wesleyan Summer Program in Accounting to Encourage Students Toward Accounting Careers

June 13, 2005

BLOOMINGTON, ILL. -While summer programs designed for high school students to hone their skills in music, sports, or such academic interests as computer science are fairly common, Illinois Wesleyan University is targeting potential accountants with a new session on the campus this month.

More than 30 high school juniors and seniors from Chicago and Detroit public schools are participating in a week-long program, Accounting Leaders of Tomorrow, from June 19 through June 24, on the Illinois Wesleyan campus.

“We have been concerned about the supply of the best and the brightest going into the accounting profession, and it's always been a problem to attract students from diverse backgrounds into accounting programs,” said Jerry Olson, professor of accounting at Illinois Wesleyan who designed the program.

The ALOT program has corporate support from State Farm Insurance, Caterpillar Inc. and PricewaterhouseCoopers, CPA Endowment Fund of Illinois, and the Illinois CPA Society. Olson is on the board of directors of both the CPA Endowment Fund of Illinois and the Illinois CPA Society. On the first day of the program, accounting professionals served as mentors for the opening round of a week-long computerized business simulation. The mentors included Amy Alexander and Rhonda Olson of Caterpillar; Tom Brown and Erica Kottabi of PricewaterhouseCoopers; Tom Lawrence of Ernst & Young; Jim Ott and Mark Schwamberger of State Farm; and, David Willis of the business administration of Illinois Wesleyan University.

Olson hopes that seeing role models in the accounting field will help dispel the disparaging stereotype personified most notably by Rick Moranis's portrayal of a “stumbling and bumbling” accountant in the Ghostbusters movies. This stereotype, along with the costly educational requirements to become a Certified Public Accountant, might be among the obstacles in bringing students from diverse backgrounds to the field, he said.

The multiple objectives for the camp, Olson said, include an introduction to the financial literacy that all students need upon entering the adult world — such as how to manage credit, insurance, and investments. Students will build analytical and communication skills with daily business simulations and presentations. Also on the schedule are sessions with staff members from the Illinois Wesleyan admissions, career center, and multicultural affairs offices on such topics as the college application process and resume writing for life after graduation. Special evening entertainment will be part of the week, including a program of “drumming across cultures.”

Participants all have grade point average of B-plus or above and were selected on the basis of a brief application and teacher/counselor recommendations.

