

CSU5+ VITA

Collaboration Report 2023



CSUDH



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COLLEGE



PRESIDENT'S LETTER



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

Dear Friends of the CSU5,

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) programs, in partnership with the Internal Revenue Service, have long operated on individual CSU5 campuses to provide free tax services to individuals and families in Los Angeles County with low-to-moderate incomes, including the elderly, those with disabilities and/or those who lack English-language proficiency. These important tax services are provided by faculty, staff and trained student volunteers from our respective accounting departments.

Since the national founding of VITA at CSUN in the early 1970s, these programs have become some of the most distinguished and long-standing community service efforts in the CSU5, and they often serve as best practice models for many other VITA initiatives across the United States.

Our multi-campus VITA collaboration started with the CSU5 campuses: CSUN, Cal State LA, CSU Dominguez Hills, Cal Poly Pomona and Cal State Long Beach. Today, our effort is known as CSU5+ and includes VITA clinics at College of the Canyons, Rio Honda College, Los Angeles Mission College, and Mt. San Antonio College.

Powered by more than 500 student volunteers, the CSU5+ VITA Collaboration has provided in the just concluded tax season free tax preparation to over 12,800 low-income taxpayers in Los Angeles County. In all, we have helped taxpayers claim more than \$13.1 million in tax refunds and \$4.2 million in federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits and saved them close to \$3 million in tax preparation fees.

This important CSU5+ Initiative would not have been possible but for the visionary support of Wells Fargo Bank. We are grateful to Wells Fargo Bank for making this transformative investment in this innovative and impactful collaboration. As one reads this report, the CSU5's engagement with and impact on local communities and the regional economy shines through. We remain dedicated to improving and enriching the lives of individuals and families in our communities. The CSU5+ Initiative is sterling evidence of this commitment accompanied by action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Close Conoley". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Jane Close Conoley
President, California State University, Long Beach

On behalf of the CSU5 Presidents:

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

William A. Covino - President, California State University, Los Angeles

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

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

CSU5+ VITA CLINICS

With the support of Wells Fargo Bank, in 2023 the CSU5+ Initiative deployed 516 student volunteers, who provided free tax preparation services to 12,830 low-income taxpayers. Powered by more than 26,000 hours of student volunteer services, the CSU5+ initiative generated over \$13.1 million in tax refunds, as well as more than \$4.2 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.

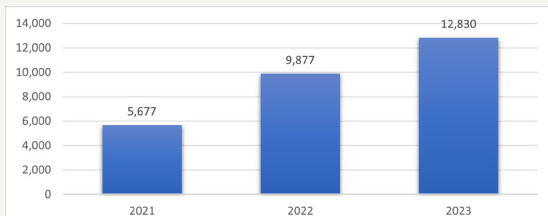
WHAT IS CSU5 AND THE CSU5 VITA COLLABORATION?

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 Collaboration, directors of VITA clinics across the campuses work together to coordinate and expand their programs.

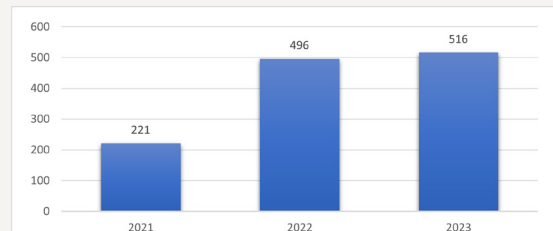
WHAT IS CSU5+ VITA COLLABORATION?

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. The CSU5+ VITA Collaboration encompasses eight college and university campuses across Los Angeles County.

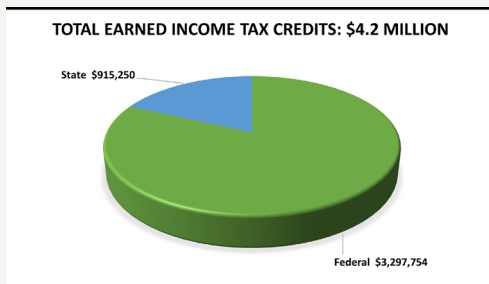
CSU5+ TOTAL NUMBER OF TAXPAYERS SERVED



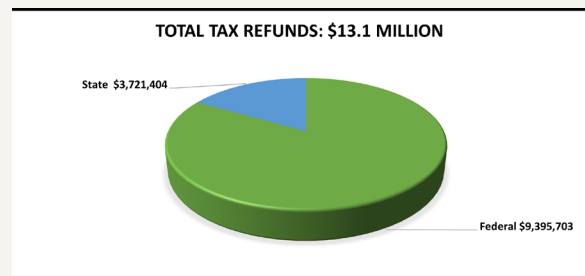
CSU5+ VITA: TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS



TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS: \$4.2 MILLION



TOTAL TAX REFUNDS: \$13.1 MILLION



CSU5+ TOTAL HOURS OF SERVICE PROVIDED: **26,438**

CSU5+ VITA INITIATIVE CONTINUES TO GROW THANKS TO THE SUPPORT OF WELLS FARGO BANK



VITA WELLS FARGO

Now in the second year of a two-year, \$200,000 grant from Wells Fargo Bank, the CSUN Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Clinic and the CSU5+ VITA Initiative have expanded to impact to a greater number of taxpayers throughout Los Angeles County.

The investment from Wells Fargo Bank enabled CSUN's VITA Clinic to operate year-round and also help the CSU5+ Initiative – comprised of other CSUs and community colleges – develop and grow VITA operations. The grant also supported growth of the CSUN VITA Clinic's financial coaching services in the community.

"Wells Fargo Bank's continued support of the CSUN VITA Clinic has been immensely critical for the clinic's growth for the past five years," said accounting professor Rafi Efrat, director of the CSUN VITA Clinic and Bookstein Institute for Higher Education in Taxation. "With Wells Fargo's steadfast generosity, we expanded our free tax preparation services and financial coaching offered to low-income taxpayers."

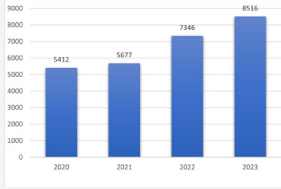
"Wells Fargo is proud to support CSUN's VITA Clinic," said Jack Olree, vice president for community giving and philanthropy at Wells Fargo. "We are pleased that through our donation, we will be able to provide

assistance to local residents with no-cost tax services and financial advice."

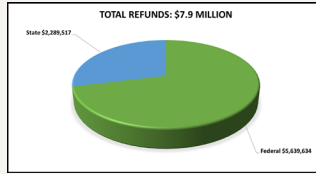
"The CSUN VITA Clinic and the CSU5+ VITA Initiative offer students a unique and invaluable opportunity to gain knowledge and experience in their field of study," said Colin Rappel, a graduating senior in the accounting program who has served as the CSU5+ VITA coordinator this past tax season. Rappel and his team supported the various CSU5+ partnering campuses with any help they needed, including recruiting volunteers, marketing training, supplies and logistics.

"The CSU5+ VITA Initiative was powered this past tax season at five CSU campuses and four community colleges in Los Angeles County, operating six days per week with the help of hundreds of student volunteers, and serving well over 12,000 taxpayers throughout Los Angeles County," said Efrat. "Wells Fargo Bank's investment in this program of experiential learning and community service powered our operation and expansion."

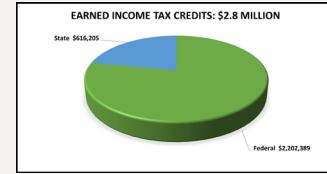
CSUN VITA SERVES MORE THAN 8,500 TAXPAYERS AT 14 SITES



CSUN TAXPAYERS SERVED



CSUN TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



CSUN TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

Liberated from the restraints of the pandemic, the CSUN Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Clinic came back strong to clinch the top ranking among more than 6,700 VITA sites nationally in terms of returns transmitted. Powered by more than 250 student volunteers, CSUN VITA provided free tax preparation and financial coaching to over 8,500 low-income taxpayers in Los Angeles County.

In all, the CSUN VITA Clinic helped taxpayers claim nearly \$8 million in tax refunds and \$2.8 million in federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits, while saving them over \$1.9 million in tax preparation fees.

This year the CSUN VITA Clinic reopened its doors on campus and at 13 other sites throughout Los Angeles County, including seven public library locations. From Jan. 28 through April 18, dedicated volunteers were available six days per week and up to 12 hours per day.

With the generous support of Wells Fargo Bank, the Internal Revenue Service and the California Department of Community Services and Development, the CSUN VITA Clinic revitalized the exciting CSU5+ VITA Initiative, providing the impetus for nine campuses to join together and serve more than 12,000 taxpayers with the support of 500-plus student volunteers across the collaborative.

The \$200,000 contribution from Wells Fargo Bank also enabled the CSUN VITA Clinic to integrate and provide financial coaching services to its low-income clients, empowering taxpayers to set aside a portion of their tax refunds to save for long-term financial goals.

In collaboration with CSUN's Translation and Interpretation program, and with financial help from City National Bank, the CSUN VITA Clinic also successfully integrated Spanish language interpretation service.

CSUN VITA Clinic's remarkable success during this past tax season would not be possible without some key individuals. Professor Rafi Efrat, VITA Clinic director, and Professor Lucy Nalbandian, VITA Clinic faculty member, singled out the clinic's exceptional leadership team, including dedicated CSUN VITA Clinic co-coordinators Areli Arujo and Cynthia Montes; operations supervisors Alexandra Muro, Melissa Cortez, Maria Anaya de Monarrez, Colin Rappel, Ammar Al Harthy; social media communication specialist Lizette Macias; financial coaching coordinator, Neeka Miremadi; and student assistants Lily Cabrales and Jeny Vasquez-Flores.



VITA WELLS FARGO

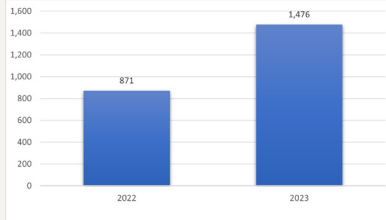
Efrat said their unparalleled, tireless commitment, along with their versatility, adaptability, and ingenuity, proved critically important to the success of the clinic's operations. Aside from their high professional competencies, they, along with the clinic's lead supervisors, demonstrated superb ability to manage a high-paced work environment with a calm, positive predisposition and a "can do" attitude, Nalbandian added.

Efrat and Nalbandian said they were particularly impressed by the incredible show of professionalism, unity and commitment demonstrated by the CSUN VITA Clinic's team of volunteers, including more than 250 certified tax preparers and supervisors, financial coaches, and Spanish interpreters. During the clinic's recent awards banquet, several outstanding VITA clinicians were recognized for their exemplary service, including Maria Bobrova, Nelson Granados, Bendel Bateria, Joseph Perez, and Andranik Yelanyan. These individuals were recognized with a \$1,000 scholarship from the Bookstein VITA Endowment

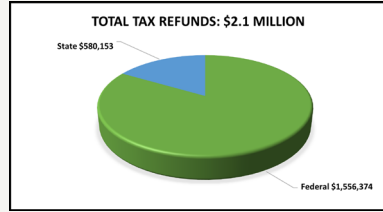
The CSUN VITA Clinic team looks forward to next year with further expansion of services in the community.



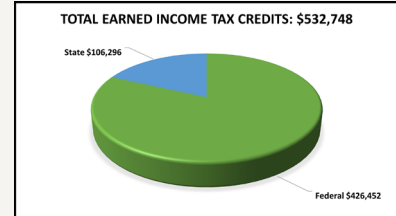
ACHIEVING GOALS AT CSULA VITA CLINIC



CSULA TAXPAYERS SERVED



CSULA TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



CSULA TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

The California State University, Los Angeles VITA Clinic has been a beacon of financial hope for the community for more than 40 years. Providing free preparation services to local community members and students alike, the CSULA VITA Clinic strives to go above and beyond each year, and now as we enter a post-pandemic era, the clinic is operating in full gear.

“We’re finally achieving our goals,” said John Cooper, faculty advisor and program administrator for the CSULA VITA Clinic. “With how many hurdles we had to jump over in previous years due to COVID-19, it is great to finally get back to serving the community.”

Last year, CSULA VITA only had one site in operation. This year, it is running five sites: one on-campus site, three public library sites, and one site at a nonprofit organization.

“We’re doing something that is very rewarding for ourselves and beneficial to the community,” Cooper said. “We’ve had clients come to us for many years to get their taxes filed and they love the student atmosphere in our clinics. We want to keep building on that.”

CSULA VITA filed a total of 1,476 returns for the 2022 tax year. This was a significant increase from 2021, when only 871 tax returns were prepared, Cooper said.

Run entirely by student volunteers, the CSULA VITA Clinic provides integral training as it prepares the student tax preparers for their future careers. All student preparers have to take a mandatory IRS tax preparation training course. This gives each student the knowledge and capability to prepare taxes at a professional level.

“Seeing our students turn into young professionals is my favorite part of our VITA program,” Cooper said. “The program reinforces many of the concepts they learn in school and teaches them real-world application. We want to help our students get recruited by employers when they graduate from CSULA, and from past experience, the VITA program gives them quality experience that is a great boost to their resumes.”

This was Cooper’s third year running the VITA program at CSULA and he said hopes to keep improving the clinic in the coming years. Currently, the CSULA VITA Clinic only offers tax preparation to the community, but Cooper wants to expand services to offer financial coaching as well.

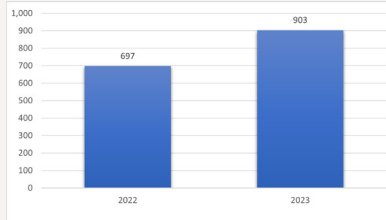
“We look to our sister college, California State University, Northridge, as an important resource,” Cooper said. “CSUN is helping us initiate many of the plans we have for next year, as well as provide training to our student volunteers.”



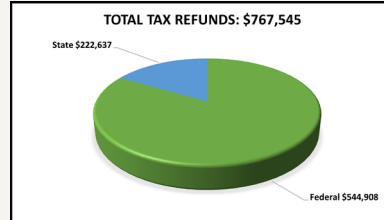
CSULA VITA CLINIC TEAM HELPING CLIENTS



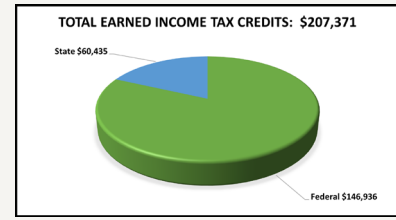
A VITA CLINIC MORE THAN 45 YEARS IN THE MAKING AT CSU LONG BEACH



CSULB TAXPAYERS SERVED



CSULB TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



CSULB TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

The California State University, Long Beach VITA Clinic has provided free tax preparation services in the Long Beach area since 1976. In those 47 years, the clinic has become a financial staple for community members.

Sudha Krishnan, chair of CSULB's Accountancy Department, has led the college's VITA Clinic since 2013. She said VITA provides a valuable resource not only to the community but also to the student volunteers who prepare tax returns for local residents.

"The biggest impact we make is the refunds we can get the members in our community," Krishnan said. "We've had so many clients come in and start crying when they find out how much they're receiving. VITA also opens the doors for student tax preparers and their career possibilities. We help them see the opportunities they have and the ones they can create. VITA is an extremely special service."

COVID-19 put many California VITA clinics into a slump, Krishnan said. But now in a post-pandemic era, she said VITA clinics are seeing greater numbers of returns filed in their communities. This tax season, Krishnan said CSULB VITA Clinic filed 903 tax returns, a staggering increase from last year's 697.

To help the community, the CSU Long Beach VITA Clinic provides two ways for local taxpayers to file their returns. People can drop off their tax materials to the VITA Clinic in the morning before work and then come back later in the day to receive their completed return and refund information. Or they can also submit their information via the CSULB VITA Clinic's secure online system which protects personal information while allowing student tax preparers to finalize and file taxpayer returns. Krishnan



CSULB VITA CLINIC

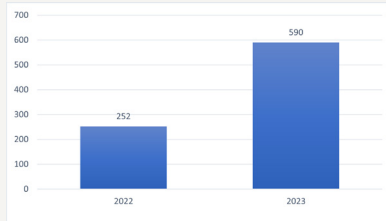
said both methods provide an easy and convenient way for community taxpayers to file their tax returns.

Krishnan praised her CSULB VITA Clinic student volunteers for the many benefits they provide to the community, while also gaining invaluable career experience.

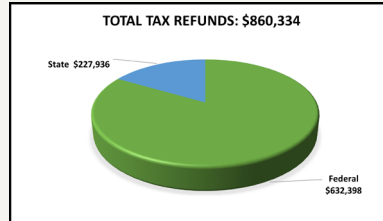
"All of our student volunteers work at the clinic in conjunction with their upper level accounting courses," Krishnan said. "This experience of working with real taxpayers at our VITA Clinic helps them turn the knowledge they're learning in their classes into real-world experience."

Krishnan added that each volunteer rotates through various job positions in the clinic to provide them an array of career skills, whether that is leadership, administration work or preparing returns.

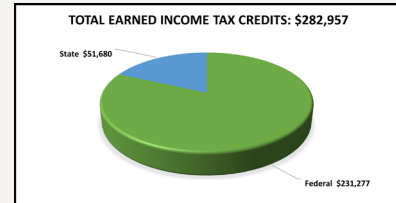
For next year and beyond, Krishnan said she wants to keep expanding CSULB's VITA Clinic to increase student and community interaction.



CSUPP TAXPAYERS SERVED



CSUPP TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



CSUPP TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

Now in his third year as director of the VITA Clinic at Cal Poly Pomona, Mohamed Gomaa, associate professor of accounting, leads a team of student volunteers in preparing free tax returns for local taxpayers in Pomona and neighboring cities in eastern Los Angeles County.

As pandemic concerns have eased, the VITA Clinic at Cal Poly Pomona has flourished. Last year, Cal Poly Pomona's VITA Clinic operated only one site, but this year it offered services at seven sites where local community members could file their tax returns for absolutely no cost.

"When I was first brought aboard the VITA team three years ago, there was a huge learning curve I had to adjust to," Gomaa said. "But seeing the benefit this program brings every year to students and to the local community motivated me to keep going and try to reach a wider audience at Cal Poly."

The Cal Poly Pomona VITA Clinic served 590 taxpayers during the 2022 tax season, compared with 252 people in the 2021 tax season.

Because the Cal Poly VITA Clinic is run entirely by student volunteers, it provides the students with an important and vital benefit: real-world experience.

Each volunteer must complete a training course led by a Cal Poly Pomona faculty member, as well as a special IRS tax preparation certification. This guarantees that

student preparers have the knowledge and professional capability to prepare tax returns.

"Cal Poly VITA Clinic prides itself on being a learning-by-doing program," Gomaa said. "Our students receive hands-on experience in accounting and find out for themselves early on if this is career they want to pursue after their degrees."

Gomaa expressed that many of his students get something more than just experience being in the VITA program. It also helps the students better understand what financial burdens taxpayers face in the community around them, and how they can help ease some of that burden.

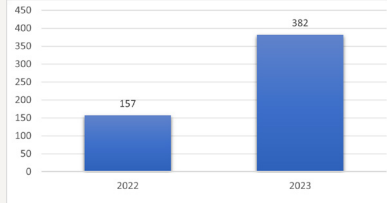
Cal Poly Pomona's VITA Clinic works in conjunction with the VITA Clinic at California State University, Northridge, with CSUN's VITA team offering assistance and guidance to Gomaa's team.

"CSUN provides a tremendous service to our VITA program here at Cal Poly," Gomaa said. "They help fund our current and new clinics here as well as help answer any technical questions we might have regarding VITA as a whole. Their team's constant support, guidance and communication with our team is incredible."

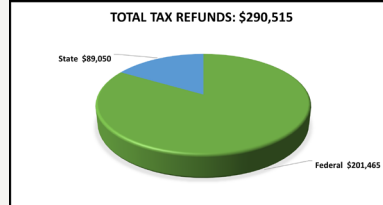
Next year, Gomaa plans to take a sabbatical year. He will help transition a new program leader into the VITA program at Cal Poly Pomona.



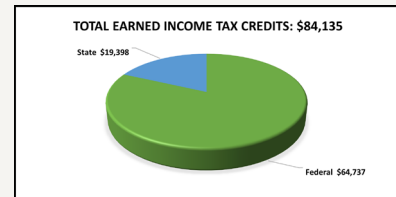
MOHAMED GOMAA, PH.D., DIRECTOR OF THE CPP'S VITA PROGRAM



CSUDH TAXPAYERS SERVED



CSUDH TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



CSUDH TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

Back when accounting professor Arek Arakelian was an undergraduate himself, he filed his first tax return at a local VITA Clinic, not knowing that one day, many years down the line, he would be running a VITA program.

Now as the program director for the CSU Dominguez Hills VITA Clinic, Arakelian and his team of student volunteers work tirelessly to provide free tax preparation services to taxpayers in Carson and other South Bay cities near the campus.

“We’re creating a giant impact in our community with the services we provide at our VITA site,” Arakelian said. “The team we have now have so much energy and passion for what we do. Since COVID-19 is on its last legs, our program has never been stronger.”

Each volunteer who works at the CSU Dominguez Hills VITA site goes through a training course taught by Arakelian, as well as a IRS tax preparation certification, in conjunction with their upper division accounting classes. This ensures that students have the knowledge and capability to prepare tax returns proficiently.

“My favorite part of the VITA program is training a student who knows absolutely nothing about taxes and teaching them how to prepare a tax return with moderate complexity,” Arakelian said. “Volunteers learn so many valuable skills during the tax season that they are able to apply in the real world, such as communication skills, client relations skills and tax preparation knowledge.”

Arakelian said that many of his student volunteers receive job offers from prestigious accounting firms after their experiences working with taxpayers at the VITA site.

This tax season, the CSU Dominguez Hills VITA Clinic filed a total of 382 tax returns for the local community, helping to put money directly back into the hands of taxpayers.

Arakelian said he has big plans for CSU Dominguez Hills VITA program in the coming years.

“I want to expand our program,” Arakelian said. “By increasing the number of volunteers and creating more community engagement, I think we can really continue to increase the impact we’re having in the local community.”

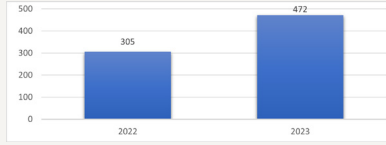
Arakelian said that California State University, Northridge has been a great support for the CSU Dominguez Hills VITA program.

“CSUN is our role model when it comes to the VITA program,” he said. “CSUN is an important resource for us. We communicate with them whenever we need help with any technical questions or simply need to share experiences. We rely greatly on our sister college.”

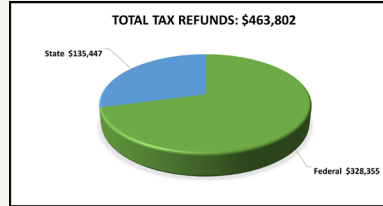


CSUDH VITA CLINIC

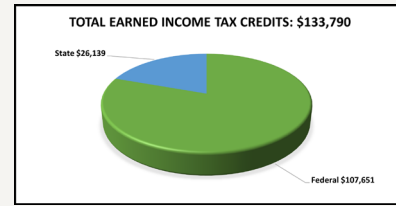
GETTING BACK ON TRACK AT MT. SAN ANTONIO COLLEGE VITA CLINIC



MTSAC TAXPAYERS SERVED



MTSAC TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



MTSAC TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

“I feel like we’re finally back on track,” said Steven Valdes, professor of accounting and program coordinator at Mt. San Antonio College VITA Clinic. “We’re bringing in pre-COVID era numbers back into our VITA Clinic and it feels amazing.”

For the last two years, COVID-19 made tax preparation at VITA clinics across California extremely difficult, especially for those clinics that could only offer in-person tax preparation services. Now entering a post-pandemic era, Valdes said he is extremely grateful to get back to the most important thing on his mind: local community taxpayers.

With 50 volunteer preparers this tax season (a stark increase from last year’s 30), the Mt. SAC VITA Clinic had even more hands on deck to handle community members’ tax returns this year. Valdes said he hopes to increase this trend through future expansion.

“In our first week, we had over 65 returns,” Valdes said of the most recent tax season. “The community is showing us just how important our tax services are.”

The Mt. SAC VITA clinic is run entirely by volunteers, both student and local community members alike. Before they can prepare tax returns, each volunteer is personally trained by Valdes, who is a Certified Public Accountant. The volunteers also must pass an IRS tax preparation certification, to guarantee that preparers are not only qualified, but have the knowledge to prepare taxes.

What separates the Mt. SAC VITA Clinic from many others is an interesting training method developed by Valdes.

“When I train my volunteers, I try to put them through unique scenarios that will prepare them before they start working at our VITA Clinic,” Valdes said. “Whether those are specific communication scenarios or special types of tax returns we see, I hope to give them the skills they can implement in the real world.”



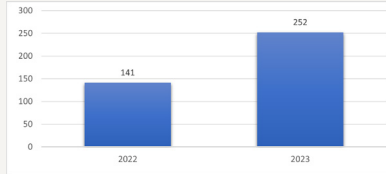
MT SAN ANTONIO VITA CLINIC TEAM

In addition to this special scenario-based training, volunteers gain valuable career experience during their time at the Mt. SAC VITA Clinic, whether that be developing communication, management or team building skills. Valdes adds that volunteering the clinic also provides students with a great boost to their resumes as young adults.

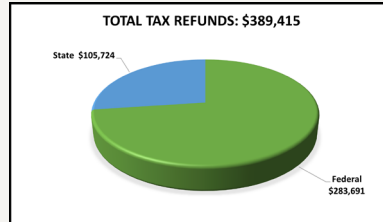
The Mt. SAC VITA Clinic filed a total 472 tax returns for the 2023 tax season. But Valdes said he does not want to stop there, adding that he hopes to add more tax preparation days to the clinic schedule next year.



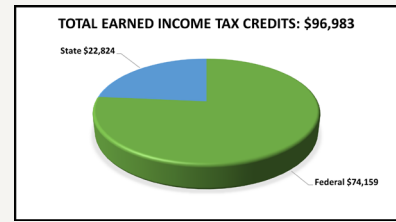
HELPING THE COMMUNITY FILE TAX RETURNS AT RIO HONDO COMMUNITY COLLEGE VITA CLINIC



RHC TAXPAYERS SERVED



RHC TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



RHC TOTAL EARNED IN-COME TAX CREDITS

Now in her tenth year as VITA site coordinator for Rio Hondo Community College VITA program, Professor Jeannie Liu and her team of student volunteer tax preparers continued to help local community taxpayers file free tax returns for the 2022 tax season.

“Our services are extremely valuable to the community as we service so many taxpayers who otherwise would need to pay for tax preparation,” Liu said. “Many of our taxpayers are lower income, disabled and elderly people, who desperately need the services we provide.”

Liu’s core team includes faculty volunteers, Professor Janet Cha from Rio Hondo and Professor Rik Ichicho of Whittier College. Their program is staffed by student volunteer tax preparers and reviewers, with each client’s tax return going through a strict review process to provide accurate services to the community, Liu explained.

When a taxpayer comes in, they are greeted and screened for qualification into the program. After filling out an intake form, which provides a checklist of required personal documents, clients are assigned a tax preparer who goes over information for their tax return. When the taxpayer’s return is ready to be filed, a tax reviewer ensures all information is correct and ready to be signed.

Each volunteer at the Rio Hondo VITA Clinic must complete tax preparation training conducted by Liu as well as an IRS tax preparation certification. This ensures that student volunteers have the knowledge and capability to prepare a tax return, and that taxpayers receive accurate returns.

The program benefits many taxpayers in the community as well as the student volunteers, who receive real-world professional and technical experience in accounting.



RIO HONDO COMMUNITY COLLEGE VITA TEAM

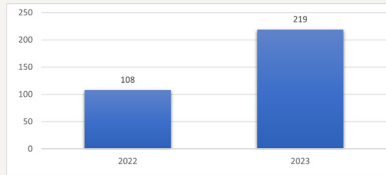
“Many of our students have told us great things about their experience in the VITA program,” Liu said. “They’ve expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to get hands-on experience in the tax world and to learn about careers they can pursue in the accounting world. One of my students told me the benefit they receive in the VITA program is that they get to see how their position directly helps the community.”

The Rio Hondo VITA program served 252 taxpayers during the recently concluded tax season with the help of 24 student volunteers and generated close to \$400,000 in federal and state tax refunds, and almost \$100,000 of federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits.

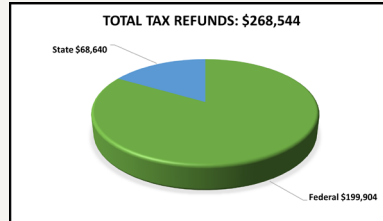
Liu said she still has many plans for the Rio Hondo College VITA program. She wants to continue to work with California State University, Northridge to help grow Rio Hondo’s volunteer base and hopes to expand marketing to increase the program’s community impact.

“Our students motivate us to keep coming back,” Liu said. “We want to give our students the opportunity to give back to the community and put into practice the tax knowledge they receive in the classroom.”

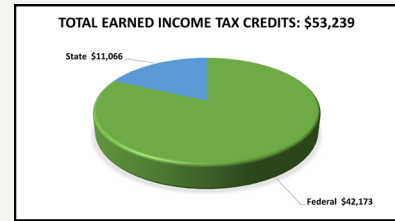
THE CLINIC IN THE CANYONS



COC TAXPAYERS SERVED



COC TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



COC TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

This tax season, the VITA program at College of the Canyons in the Santa Clarita Valley more than doubled the number of taxpayers it served, from 108 people in 2022 to 219 people in 2023. COC's VITA program founder, professor Ali Naddafpour, hopes this impressive growth continues in the future.

"Now that COVID-19 finally seems to be on its last legs, our VITA clinic has never been better," Naddafpour said. "We're seeing much better growth since last year and preparing more tax returns for the local community than ever."

Naddafpour said COC VITA Clinic student volunteers don't participate in the program for grades or credit. Instead, they are there to assist the community and, during the process, learn organizational and career skills. He hopes with each coming year, that the VITA team at COC wants to increase its impact in Santa Clarita Valley.

"There seemed to be something different about this year's team of volunteers," Naddafpour said. "Our volunteers were more motivated and dedicated than ever. They're seeing this program's direct impact in our local community. Although it is hard work, the feeling and experience they receive from that is bar none."

Each College of the Canyons VITA volunteer has to study, learn and become knowledgeable about tax rules and regulations. They get training in interviewing and taking care of clients, and have to pass the VITA tax preparation certifications provided by the IRS. Naddafpour said the process ensures that volunteers have the knowledge to interview and communicate with the clients, as well as

the capability to prepare returns and perform required services.

Open every Saturday during tax season from February to April, the COC VITA clinic works to take the financial burden off of local community taxpayers, by providing free tax preparation services.

Even though the college serves a "very affluent area," Naddafpour explained that the COC VITA clinic offers free tax preparation to those who generally make \$60,000 or less a year.

"When our volunteers start preparing tax returns their eyes are opened to a part of the community they didn't know existed," he said. "They not only

get the career experience at our clinic, but they get the added benefit of helping our community."

In preparing for the most recent tax season, Naddafpour said his team focused on raising awareness about the program. Working in partnership with California State University, Northridge, the COC VITA team had the opportunity to use CSUN's services to print flyers to let community taxpayers know about their free tax preparation services.

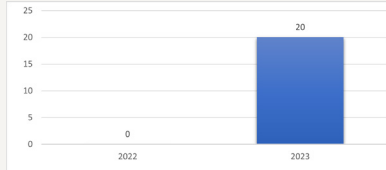
"CSUN is the number one supporter of our VITA Clinic," Naddafpour said. "We work with them to cover what we can't do during our Saturday operations and to strategize for the upcoming tax season. In many ways, we are their babies because they laid down the scaffolding for our VITA program."



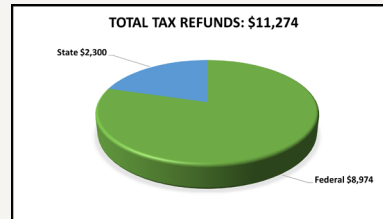
COLLEGE OF THE CANYON'S VITA STUDENTS



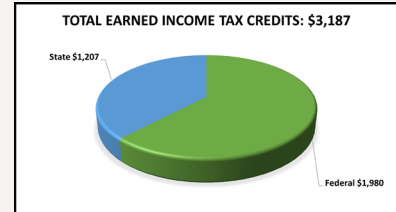
SERVING TAXPAYERS AGAIN AT LOS ANGELES MISSION COLLEGE VITA CLINIC



MISSION COLLEGE TAXPAYERS SERVED



MISSION COLLEGE TOTAL TAX REFUNDS



MISSION COLLEGE TOTAL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

When COVID-19 struck, many VITA clinics in and around Los Angeles County area were forced to shut down. While established clinics adapted their operations to fit this unprecedented challenge, some clinics that were only a few years old or those without an established network of volunteers had to remain closed until the pandemic subsided.

In its first year back since 2020, the Los Angeles Mission College VITA Clinic hit the ground running this tax season, providing free tax preparation services to 20 local taxpayers.

“The pandemic stopped us right in our tracks,” said Anna Barsegyan, VITA Clinic faculty advisor at Los Angeles Mission College in Sylmar. “Now that we’re in our first year back, we were ready to get these services back into the community.”

Offering free tax services out of a Mission College classroom, Barsegyan’s team of student volunteers worked hard to serve the community where they could: financially.

Each student volunteer tax preparer at Mission College is trained by Barsegyan in order to earn their tax preparation certification from the IRS. This process ensures that students gain the required knowledge and are ready to prepare tax returns for local community members.

“Since this was our first year back in the VITA program, we were focused on just getting the word out about our services,” Barsegyan said. “We hope to improve on the marketing side of our clinic for next year so that we have banners and marketing material to hand out to the community.”



LOS ANGELES MISSION COLLEGE VITA CLINIC ANNA BARSEGYAN

Even though the Mission College VITA Clinic is still growing its services for local community members, Barsegyan said student tax preparers are nonetheless gaining important experience while working with their taxpayer clients.

“The impact this program has on our students is unmatched,” she said. “We allow the students the opportunity to receive real-world skills and make an impact in their community. My favorite part about the program is seeing the students progress as preparers from the beginning until the end of the program.”

Barsegyan said she has high hopes for expanding the Mission College VITA program in the future and she and her team already are preparing for next year’s tax season.

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