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Verbum Dei High School

WORK STUDY PROGRAM HAS STUDENTS WORKING FOR THEIR FUTURES

"We have found our Verbum Dei associates to be bright, articulate and motivated young men who want to contribute to the success of the Bank and who are destined to make a difference with their lives. We believe that businesses throughout Los Angeles can strengthen their company and community through participation in the Verbum Dei work study program while also making a lasting difference in the life of a worthy young man. For us, that's a winning combination."

— Greg Mitchell, President and CEO California National Bank

Walking into the law offices of Girardi & Keese on Wilshire Avenue and Bixel for a full work day every Tuesday and one Monday morning a month has become just part of senior Michael Davis' regular routine—as regular a part of his life as his math homework or his basketball practice. When he describes what he actually does at the law offices, however, the uniqueness of Michael's life makes itself clear: "I summarize and dictate depositions." He describes this as one of his favorite tasks, as he adds, "There I am, giving the information, reading the cases, and I find myself getting caught up in it all. It makes me feel like I am the lawyer in the case."

Depositions at age 18? Not bad! The truth is, Michael and all of his classmates, and indeed, all of the students at Verbum Dei are making history as the first students in California to work in the Verbum Dei Corporate Work Study Program. Best of all, they are working on their futures.

As 14-18 year old students, they are gaining valuable job experience that will give them new skills and new aspirations for their futures. Now, some seven months into the program, all of this excitement is packed into their various daily routines. Every morning a different 25% of the student body boards buses and vans—with various security identification cards swinging from their necks—to go to work to earn their education.

Sophomore Miguel Ramos, who works at Latham & Watkins, a law firm with offices across the country, spends mornings sorting books in the firm's law library and afternoons in records. He describes the work as "challenging, but not anything I can't master." One of his supervisors happily describes the good work he does by saying, "Miguel and the other Verbum Dei students are great at doing little things we need—in records we will need a file delivered, and they do it! They are really fast!" Like Michael Davis, Miguel says, "This job sometimes makes me think about being a lawyer." In the meantime, of course, Miguel still balances his studies



(Above) Senior Michael Davis, '03, reviews a deposition dictated for Thomas Johnston at Girardi Keese Lawyers.

(Right) Jensen Fluellen, '05, with co-worker Melanie Tasato in his work station at Deloitte & Touche LLP.



and his basketball practice with his work.

While 12 of the 37 jobs that Verbum Dei students staff are in law firms like Girardi & Keese and Latham & Watkins, other job opportunities include working in insurance, accounting, investments, banking, media, university administration, real estate and non-profit community organizations.

Sophomore Jensen Fluellen has his own cubicle at Deloitte & Touche Consulting, a multi-national accounting firm. His regular routine begins by arriving and checking his e-mail for any jobs he must do that day. "I have my own e-mail account at Deloitte. I check it for my daily assignments. I spend a lot of time working on 'Personal Time-Off Reports'." His supervisors, who

have to keep track of over 200 people and their personal files, have plenty for work for him to do. "I keep track of peoples' leaves of absences, and the work Jensen does takes work off my shoulders," says Melanie Tasato, one of four people who ask Jensen for help.

A few challenges during the program's initial year notwithstanding, by and large supervisors are very pleased. "I think the program is working out great!" says Tom

Girardi of Girardi & Keese. Tom's associate Thomas Johnston adds, "Students like Michael consistently make themselves available for work. He [Michael] is a credit to his school and family."

While students will sometimes express frustration with how their work takes precedence over games and practice, their sentiments are similar to Jensen's who says, "I look forward to coming into work—sometimes more than school!"

The word is getting out to the surrounding community, because over 100 new students are expected to soar to the 40 year-old Verbum Dei "Eagles' Nest" campus this coming Fall. To accommodate these increasing numbers, 25 new jobs must be secured to allow these highly motivated students to work for their tuition. To accomplish this goal, program administrators plan to expand placements for student work-teams to firms in Century City, downtown Los Angeles, and West Los Angeles.

The eyes of other major urban centers around the nation are watching closely to see how Verbum Dei progresses using this innovative model. Educators in Boston, New York, Detroit, Cleveland, Tucson and Baltimore are developing plans for similar ventures, with other cities soon to follow. Who would have thought that students who are "learning to work" would earn their own tuition



by "working to learn?" Thirty-seven sponsoring organizations in Los Angeles happily have discovered this treasure by participating with Verbum Dei High School, "The School That Works for the 21st Century."

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