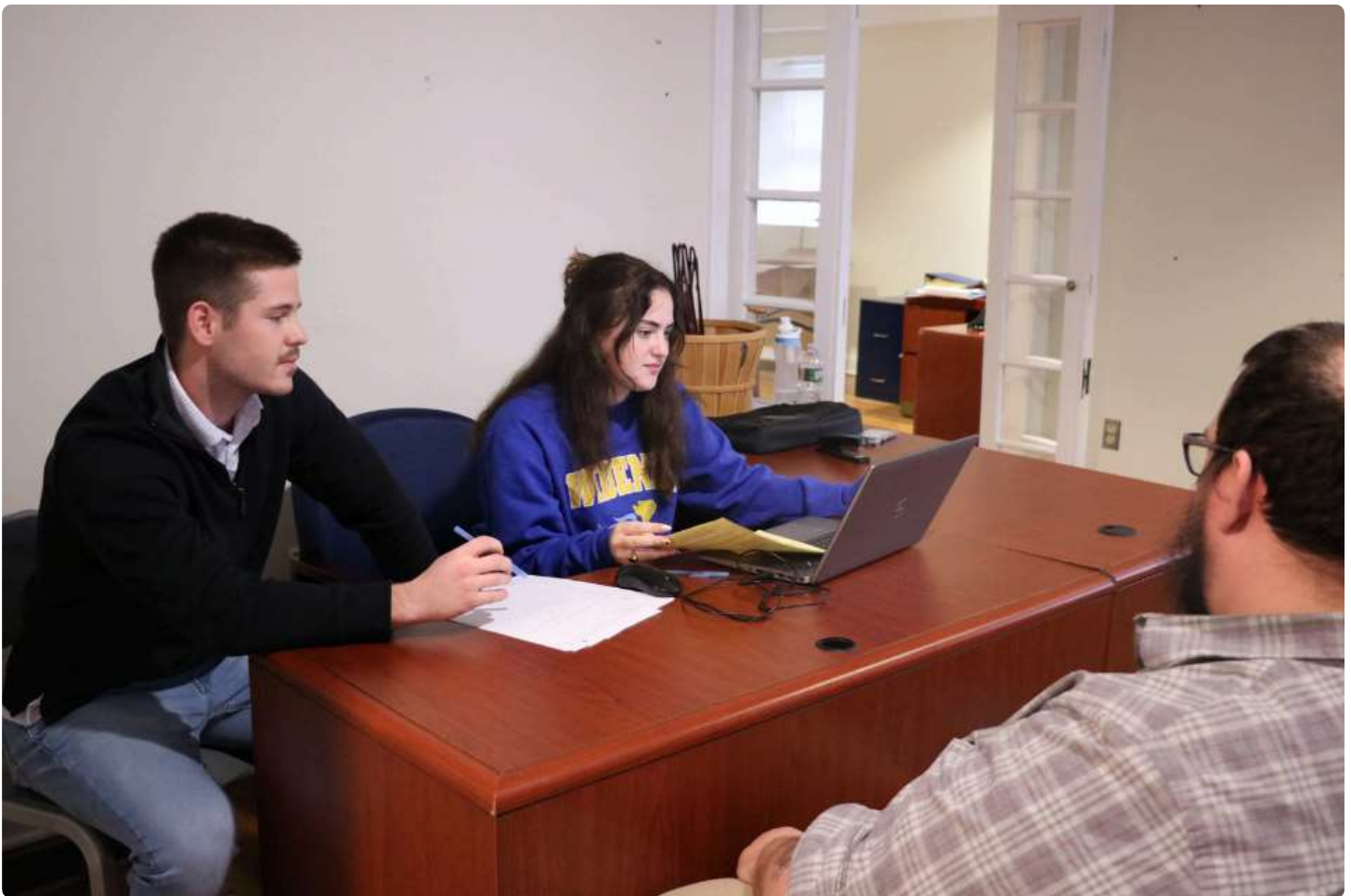


Business Students Become Certified Tax Preparers at VITA Community Tax Clinic

April 22, 2024 | Nicole Carrera, Assistant Director of Communications

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Filing taxes can become a time consuming and costly annual process for many Americans. Widener's School of Business Administration partnered with the Community Action Agency of Delaware County (CAADC) to help Delaware County residents file their taxes free of charge.

For over 15 years, the CAADC has hosted Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Tax Clinics across the region to help low- and moderate-income Delaware County residents file their taxes for free with the help of IRS-certified volunteers- some of which are Widener students.

"This is our second year partnering with Widener University to add this clinic to our VITA program. This partnership has allowed us to help more members of the local community," said Wyatt Foth, VITA program coordinator at CAADC. "The students have been great. They came into the clinic ready to learn how to do the returns and have picked up on it very quickly."

After studying and completing a series of three tests, five student volunteers from the School of Business Administration became IRS-certified tax preparers and assisted community members one-on-one under the supervision of Widener and CAADC staff members.



Angelina Breen '27 at the clinic

"We all have the basic certification, so we are able to file. We just need someone to check it first," said Angelina Breen '27. "We had to study a booklet with a lot of different tax rules, so it was kind of scary at first but they really prepared us well."

Breen, a first-year accounting major, heard about the opportunity from her professors and was interested in getting hands-on experience as early as she could in her college career.

"Since there's so many different fields in accounting and I don't know which one I'm going to end up going into after I graduate, this was a good opportunity for me to get a glimpse at the tax side," Breen said.

Jasilda Pajollari '24 '25 had a similar experience gaining exposure to the tax world. In addition to volunteering at the clinic, she was also taking a tax class and was able to transfer her skills and knowledge to and from the clinic.

"Seeing the same information and terms in both places it was like 'oh, I just learned that' or 'oh, I just saw this at the clinic' so I was able to implement those skills." Pajollari said.

Pajollari's time with tax will continue as she pursues her 4+1 master's in taxation and financial planning.

"I was already considering pursuing the 4+1, but this experience helped to solidify my decision," she shared. "Having these outside-of-the-classroom experiences has been really beneficial."

The partnership with CAADC is led by School of Business Associate Dean Donna McCloskey and Assistant Dean John Reagan. Students at the clinic were also supported through a generous donation from The Elsie Foundation, an alumni-founded group with a passion for giving back to business students.



Deb McCracken '89 speaks with student volunteers at the clinic

Founded by Deb McCracken '89 and her husband, Jamie McCracken '87, and with a board full of Widener alumni, the Elsie Foundation is committed to supporting Widener students in various ways, including with this clinic.

"I always think back to what my mother said: 'If you can touch the lives of some of these students and change their trajectory in a positive direction, it can be life changing for them.' And hopefully they will pay it forward," McCracken said.

The student volunteers echoed McCracken's sentiments, emphasizing that while the hands-on experience helped them academically and professionally, the community engagement was the real reward.

"It can get really expensive to get your taxes done so I think it's really good for us to give back," said Breen. "It's such a little thing but it's just really saving a lot of people money. Everyone was really nice and they're all really appreciative of us doing this."

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