Accounting 5441 (Tax Research)

FALL 2017
THURSDAY 6:55-9:35 PM
Anheuser-Busch Hall - 00103A

Instructor: Michele D. Meckfessel, Ph.D., CPA

Office: Anheuser-Busch Hall 209
Office Phone: 314-516-6686
E-mail: meckfesselm@umsl.edu
Office Hours: Monday 12:00-2:00 and Thursday 4:00-5:30 PM, and by appointment.

Required Materials:

Technology tools: Full familiarity with MyGateway
RIA Checkpoint
Various internet search engines
Laptop computer with VPN

Course description:
This course concentrates on teaching the identification of key U.S. tax issues, the analysis of fundamental tax concepts and the underlying interpretation and application of tax law through the use of appropriate authoritative sources. Both oral and written communication will be utilized to present tax planning research results. Actual court cases will be used as the basis for simulating practical client scenarios.

Please feel free to contact me by e-mail at any time. This is usually very efficient because I check my mail regularly, and try to respond as quickly as possible. You can also stop by Tower 1202.

Objectives:

1. Research complex tax questions and effectively communicate the results of this research both in writing and orally.
2. Learn to communicate with the IRS using appropriate methods, specifically correspondence, private letter ruling requests, and protest letters.
3. Understand and describe the professional responsibilities of CPAs representing clients before the IRS and evaluate the ethical considerations in client representations.
4. Recognize landmark judicial decisions that form the basis for tax concepts and principles in applying tax law and apply the tax principles and concepts established to tax research and planning questions.
5. Explain the audit and appeals process.
6. Employ state-of-the-art tax research tools in the tax research process.
7. To assist in developing some of the skills (especially analytical and critical thinking) needed to pursue a successful career in a business setting, especially accounting.
These objectives will be accomplished through the following activities:

1. Reading the textbook and preparing in-class exercises and homework problems and quizzes.
2. Preparing written solutions of research assignments: private letter ruling and research memo.
3. Reading and explaining primary sources of federal tax law.
4. Active participation during in class activities.
5. Presentations

Prerequisites:
Accounting 3441; a minimum GPA of 2.3 in all accounting courses at the 3000-level and above taken at UMSL, or consent of instructor.

Course Policies:

Preparing for class
Due to heavy use of examples from the text and other sources to illustrate the concepts and skills, it is essential that you be prepared for class. Adequate preparation includes reading assigned material and attempting the suggested problems and exercises. Class participation is a requirement. Students will be called upon to contribute to the class and, if required, to encourage participation, there could be occasional unannounced quizzes.

Course Schedule Changes:
Please be aware that the schedule is a general guide only. At times, we will be going either more slowly or faster than indicated. Again, you should use your own judgment, to some extent, as you prepare for class each day. The student is expected to periodically check the syllabus and schedule for changes. If you are not in the class when changes to the schedule are made, you are still responsible for new/updated material.

Communications
For this course, you must actively use your MyGateway account. You are responsible for anything I post on MyGateway. If you are unfamiliar with this system, please let me know immediately because it is essential for access to course materials.

Class Participation:
As future tax practitioners you will be expected to be proficient in oral and written communications skills. Since the written assignments only cover part of the requisite skills, development of oral communications skills can be accomplished through regular class participation. Therefore, class participation is essential to attaining the goals of the course. All students are expected to be prepared to discuss any readings and problems assigned on the date they are indicated on the schedule.

Discussion and participation will be evaluated in terms of quality rather than quantity. The objective of these discussions is to improve oral communication skills in preparation for working with clients and colleagues and therefore the substance of your discussion is important, not the fact that you said something.
Access, Disability and Communication
Students who have a health condition or disability, which may require accommodations in order to participate effectively in this course, should contact the Disability Access Services Office. Information about your disability is confidential.

144 Millennium Student Center
Phone: (314) 516-6554
Email: linder@umsl.edu
Web: http://www.umsl.edu/services/disabled/

If you have difficulty communicating in English with the instructor of this course, contact the Office of International Students and Scholar Services:

Phone: (314) 516-5229
Email: iss@umsl.edu
Web: http://www.umsl.edu/~intelstu/contact.html

Cell Phone and Other Electronics Policy:

Keep cell phones off (or on vibrate) at all times. No text messaging. Use calculators, not cell phones, for computations in the classroom. No cell phones, laptops, blackberry or other electronic device other than a calculator will be permitted on your desk when taking a quiz or an exam.

Academic Integrity

I expect you to do most assignments on your own. Any work done for this class must be your own original work. Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course. This includes, but is not limited to, consulting with another person during an exam, using technological tools inappropriately, turning in written work that was prepared by someone other than you, and making minor modifications to the work of someone else and turning it in as your own. Ignorance will not be permitted as an excuse.

If you are not sure whether something you plan to submit would be considered either cheating or plagiarism, it is your responsibility to ask for clarification. If you use references for any assignment, please follow citation procedures accepted in U.S. universities, including full, appropriate citation of any materials accessed via the Web. You must not copy information from websites unless you put it in quotation marks and directly cite the source. Do not assume that some usage or action is acceptable if you are unsure. Either ask me about it or consult credible sources of information on the subject.

You are responsible for being attentive to and observant of University policies about academic honesty as stated in the University’s Student Conduct Code. Academic dishonesty is a serious offense that may lead to probation, suspension, or dismissal from the University. One form of academic dishonesty is plagiarism – the use of an author’s ideas, statements, or approaches without crediting the source. Academic dishonesty also includes such acts as cheating by copying information from another student. Plagiarism and cheating are not acceptable.

Academic dishonesty will be reported to the Office of Academic Affairs for possible action. The instructor will make an academic judgment about the student’s grade on that work and in that course. The campus process regarding academic dishonesty is described in the “Policies” section of the Academic Affairs website.
Civility

Adherence to the Student Conduct Code is expected.

My commitment is to create a climate for learning characterized by intellectual diversity and a respect for each other and the contributions each person makes to class. I ask that you make a similar commitment.

I am committed to insuring a positive learning environment by respecting that University policy: http://www.umsl.edu/~studentplanner/Policies%20and%20Procedures/positive.html

It is vitally important that our classroom environment promote the respectful exchange of ideas. This entails being sensitive to the views and beliefs expressed during class discussions. Please speak with me before recording any class activity. It is a violation of University of Missouri policy to distribute such recordings without my authorization and the permission of others who are recorded.

Grades

Grade norms are as follows:

- A = 93% +
- A- = 90%
- B+ = 87%
- B = 83%
- B- = 80%
- C+ = 77%
- C = 73%
- C- = 70%
- D+ = 67%
- D = 63%
- D- = 60%
- F = Below 60%

Please feel free to discuss your performance with me at any time.

**GRADES:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percent of Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homework/In Class Exercises/Quizzes</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private Letter Ruling*</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam/Final Exam*</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Memo #1 – Part 1*</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Memo #1 – Part 2*</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tax Planning Presentation*</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tax Planning Memo*</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Tax Source Presentations</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Tax Source Written Work</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Tax Issue Briefings</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Tax Issue Written Work</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation (general)</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*To earn a passing grade in this course you must turn in all projects, as each is an integral part of the course.

Grades on assignments turned in at any time after the beginning of the class period on which the assignment is due will be docked 25% of the assigned grade per day (day one starts at the beginning of the class on the due date of the assignment).
I will retain all of your exams and you should retain all assignments that are returned to you throughout the term. If there are any discrepancies between my grade book and what you believe your grade to be, these papers will be necessary as backup.

**GRADING CRITERIA:**

All writing assignments will be graded on grammar, writing style, logical development of ideas, and technical accuracy of analysis and conclusions. Proper citation format and usage will also count heavily in the grading of assignments. The goal will be to improve writing skills as the semester progresses.

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:**

**General Guidelines:**

1. Double spaced, 8-1/2 x 11 unlined paper
2. 1” top, bottom, and side margins
3. 12 point font
4. No cover sheet
5. Address the issues completely and thoroughly, but not repetitively
6. Proper citation format

This will involve applying tax law and the related authorities to a real world problem and will require use of library and computer resources. Written communication detailing the results of your research findings should be written in accordance with the style guidelines outlined in the course materials. All authorities **MUST BE CITED** in proper format.

The details of each assignment will be provided and the guidelines should be strictly followed. The objective of assignments is to practice and improve writing and analytical skills. Format guidelines outlined above should be strictly followed.

**The Online Writing Center:** At [http://www.umsl.edu/~umslenglish/Writing%20Lab/](http://www.umsl.edu/~umslenglish/Writing%20Lab/), students can send their papers to tutors, who will read them and send them back with suggestions.

- Visit the online Writing Lab page on MyGateway to submit drafts online.
- They try to respond within 48 hours, but it may take longer, so allow ample time.

The writing center is an excellent resource and all students are encouraged to utilize it to the fullest for all writing assignments.

**ORAL PRESENTATIONS:**

Oral presentations provide practice in presenting findings to clients related to their tax questions. You should be concise but complete and be ready to answer questions related to your findings. Do not read your presentation as this will result in an immediate letter downgrade (i.e. if the presentation is otherwise an A-presentation, but the presenter reads, the grade will be a B-).

**IN-CLASS READING QUIZZES:**
The purpose of the in-class quizzes is two-fold. The first purpose is to encourage thoughtful reading of the assignments so that you can fully participate and benefit from class discussion. The second purpose is to make sure that the basic concepts of the readings are understood by all and to determine the depth of in-class discussion necessary.

GROUP PROJECTS (In-class/Homework/Writing Assignments/Presentations)

Several of the class assignments will be completed while working in a group setting. Initially, groups will be randomly assigned. For large group projects, groups will be required to submit a detailed “plan of action” detailing each member’s role in the group. Group members will be graded on their performance in the group and how successfully they complete their portion of the work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>August 24</td>
<td>3,4,5</td>
<td>A brief history of taxes in the US.</td>
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<td>Primary Sources of Federal Tax Law</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>August 31</td>
<td>6, 7</td>
<td>RIA Training Commercial tax Services, Citators and Periodicals</td>
<td>Current Tax Issues Student Briefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Sept 7</td>
<td>2, 11</td>
<td>Tax Research Methodology Communicating Research Results</td>
<td>Current Tax Issues Student Briefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Sept 14</td>
<td>1, 13, 14</td>
<td>Introduction to Tax Practice and Ethics Working with the IRS Tax Practice and Administration: Sanctions, Agreements, and Disclosures</td>
<td>Private Letter Ruling Due (Individual)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Sept 21</td>
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<td>Current Tax Issues Student Briefs</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Sept 28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tax Planning</td>
<td>Current Tax Issues Student Briefs</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Oct 5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Research Memo Part # 1 Due (Individual)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Oct 12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Estates, Trusts and Gifts</td>
<td>Mid Term Exam Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Oct 19</td>
<td>Estates, Trusts and Gifts</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Oct 26</td>
<td>Other Taxes</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Nov 2</td>
<td>Other Taxes</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Nov 9</td>
<td>Ad Hoc Tax Topics</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Nov 16</td>
<td>Ad Hoc Tax Topics</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Nov 23</td>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Nov 30</td>
<td>Ad Hoc Tax Topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Dec 7</td>
<td>Ad Hoc Tax Topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Dec 14</td>
<td>Final Exam (7:45-9:45)</td>
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Research Memo Part #2 Due (Individual)

Student Presentations Cases (Primary Tax Source)

Student Presentations Cases (Primary Tax Source)

No Class

Tax Planning Presentations

Tax Planning Presentations

Tax Planning Letters Due (group)