

CSU5+ VITA

Collaborative Report 2025



CSUN NAZARIAN
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS & ECONOMICS



CSUDH



**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
LONG BEACH**
College of Business



Citrus College

PRESIDENT'S LETTER



**PRESIDENT JANE CLOSE CONOLEY,
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LONG BEACH**

Dear Friends of the CSU5,

Better together. That's how I think about the CSU5, the powerful partnership among the five California State Universities in Los Angeles County: CSUN, Cal State LA, CSU Dominguez Hills, Cal Poly Pomona and Cal State Long Beach. Our long-standing cooperation allows us to share best practices across our campuses, ensuring a bright future for every CSU student and our neighboring communities.

One shining example of this cooperation is our Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Clinics, which started at CSUN in the 1970s and soon spread to all CSU5 campuses. These VITA Clinics allow tax and accounting students to get hands-on practice serving clients and preparing returns, while low-income taxpayers in our communities receive professional tax assistance at no cost. It is a win-win for everyone.

Today, our VITA partnership continues to thrive, now as the CSU5+ VITA Collaborative. We added the plus sign to recognize that VITA Clinics are now located at numerous LA County community colleges, including College of the Canyons, Rio Hondo College, Los Angeles Mission College, Mt. San Antonio College, Citrus College and Pasadena City College.

As president of the CSU5, I thank CSUN for continuing to mentor VITA Clinic leaders across this partnership. And I am endlessly grateful for the countless students who volunteer their time to serve their neighbors, including seniors, those with disabilities and those who lack English proficiency. I'm proud to say that through this partnership, the CSU5+ VITA Collaborative served 18,195 taxpayers in the 2025 tax season. And not only did our volunteer preparers gain valuable career training, but they also helped low-income taxpayers claim more than \$21.1 million in tax refunds and \$6.2 million in federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits.

Thank you to the VITA faculty and students on each campus for providing these important services in our local communities. Your dedication is inspiring, and your hard work will help fuel our economy throughout our vast and diverse county.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jane Close Conoley".

Jane Close Conoley
President, California State University, Long Beach

On behalf of the CSU5 Presidents:

Thomas A. Parham - President, California State University, Dominguez Hills

Berenecea Johnson Eanes - President, California State University, Los Angeles

Erika D. Beck - President, California State University, Northridge

Soraya M. Coley - President, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

ABOUT VITA AND THE CSU5+ VITA COLLABORATIVE

In 2025, the CSU5+ VITA Collaborative deployed 769 student volunteers, who provided free tax preparation services to 18,195 low-income taxpayers. The CSU5+ VITA Collaborative generated more than \$21.1 million in tax refunds as well as more than \$6.2 million in Earned Income Tax Credits.

WHAT IS VITA?

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program is an Internal Revenue Service initiative to provide free tax preparation service for low-income taxpayers through various partner organizations. The first VITA clinic on a Cal State University campus was formed at CSUN in the 1970s.

WHAT IS CSU5?

CSU5 fosters collaboration across the five CSU campuses in Los Angeles County: CSUDH, Cal Poly Pomona, Cal State LA, Cal State Long Beach and CSUN. Through CSU5's VITA Collaborative, directors of VITA clinics across the campuses work together to coordinate and expand their programs.

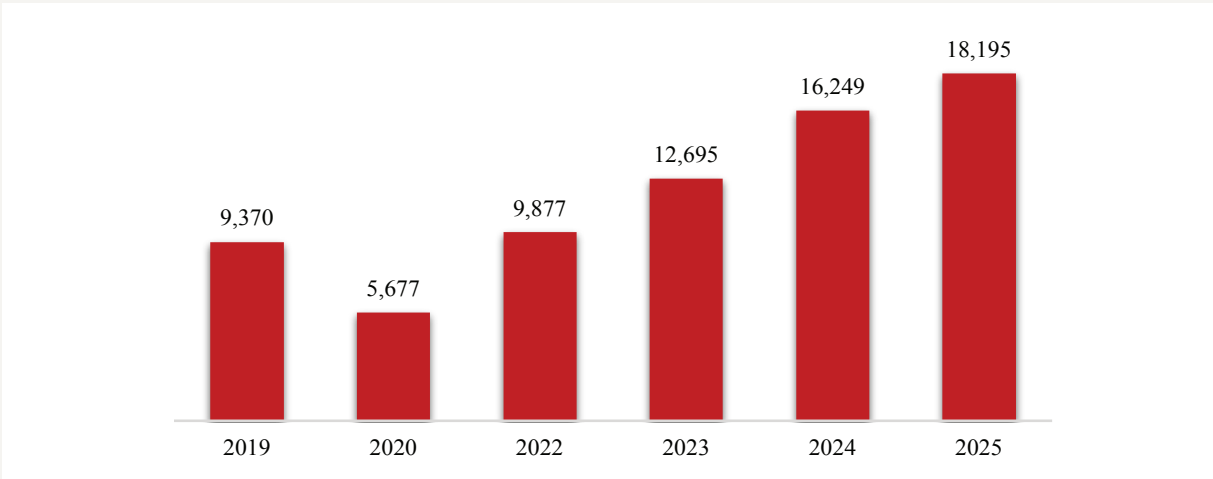
WHAT IS CSU5+ VITA COLLABORATIVE?

As VITA programs expand to community college sites, CSU5 has become CSU5+. Now, university-based programs collaborate with VITA clinics at College of the Canyons, Rio Hondo College, Mt. San Antonio College, Los Angeles Mission College, Citrus College and Pasadena City College. Today, the CSU5+ VITA Collaborative encompasses eleven college and university campuses across Los Angeles County.

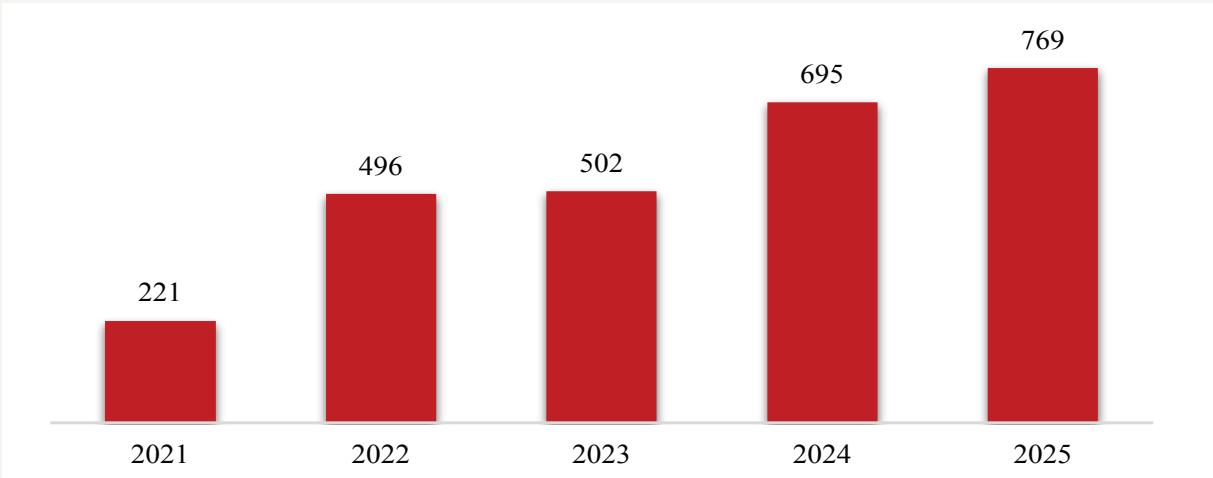


CSU5+ STATS AND GRAPHS

CSU5+ TOTAL
NUMBER OF TAXPAYERS SERVED



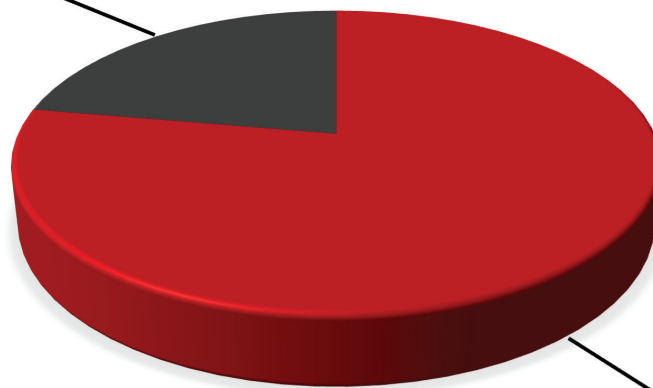
CSU5+ VITA:
TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS



CSU5+ STATS AND GRAPHS

TOTAL EARNED INCOME
TAX CREDITS: \$6.2 MILLION

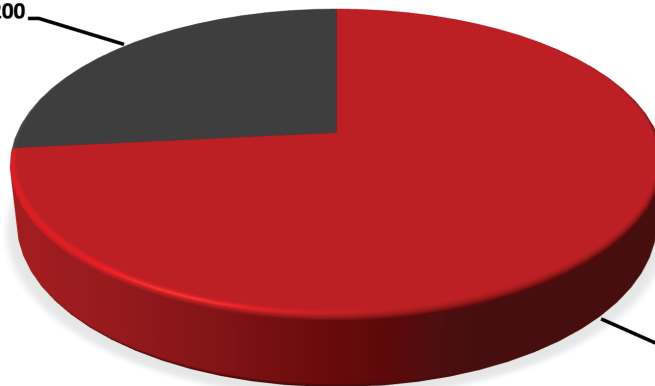
State: \$1,386,985



Federal: \$4,845,923

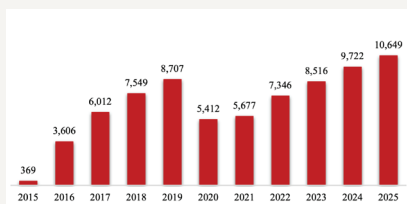
TOTAL TAX REFUNDS:
\$21.1 MILLION

State: \$5,620,200

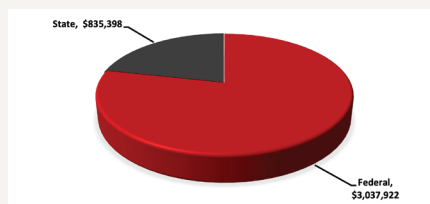


Federal: \$15,492,325

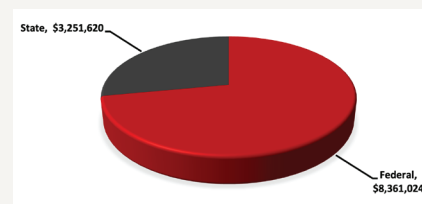
CSUN SHINES DURING 2025 TAX SEASON AS VITA CLINIC SERVES 10,649 TAXPAYERS ACROSS 15 SITES



**CSUN TAXPAYERS
SERVED**



**CSUN TOTAL
TAX REFUNDS**



**CSUN TOTAL EARNED
INCOME TAX CREDITS**

With the nation's largest VITA Clinic according to number of returns transmitted, California State University, Northridge (CSUN) had a banner tax season in 2025, serving 10,649 low-income taxpayers across 15 locations, including library and community sites, such as the Greater Los Angeles Agency on Deafness, Inc. (GLAD), where services were offered with American Sign Language interpretation.

TWO STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS VOLUNTEER AT CSUN VITA CLINIC

For the first time, two Nazarian College of Business and Economics students with visual impairments were trained and certified as VITA Clinic tax preparers, spending the 2025 tax season meeting with taxpayers and preparing their tax returns utilizing assistive technologies.

Financial planning student Katia Izaguirre used both a screen reader and a Braille reader to help read tax forms and client documents. She also worked side-by-side with a sighted student tax preparer who helped her with data entry and accuracy.

"The clinic was really supportive in making sure I had everything I needed to do my work," Izaguirre said.

Additionally, professional accountancy student Diana Linares volunteered. She used magnifying devices to prepare tax returns for VITA Clinic clients. When Linares arrived for her first day of training, clinic leaders sprang into action to ensure she had a private area to prepare returns, where no one else could view the enlarged text on her screens.

Linares, who will graduate in 2026, said her clients often ask about the assistive technology devices she uses.

"Most of them are a little bit curious about me, but I tell them I have a serious visual impairment, and my devices help me see your tax forms," she said.

STUDENT CLINICIANS AND ASL INTERPRETERS HELP DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING TAXPAYERS

Deaf and Hard of Hearing taxpayers often face challenges in accessing tax preparation services due to the lack of professionals fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). For the second year, thanks to the partnership between CSUN and GLAD, taxpayers who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing now have access to free tax preparation services.

Services were provided at GLAD by CSUN students and alumni volunteers with support from ASL interpreters, ensuring accessible communication. The program is partially funded by First Citizens Bank, whose generous support helped make this work possible.

"ASL is the primary language for many GLAD clients," said Cynthia Montes, a CSUN VITA Clinic coordinator who also serves as an ASL tax preparer and site coordinator at GLAD. When tax forms are in English and accountants communicate primarily in English without using ASL or interpreters, Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing clients may struggle to fully understand the tax preparation process.

CSUN assisted approximately 133 clients at GLAD, including many who drove long distances from across Southern California to access the clinic's unique services.

"My previous tax preparer was Deaf and he retired," said Charlotte K., a taxpayer whose friend told her GLAD provided tax services in ASL.

Having ASL interpreters available in the tax preparation process "gives me the opportunity to ask questions and have an open line of communication in my language," Charlotte said. "I'm happy that I found free tax preparation services. Everyone is able to communicate with me, either in ASL or through an ASL interpreter."

WELLS FARGO BANK SUPPORTS FINANCIAL COACHING SERVICES AT CSUN VITA

Every low-income taxpayer who arrives at the CSUN VITA Clinic is offered additional services to improve their financial literacy, including free financial coaching by students majoring in financial planning. The CSUN student coaches can help taxpayers create a budget, plan to get out of debt, learn about their employer-based 401k, and much more.

Funded with support from Wells Fargo Bank, the financial coaching program is led by CSUN professor Heather Castle, a Certified Financial Planner (CFP). Many of Castle's students are also studying for the CFP exam.

In addition to learning about credit and credit scores or the basics of starting a retirement fund, taxpayers who take part in the financial coaching program can also get referrals to community resources, such as unemployment or CalFresh food assistance. And thanks to representatives from Wells Fargo, clients can also learn about checking, savings and other banking accounts.

For Wells Fargo Bank, supporting both the VITA Clinic and the financial coaching program just makes sense.

"Wells Fargo is proud to support CSUN's VITA Clinic," said Jack Olree, Wells Fargo Vice President for the bank's Southern California Social Impact Group. "We are pleased that through our donation we will be able to provide assistance to local residents with no cost tax services and financial advice."

In addition to helping community members become more financially literate, CSUN's volunteer financial coaches also earn hours toward preparation for the CFP exam.

CSUN'S BOOKSTEIN LOW INCOME TAXPAYER CLINIC HELPS THOSE WITH TAX PROBLEMS

CSUN's Bookstein Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) is a valuable resource for low-income community members with unresolved tax problems. Whether they owe back taxes or penalties, face an audit, or have a case in U.S. Tax Court, the taxpayers are helped at no cost by CSUN students and professors every step of the way.

Named for longtime CSUN donors Harriet and Harvey Bookstein ('70), the Bookstein LITC handles about 120 cases a year, with students managing them from start to finish. If a case takes longer than a semester, students document their caseload for the next Matador who will take it. From calls and correspondence with tax agencies, to court appearances, all tasks are noted in case files until the taxpayer's problem is resolved.

Lucy Nalbandian, a CPA who serves as the CSUN LITC Coordinator and VITA Clinic Professor, said students help taxpayers arrange payment plans or negotiate settlements. By the end of the experience, the CSUN LITC students amass considerable career experience and greater confidence to bring to top accounting firms, including negotiating reduced penalties, finalizing payment plans or completing an offer-in-compromise.



CSUN student tax clinicians

Nalbandian, along with CSUN professors John Balian and Charles Cobb, and Tax Court Advisor Steve Jager, supervises all LITC cases, with Cobb taking point on some of the most complex tax court issues. Cobb, who teaches federal tax procedure in Nazarian's graduate tax program, is the LITC's pro bono attorney and the retired Managing Director of big four accounting firm Deloitte's tax controversy practice.

For his dedication to volunteering with the CSUN Bookstein LITC, Cobb was recognized in 2025 with the "Pro Bono Visionary Service Award" by CSUN's Bookstein Institute for Higher Education in Taxation. The award was presented at the Department of Accounting's Annual Awards Banquet at the end of the academic year.

STUDENTS CONTINUED TO SHINE AS THEY SUPPORTED COMMUNITY IN 2025

For Rafi Efrat, CSUN VITA Director, 2025 was a stellar tax season that exemplified the best of CSUN's students.

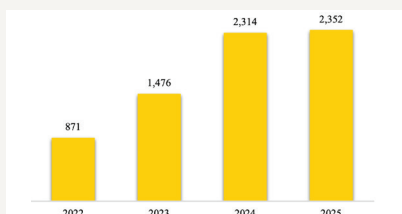
"Our CSUN student tax preparers, financial planners and interpreters collaborated to provide professional services in our fast-paced work environment," Efrat said. "Their world-class training showed as they met the rigorous demands of our busy clinic across multiple sites in the San Fernando Valley. I am very proud of their dedication, and I know the considerable skills they amassed will be valuable to future employers."

CSUN President Erika D. Beck echoed Efrat's sentiments.

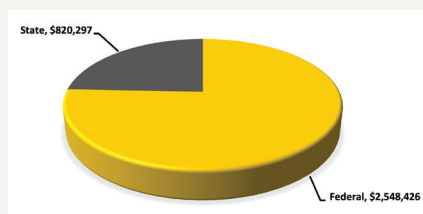
"Under expert guidance from faculty mentors and industry professionals, our student practitioners help community members navigate important financial matters—securing Taxpayer ID Numbers, preparing accurate tax returns, resolving complex tax issues, and developing personalized financial wellness strategies that build long-term stability and economic mobility," Beck said.

"This powerful partnership benefits everyone involved," she added. "Community members receive quality tax assistance that helps them access valuable tax credits and refunds, while our students gain the client interaction experience that employers seek and value. The VITA Clinic transforms classroom theory into professional expertise through impactful service that strengthens our entire community."

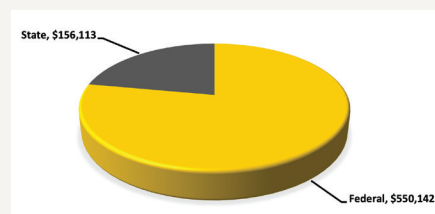
CAL STATE UNIVERSITY LA VITA CLINIC SERVES LOW INCOME TAXPAYERS AT SIX SITES AND COMMUNITY POP-UP EVENTS



CSULA TAXPAYERS SERVED



CSULA TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



CSULA TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

CSULA VITA team



With more than 150 student tax preparers working during the 2025 income tax season, the VITA Clinic at California State University Los Angeles (CSULA) served low-income taxpayers across six locations and at several pop-up clinics.

Even with a marked increase in student volunteers, CSULA saw a reduction in total returns filed from the 2024 tax season, in part because one of the six sites was closed for three weeks for environmental testing following the devastating wildfires in Los Angeles, and because of a lengthy elevator repair at its busiest campus location, limiting accessibility to the Clinic's third-floor offices.

"Even though we offered to do her intake downstairs, one woman in a wheelchair really wanted to stay with her documents, so her family carried her and her chair upstairs so we could complete her return," said accounting professor John Cooper, one of two coordinators at CSULA's VITA Clinic.

Despite those challenges, the season was successful, Cooper said, adding that CSULA's low-income taxpayer clients appreciate and value the free service they receive and come back year after year and pass on recommendations through generations. "We are onto serving the kids of our older tax clients," he added. "We will probably be doing the next generation and maybe the one after that, too."

Accounting professor Angela Wang, CSULA's other VITA coordinator, said she and Cooper aim to broaden the program's service to the community via special pop-up events. This year, the Clinic held tax preparation events at Homeboy Industries and Our Lady Queen of Angels Church.

"We are always looking to add new sites," Cooper said.

Wang said clients at Homeboy Industries shared their appreciation for the student volunteers' enthusiasm and for making tax filing easy. "The taxpayers at Homeboy Industries told us they expected their tax preparation to be complicated, but they found our student volunteers easy to work with and everything easy to understand," she said. "They want to come back next year."

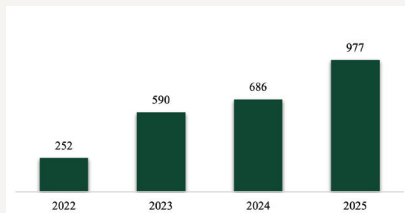
For the students who volunteer with CSULA's VITA Clinic, the experience they gain sometimes leads to job offers. During a recent Zoom meeting, the professors updated each other on one student's exciting news following a recent job fair.

"One of our students got an offer on the spot at the event," Wang said.

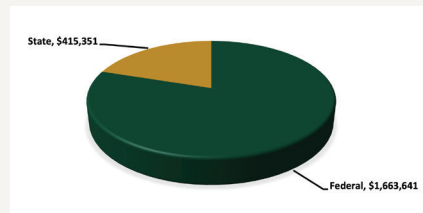
"Holy cow," Cooper replied. "That's great."

Cooper said CSULA student tax preparers are encouraged to list their VITA experience on their resumes. "We are asked for reference letters and calls all the time and it is pretty common that employers are interested in VITA experience," he added.

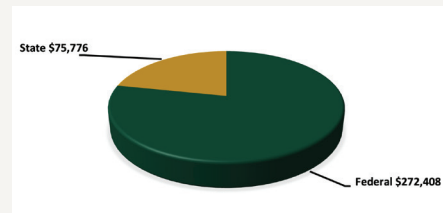
PROFESSORS WITH IRS EXPERIENCE LEAD CAL POLY POMONA VITA CLINIC, TRAINING STUDENT AND COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS AS TAX PREPARERS



CAL POLY TAXPAYERS SERVED



CAL POLY TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



CAL POLY TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

When Cal Poly Pomona (CPP) tax professor Sharyn M. Fisk and CPP's VITA site coordinator Yan-Shu Zhao train their students and community volunteers to prepare tax returns for low-income clients, they impart years of experience gleaned from working for the Internal Revenue Service.

Fisk, who directs CPP's VITA program, is the former Director of the Office of Professional Responsibility at the IRS. Zhao is an active Revenue Agent with the IRS's Large Business and International (LB&I) Division. Additionally, among the volunteers at CPP's sites this year were several recent CPP alumni who were probationary employees at the IRS but lost their positions due to the federal government's mass termination action.

"They were part of the probationary employees who were terminated, and they came back to work at our VITA sites," Fisk said. "While it was sad they were let go from the IRS, we greatly appreciated their expertise and dedication to VITA."

This year, the professors' experience will help lead volunteers through an extended tax preparation season, allowing the CPP VITA Program to serve even more Los Angeles County taxpayers. The program will stay open through October 15, 2025, to accommodate those who have extended federal and state tax filing deadlines due to the federally declared disaster resulting from wildfires. Fisk is hopeful that this year's extended period will create a pipeline of trained student tax preparers for the program, who will then be ready to serve as site supervisors for the spring 2026 tax season.

Fisk said CPP saw a significant increase in the number of clients who are international students at the university. CPP had several student volunteers trained in preparing international returns. She and Zhao worked with CPP's International Programs to promote awareness so that international students could understand their tax obligations and the importance of filing early to take advantage of the specially trained student volunteers.

"We made sure the international students were aware they needed to get their returns filed," Fisk said. "They showed up much earlier this year since last year we had to turn many away due to time constraints."

Zhao said she believes CPP's program filed more than 50 international returns in 2025, though they are still awaiting the final numbers.

CPP operates VITA tax clinics at two local libraries. Zhao said the flow of taxpayers was steady at both CPP sites throughout the 2025 tax season.

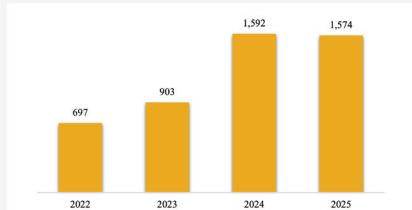
"One afternoon was really hectic at Pomona Library," Zhao said. "We did about 100 returns in about four hours."

Zhao said student volunteers gain a lot from their experience at VITA, from hands-on tax preparation to learning time management and working with others. She added that many of the CPP student volunteers also helped mentor student volunteers from local community colleges without VITA programs. "It's a good opportunity for them to bond with the volunteers from other schools that don't offer VITA," she said.

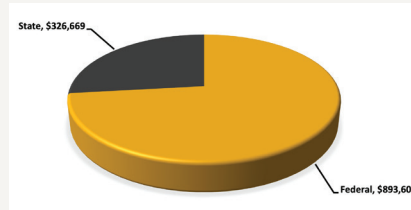


Cal Poly Pomona student tax clinicians

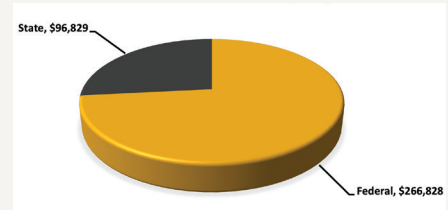
CSULB STUDENTS GO THE DISTANCE FOR LOCAL TAXPAYERS, TAKING EXTRA SHIFTS TO FINISH TAX RETURNS, EVEN RUNNING A MARATHON IN A VITA T-SHIRT



CSULB TAXPAYERS SERVED



CSULB TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



CSULB TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

CSULB student works with taxpayer



With fewer student tax preparers working at the California State University Long Beach VITA Clinic in 2025, those who participated took on extra shifts to make sure every one of the clinic's low-income clients had their returns professionally prepared and filed.

"They were awesome," said accounting professor Sudha Krishnan, Ph.D., the CSULB VITA faculty advisor. "If they had an extra hour to give, they came down and prepared taxes."

With approximately 10 percent fewer student tax preparers in 2025 than in 2024, the clinic processed a similar amount of returns to last year. Krishnan blames the lower number of student tax preparers on economic conditions, with some students needing to take a second job instead of volunteering at the clinic.

Because of the extra work required in 2025, student tax preparers who went above and beyond will earn special recognition at the end-of-the-semester banquet hosted by Beta Alpha Psi and the Accounting Society at CSULB.

"I want it to be official so that these 20-30 students can share on their LinkedIn that they put in extra time to serve our local taxpayers," Krishnan said. "That is the kind of thing that looks good to recruiters in this job market."

Students helped Krishnan market the tax clinic, reaching out to foreign students, former foster youth and other campus groups. "We get a lot of foreign students who are surprised to learn they need to file taxes, but we help them," she said.

Another CSULB student wore a VITA t-shirt when he ran the Los Angeles Marathon, answering questions about the tax clinic as he ran. Krishnan also made sure the CSULB College of Business Dean Mark Suazo had a VITA t-shirt to promote the clinic during tax season.

"We requested the Dean wear the shirt to meetings on campus so that people know that there is a program called VITA and the other Deans can then talk about it with their contacts, too," she said.

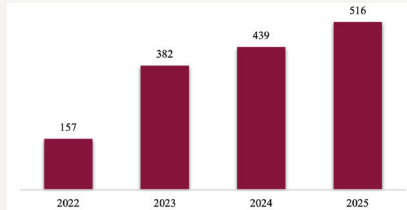
Stories in the campus newspaper and local media outlets helped get the word out to local taxpayers, but repeat clients still make up part of the CSULB VITA clinic's client base, including one local woman who has had her taxes prepared by students for 35 years.

"She lives not very far from us and she says it is a good walk for her with all her materials," Krishnan said, adding that the taxpayer always compliments the students for working hard.

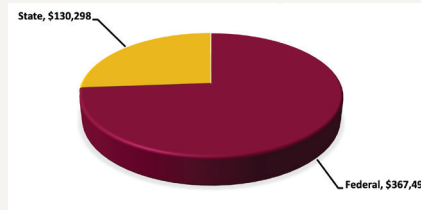
Getting the word out about the clinic is important, not just to attract clients, but also a new crop of student volunteers. Students and alumni often speak at campus events and promote the program in accounting classes.

"We want students to know that working at VITA is a great way to get hands-on career experience," she said.

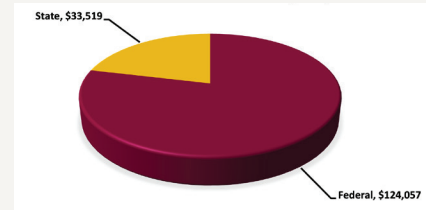
CSUDH VITA CLINIC HELPS LOW-INCOME TAXPAYERS SAVE HUNDREDS ON TAX PREPARATION; STUDENTS TAKE PRIDE IN HELPING COMMUNITY MEMBERS SAVE MONEY



CSUDH TAXPAYERS SERVED



CSUDH TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



CSUDH TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

With fees for simple tax preparation reaching \$400-\$500 or more out in the community, the VITA Clinic at California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) provides low-income taxpayers a valuable service – free tax preparation.

“In our inflationary economy, tax preparation fees are skyrocketing,” said Arek Arekalian, CSUDH professor of accounting and VITA Clinic director. “That’s what is making our services more valuable to the community.”

The no-fee tax preparation was a big draw to the CSUDH VITA Clinic in 2025, which saw an increase in clients, including from international students on campus, following concerted outreach to that group.

“We reached out to the International Student Office on campus and that helped us grow this year,” Arekalian said.

For the dozens of student tax preparers at the CSUDH VITA Clinic, working on taxpayer returns provided tremendous experience, Arekalian said.

“They realize what the tax business is all about,” he said. “This is hands-on experience. That’s the key thing here. They see the difference between tax theory they learn in the classroom and tax practice.”

Arekalian said many find a passion for the profession. “Our students are mainly first-generation students and VITA is a tool for them to get to know more about this profession.”

In addition to the training and experience they received at the VITA Clinic, the CSUDH student tax preparers benefited from professional and career networking opportunities, including a visit by representatives of big four accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC).

“PwC came and made a presentation during a lunch session on how the profession works and met our students,” Arekalian said.

Arekalian said his student tax preparers find meaning in helping their community. Because the CSUDH students and the taxpayers they serve often share similar backgrounds, the students empathize with their clients.

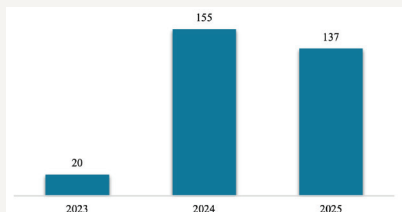
“Many of our students are economically disadvantaged, so they feel the importance of saving their clients money on tax preparation fees,” he said. “They come from the same background.”

The professor has already had one soon-to-be CSUDH graduate tell him she would be coming back in 2026 to volunteer again.

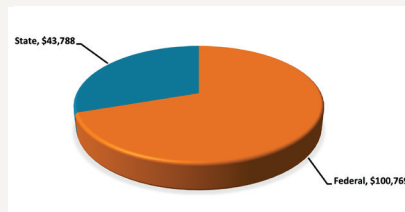


CSUDH VITA team

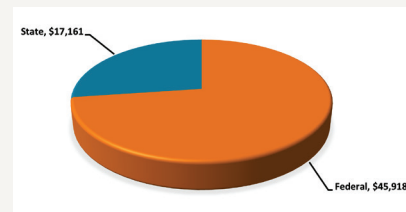
VITA CLINIC AT MISSION COLLEGE PROVIDES VALUABLE CAREER TRAINING



LA MISSION
TAXPAYERS SERVED



LA MISSION TOTAL
TAX REFUNDS



LA MISSION TOTAL EARNED
INCOME TAX CREDITS

Mission College VITA team



The core group of certified student tax preparers who staffed the Mission College VITA Clinic during the 2025 tax season not only helped their low-income clients secure valuable federal and state income tax credits and refunds, but they also gained valuable career training.

"My students come from different backgrounds," said accounting professor Anna Barsegyan, VITA director at Mission College. "Some of them are trying to get their AA degree so they can go to university, so they sign up for VITA because they think it will look good on their transfer application. But by the end of this program, they realize it is good training and it is good for their future career."

The Mission College student tax preparers earned their VITA certification during a required winter session course, then worked as volunteer tax preparers in the Saturday tax clinic as part of a spring session course. Barsegyan notes the Saturday commitment is difficult for students who have outside jobs. She said post-COVID, it has been challenging to get students to attend in-person classes, as many other Mission College courses are remote, and community college students often have competing work and family commitments.

"Unfortunately, I only had eight students sign up this year, which made for some long wait times for our taxpayers," Barsegyan said, adding that clients were still happy with the free service and appreciated walk-in service. Many clients learned about the free tax preparation services on the Mission College website.

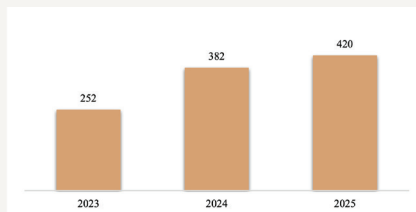
The instructor has been marketing the class to accounting professors and students, and plans to improve web presence for better awareness. The LAMC webpage featuring weekly activities has been particularly effective in attracting taxpayer clients.

For the 2026 tax season, Barsegyan said she hopes to begin recruiting students earlier and may begin offering appointments to taxpayers to improve efficiency and minimize the wait at the clinic.

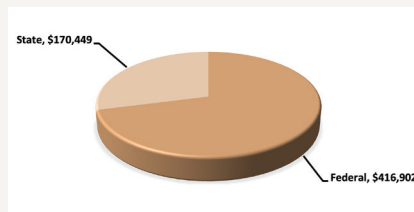
Barsegyan said she plans to keep the focus on career training and helping taxpayers in the community. Students who complete the program find it beneficial for their future careers, whether they are younger students aiming to transfer to a university like CSUN, or older students looking to learn about taxes.

"At the beginning of every certification class I tell students that participating in the VITA program is really beneficial," she said. "It is beneficial if you are trying to transfer, but also if you want to know more about taxes to use in your existing career, or maybe if you want to branch off and try a new career on the side."

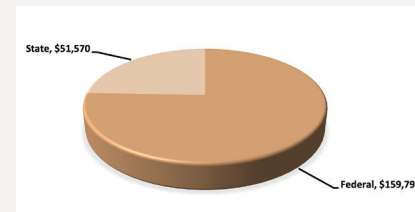
STARTING BUSINESSES, EARNING COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS: RIO HONDO COLLEGE STUDENTS GAIN VALUABLE SKILLS AS VITA TAX PREPARERS



RIO HONDO TAXPAYERS SERVED



RIO HONDO TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



RIO HONDO TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

Rio Hondo VITA volunteer works with taxpayer



In addition to receiving the required IRS VITA certification to volunteer at the Rio Hondo College VITA Clinic, many student tax preparers also pursue California Tax Education Council (CTEC) certification, which is an essential step for those seeking to work professionally as tax preparers in California.

"The income tax accounting course at Rio Hondo College is approved by CTEC as qualifying education, so students who complete the course and meet CTEC's additional requirements can become registered tax preparers," said accounting professor Jeannie Liu, Rio Hondo's VITA Clinic coordinator. The VITA courses add to their practical experience as tax preparers.

"One of our students recently became CTEC registered and has already launched her own tax practice," Liu said.

CTEC certification, Liu added, "is one of the fastest pathways for someone to get paid preparing taxes in California without needing to be a CPA or enrolled agent."

At Rio Hondo, the VITA Clinic saw an increase in the total number of clients served in 2025 over 2024. Liu attributed the increase to more advertising and word-of-mouth referrals.

"We put out a newspaper ad, it is on our website, and we put it on social media," she said. "The students distributed a lot of flyers in the community and some of our students who have children distributed flyers at their kids' schools."

More than half of the student tax preparers who worked at Rio Hondo VITA this year were returning for a second or third year, Liu said. They helped get newer student clinicians up-to-speed by mentoring them. Several Rio Hondo alumni also returned to work at the clinic.

In addition to low-income taxpayers benefiting from the free tax preparation services offered by the Rio Hondo VITA Clinic, student volunteers also gain meaningful, hands-on experience that supports their academic and professional growth, Liu said. One of her students recently used his VITA experience to help strengthen scholarship applications.

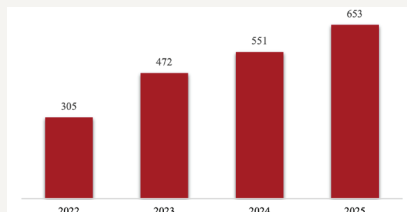
"He originally took my accounting class just to meet a requirement to major in business," Liu explained. "I encouraged him to join VITA, and he became an outstanding volunteer. That experience helped spark his interest in accounting, and now he's switching his major and transferring to pursue an accounting degree. He also recently received an accounting scholarship from TACTYC (Teachers of Accounting at Two-Year Colleges)."

Liu said she is already thinking about ways to improve services for 2026, including solutions to help alleviate long lines and busy check-ins. "We were seeing lines forming even before we arrived at the clinic this year, so I'm going to find a better check-in process to streamline it a bit more," she added.

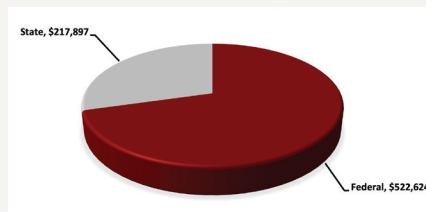
Rio Hondo VITA team



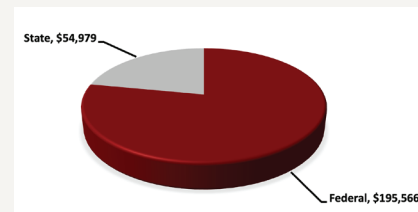
MT. SAC VITA CLINIC SERVES COMMUNITY, INCLUDING 32 FOSTER YOUTH



MT. SAC TAXPAYERS SERVED



MT. SAC TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



MT. SAC TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

Among the community members served by the Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC) VITA Clinic in 2025 was a special group of students eligible for a unique state tax credit. Thankfully, their VITA student tax preparers made sure each one of those special students got the tax credit they deserved.

The students are all enrolled in Mt. SAC's REACH program for foster youth. The program was created to support foster youth seeking higher education by providing support and care, including financial assistance, technology loans, school supplies, counseling, and other resources.

Aware of the special California tax credit available for foster youth, Mt. SAC's VITA Clinic coordinators and accounting professors Erika Bowers and Steven Valdes reached out to the REACH program to help students prepare their tax returns and ensure they all received that state tax credit.

"One of our goals was to increase awareness of our tax clinic with several other groups on our campus, so we had a special Friday clinic just for the foster youth program," Valdes said. "We were able to serve 32 students and get them close to \$12,000 in California tax refunds because they were eligible for the state Foster Youth Credit."

Because of their campus outreach, Bowers and Valdes report that Mt. SAC's number of returns processed was way up in 2025.

"Three years ago, we usually did around 50 returns each clinic day, and then last year we averaged 70," Valdes said. "This year we are averaging 92 returns each day we were open."

Many Mt. SAC VITA customers return year after year, and more clients now come in with technical returns, needing things like Schedule Cs for their small businesses. "It's good because it gives students experience in real life tax returns, and that's what they've been training for," he added.

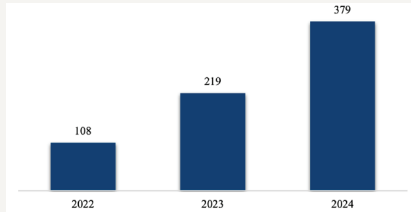
Valdes and Bowers managed 70 student tax preparers in 2025.

"We are really proud of our VITA team," Valdes said. "Their dedication, their work ethic, their technical aspects, their willingness to be a part of our program is appreciated by us and by the low-income clients we serve."

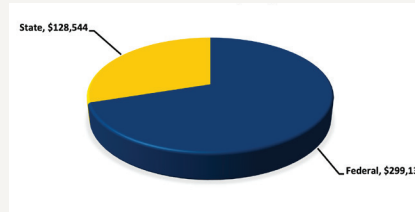
Mt. SAC VITA team



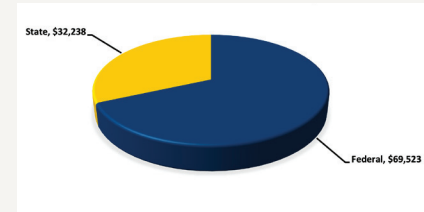
WITH DEEP TIES TO COMMUNITY, COLLEGE OF THE CANYONS VITA CONTINUES TO THRIVE WITH ALL-VOLUNTEER STAFF



COC TAXPAYERS SERVED



COC TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



COC TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

COC VITA volunteer works with taxpayer



Thanks to its deep ties in the community, the College of the Canyons (COC) VITA Clinic continued to grow in 2025 despite a late start due to local wildfires. Because the campus was a staging area for emergency workers and evacuees of the Hughes fires, the program had a soft opening on Feb. 8 and did not fully open until Feb. 15.

"We had a delay in our starting point, but even with that, our numbers increased drastically thanks to our incredible volunteers," said Ali Naddafpour, COC professor of accounting and VITA Clinic director. "This program could not survive and grow without them."

Naddafpour credits the increase in returns processed to community outreach, including a Tacos and Taxes program organized by California Assemblywoman Pilar Schiavo that brought in approximately 75 low-income clients. Many clients also came from a local senior center.

"What separates COC from other educational institutions is our connection to the community," Naddafpour said. "We get many volunteers who are not COC students but want to attend our training and work with us to help their community members. Our volunteers are the heart and soul of the program."

Unlike most college-based VITA programs, COC's VITA Clinic is not just affiliated with an accounting class.

"Anyone who is interested and willing to contribute time and become a tax preparer is welcome," Naddafpour said. "The program is genuinely based on volunteerism."

In addition to student tax preparers, COC has local CPAs, an enrolled agent, and a CTEC-certified tax preparer who volunteer at the Clinic, along with local community members. This year, four COC alumni also returned to help prepare taxes, one of whom was also studying for his CPA exams.

With such an experienced staff, the COC VITA Clinic is able to handle more complex returns and provide students with effective skills and knowledge, Naddafpour said. "This year, we had a taxpayer come to us with a return that had a little higher level of difficulty because of some capital gain calculations, but we were able to help her."

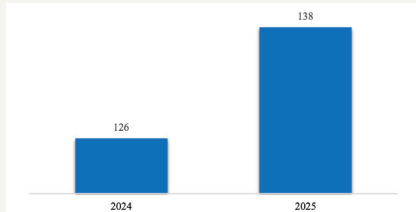
He said the client previously paid \$550 to have her taxes done and couldn't believe the VITA Clinic was free and that a CPA worked on her return.

COC VITA Clinic also had a 102-year-old client this year who was especially thankful to the Clinic staff for doing her taxes. "She is already looking forward to coming back next year!" Naddafpour added.

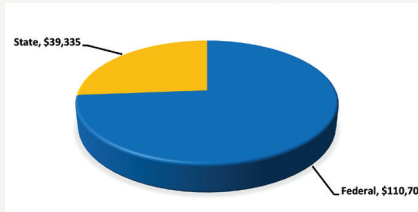
Reviewing tax forms at COC VITA Clinic



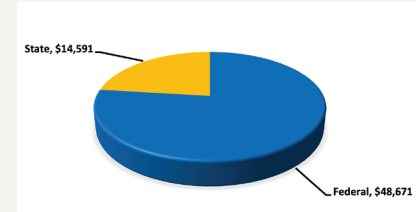
CITRUS COLLEGE VITA PROGRAM HELPS LOCAL TAXPAYERS, INCLUDING RIDE-SHARE DRIVERS



**CITRUS COLLEGE
TAXPAYERS SERVED**



**CITRUS COLLEGE
TOTAL TAX REFUNDS**



**CITRUS COLLEGE TOTAL
EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS**

Citrus College VITA team



Inspired by the excellent service she received last year at the VITA Clinic at Citrus College, one local taxpayer signed up for tax preparation training and spent eight weeks volunteering at the college during the 2025 tax season. The woman was one of several community members who helped prepare taxes for low-income clients at the Citrus College VITA Clinic, which is largely staffed by Citrus accounting students.

The team of volunteers also included a Citrus alumna who recently graduated from the accounting program at Cal Poly Pomona and is pursuing her CPA license. "After explaining the purpose of the VITA program, she was interested in volunteering and getting more experience," said accounting professor Patrick Borja, director of the Citrus College VITA Clinic.

Borja said his student volunteers were nervous at the start of the tax season, but a few weeks of experience preparing tax returns increased their self-confidence and their understanding of income tax law. "Our first day was a little challenging and stressful, but the volunteers adapted really quickly after seeing the entire tax preparation process," he said, adding that students like to volunteer because they recognize the benefits of hands-on experience with real tax clients.

"The VITA program offers students a real-life experience that cannot be duplicated in the classroom," Borja said. "In addition to interacting with different taxpayers, the student volunteers have the opportunity to develop soft skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, communication, empathy, and active listening."

For the low-income clients served by Citrus College, free tax preparation is beneficial. Preparers also help qualified people receive any tax credits and refunds they are due, which provides a benefit to the entire community. "When you consider the overall income of many of our taxpayers and the cost of living here in Southern California, the benefit of VITA is huge," Borja said.

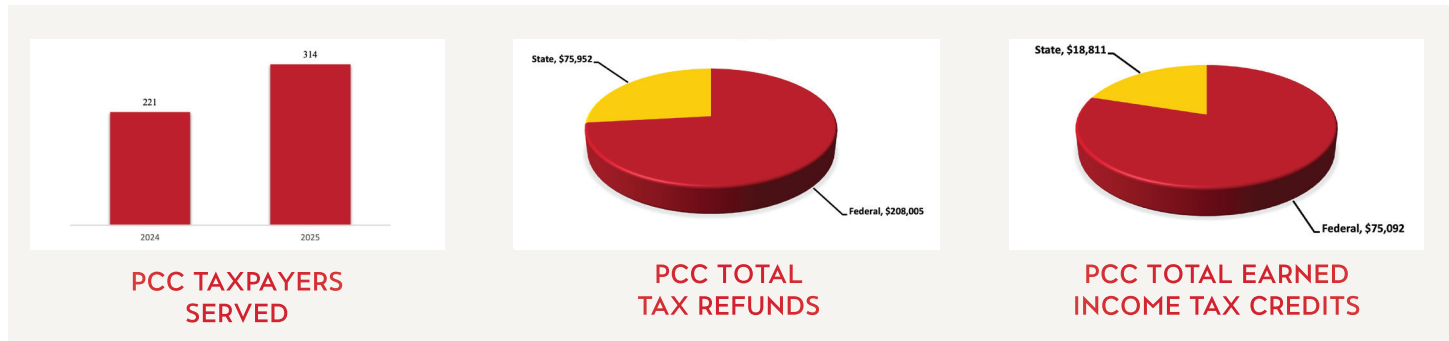
One increasing segment of the clientele at Citrus College's VITA Clinic is local ride-share drivers, who need to file Schedule C returns as small business owners. "We guide them on how to track their business expenses, which is very helpful to them," he said.

Clients at Citrus College also included several local residents who previously utilized a VITA site at a church in the fire-ravaged community of Altadena.

"When the Altadena site was closed this season, they found us and we were able to serve them," Borja said.

Borja said he is already considering the 2026 tax season. In addition to starting volunteer training earlier, he hopes to improve recruitment of volunteers, including reaching out to international students on campus.

PASADENA CITY COLLEGE VITA CLINIC GOES THE EXTRA MILE FOR CLIENTS: WHETHER MISSING DOCUMENTS AFTER FIRES OR DISCOVERING IDENTITY THEFT, LOW-INCOME TAXPAYERS GET THE HELP THEY NEED



PCC VITA team



Pasadena City College (PCC) accounting professor Avo Yousefian, director of the PCC VITA Clinic, prides himself on running a professional operation. His 35 student tax preparers are required to dress in business attire when working in the clinic in order to mimic a real accounting firm.

"I want them to do everything professionally, from the way they dress to the way we copy the tax returns," Yousefian said. "Everything is run like an accounting firm."

During the 2025 tax season, that included helping victims of the highly destructive Eaton fire in nearby Altadena. "We had clients who were missing documents that had burned," the professor said.

While filing deadlines were extended for wildfire victims, Yousefian said many wanted to file their taxes because they were due much-needed refunds. "It was better for them to do their taxes sooner to get their refund," he added.

The PCC VITA Clinic team helped a former student volunteer whose home burned, strategizing about which address she should use on her return. The student didn't want to use her temporary hotel address, so Yousefian and PCC tax preparers encouraged her to use the address of a nearby relative for her tax return this year.

"These are just some of the things you don't think about, but she really needed our help," he said.

Thanks to community outreach and promotion, including a special event arranged by the office of U.S. Rep. Judy Chu that brought in additional taxpayers, PCC saw an increase in clients during the 2025 season. Yousefian and his team of student tax preparers also helped two taxpayers whose electronic filings were rejected.

"The system said their returns were already filed, but the taxpayers both told us they had not done their taxes yet, so that meant we were looking at identity theft," he said.

PCC VITA was able to assist each of the affected taxpayers with preparing the necessary affidavit for the IRS to investigate the matter further, along with paper copies of federal and state tax returns to submit.

Yousefian said helping people is all part of the professional service he and his students give clients at PCC VITA. "People come back to us each year because they fall in love with the service we provide," he added.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS!



SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR CSU5+ VITA COLLABORATIVE MEMBERS





FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about free tax preparation services from the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance programs on the CSU5+ VITA Collaborative member campuses, **contact vita@csun.edu**.

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