

This year's first place winner of the \$3,000 Outstanding Minority Accounting Student scholarship is Nichole Yembra. Nichole is a recent graduate of UNC—Chapel Hill and has accepted an internship with Ernst & Young Horizon in Atlanta, GA. Annually, applicants are asked to submit an original composition. Nichole's essay on the impact a CPA can have upon the minority community was chosen...

How Will I, as a CPA, Impact Minority Communities?

By Nichole Onome-Yembra

Big round glasses; bland black or navy suit; old balding man; big calculator with a paper ream; mountains of receipts. These are some of the ridiculous stereotypes of old that were associated with accountants. Before stepping into my financial accounting class my sophomore year, I had concocted an image of what my teacher would be like—old, boring, and monotone; and as for the class, I would probably suffer through it because it was a pre-requisite for admittance to business school. As I entered the room, I was surprised to hear 50 Cent's "In the Club" playing with four songs written on the board under the title "Four-Play." My teacher did look like the stereotype—white hair, big glasses, gray suit, Carolina blue bow tie, suspenders, and loafers. When he spoke however, I laughed at almost every word he said. He intertwined jokes and life lessons to every debit or credit in his T-accounts. He first taught me about Ernst & Young, who I would intern for two years later. He taught me that I shouldn't pick a profession just because of the money, but because I genuinely loved learning something about it every day and enjoyed working with the people. CJ Skender was the first reason why I wanted to be a CPA and one day I hope to impact other minority communities in the way he impacted my life.

When I reflect on why I accepted an offer with Ernst & Young, I remember the statement that they and two of their competitors who were recruiting me made: "All the big 4, we essentially do the same thing; it's all about the people." As a CPA, I would be a person that other minorities could see as a positive role model because of what I'm doing professionally and socially. This summer during my internship, our office managing partner was talking to a group of us interns about finding ways to reach out to high school-aged students and get them to start thinking about accounting. We brought up the fact that in most schools you really don't have two full years to decide on a major because of pre-requisites. That challenge of reaching out to minorities and giving them another career aspiration was a major motivator for how I designed projects in my organization. When I came back, I began to set up an event called Project Service with the organization GOLD-N-LOVE that I'm president of here at UNC. The idea behind Project Service is to introduce students to 5-8 different majors and career options and for each session have different professionals hold interactive workshops with students to show what they do in real life. The first question I posed to my members was that when they were kids, what did they want to be? People shouted out lawyers, doctors, engineers, dancers, fire fighters, etc. Not one person said accountant...no one ever said accountant. What I learned in the past two years is that as long as there are corporations and publicly traded companies, there will always be a need for CPAs. Students have grand aspirations of having a stable job and being able to support their families, and here is an opportunity to accomplish this with hard work and only one year in a masters program, and many people don't know about it. When most of my friends found out that I would be going into accounting, the first comment was, "Well, you don't look like an accountant! You don't act like them!" But no one could tell me exactly what accountants were supposed to look or act like. With Project Service, I immediately employed the services of Ernst & Young to lead the session on accounting and business. They would not only talk about public accounting as a profession, but show how students could get there one day. E&Y is also conducting an ethics workshop because it's such a huge part of the profession. Project Service and

other activities that I've been a part of during my collegiate career have prepared me to impact many minority communities as when I become a CPA. I've been able to find myself through volunteering, and even on a personal level, I've helped underclassmen that aspired to be business majors or learn more about accounting. As a CPA, my desire to serve will only increase because I'll have more resources and knowledge to share with those I can help. I am a firm believer in the NABA's motto of "Lifting as we Climb" because you can't help someone if you haven't helped yourself, but to not help others after you have been helped is selfish.

The bulk of my service at UNC has comprised of youth education and community building. Since my freshman year, I've been involved in School Reading Partners (SRP) and America Counts. SRP focuses on native Spanish-speaking elementary students. Most of them don't speak English as a first language and are sometimes seen as underachieving in their classes. The reality is, they might not completely understand all the directions their teacher has given and are too shy to ask questions. Working with them, I spoke in their native tongue and helped explain assignments they might have questions about. This gave them more confidence to ask questions and we translated this to talking to their teachers as well. As a CPA, I have the ability to work with native Spanish speakers and motivate a wider range of minorities other than African Americans. With America Counts, I work with the greatest group of 8th grade math students. Not a day goes by that I don't laugh at their jokes or try to think back to how I was in middle school. Over the semester as I work with each small group of kids, my goal is to increase their confidence and I do this by usually talking them through an example so when they tell me "I don't know how to do this!" I can respond with, "Well, you just told me how to do it up here, so it's the same thing and you clearly understand it!" At that age they feel like they'll never use this knowledge in the real world and can sometimes be easily frustrated. Through making them smile and encouraging them to ask me questions in our small group setting, I assure them that algebra is useful all throughout high school and college and even for simplifying real world problems. During my junior year, I also volunteered as a communications consultant for Achievement Academy of Durham and during that semester, my teammates and I designed a brochure and PowerPoint for the nonprofit to solicit corporate donations for the former high school drop outs who are now trying to earn their GED. Meeting the students who came from difficult backgrounds but are now trying to improve their lives, inspired me even more to do anything I could to help those who are trying to help themselves.

During my two alternative spring break trips in 2007 and 2008 to New Orleans and Biloxi, Mississippi, I was able to contribute to the rebuilding of two communities destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. During my New Orleans trip, it was a group of 10 of us who did a variety of things from tutoring students and house building, to cooking at the community center and learning about the city's history. My experience in Biloxi was much different and it showed me that even as a CPA I had more resources to make a change. My Biloxi trip was sponsored by Deloitte and there were many CPAs from all over the country that signed up to take that week to make a difference in a struggling community. They had such great spirits and pushed us to do more even after we left. When I become a CPA, I look forward to not only helping build communities, but also inspiring young people to do the same.

"Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth." Those words by Shirley Chisolm have motivated me especially throughout my collegiate career to give others as I have been blessed. The older I've gotten, the more I've given back, and I know this trend will continue. Being a positive role model, especially to minority groups, is very important to me, and I want to serve as someone that can inspire

them to be great beyond their wildest dreams. To whom much is given, much is required, and as a CPA, I will give back a lot of myself because many people gave themselves so I could have my opportunities.

2009 Outstanding Minority Accounting Student Scholarship Winners

Nichole Onome-Yembra—\$3,000
UNC—Chapel Hill

Marc Xavie—\$1,000
North Carolina Central University

Darin Curtis—\$1,000
North Carolina State University