

Q&A With Teacher of the Year: Lacee Willey

09/01/2026



Huntsman School of Business students quickly learn they are getting more than a lesson in tax in one of Lacee Willey's accounting classes. They are getting a mentor, an advocate, and a professor who sees not only what they are learning, but who they are becoming.

Willey, honored as the Huntsman School of Business Teacher of the Year, is known for bringing real-world relevance to complex accounting topics and helping students build confidence that extends beyond the classroom. Her students describe her as someone who understands their goals, challenges them to think critically, and connects them with career opportunities.

For Sabrina Swasey, a Huntsman accounting student who took Individual Tax and Advanced Tax Topics from Willey, her learning experience was personal and career-shaping. Willey became her go-to mentor who encouraged her to strengthen her research and problem-solving skills and even introduced her to a connection that ultimately led to a full-time job offer. She describes Willey as a professor who truly loves both accounting and her students, adding, "She genuinely cares about her students' success and continues to support them throughout college and even beyond graduation."

Willey recently shared insights into her career and commitment to student success with Huntsman Business.

Tell us about you! What are some things students may be surprised to learn about you?

I grew up in Evanston, Wyoming. I am an avid sports fan, enjoy longboarding, and love to travel. My favorite drink is ice water, and I have a strong dislike for hot weather.

Some people think of accounting and numbers and get nervous! How would you summarize the concepts you teach to the average person?

Accounting is less about numbers and math and more about decision making. It's a framework for understanding what's really going on with a business and making better choices because of it. Whether you're investing, running a business, managing your own finances, or considering tax implications, these concepts show up constantly in everyday life.

What inspired you to transition from industry at Davis & Bott CPAs to academia?

At the time the opportunity came up, I wasn't looking to leave public accounting. A former professor of mine reached out to see if I had any interest in teaching tax at USU, and I initially told him, "Thanks, but no thanks." I was genuinely happy where I was. But that night, I kept thinking about my college experience – how much I loved school and the impact my professors and fellow students had on me. After mulling it over, I decided I should at least explore the opportunity. Coming back to campus reminded me what made Utah State special to me, and it helped me realize that this is where I wanted to be.

Of your classes, which is your favorite to teach?

The impossible question! That is a hard one to answer because there are aspects I love about each class that I teach. The introductory financial accounting class is often students' first exposure to accounting, and I enjoy dispelling many of the misconceptions students have about accounting and helping them see how accounting applies in their everyday lives even if they don't plan to pursue it as a career. I also love teaching tax. It's complex, constantly changing, and rarely has one "right" answer. It pushes students (and me) to think, ask better questions, and get comfortable operating in gray areas.

Over the years, who has made a positive impact on you professionally and personally?

I've been lucky to have incredible mentors over the years – parents, professors, colleagues, friends – who have invested in me, rooted for me, and helped me see paths I didn't see for myself. More recently, students have been the ones who have had a profound impact. They push me to stay sharp, relevant, and be better every semester. They are kind, gracious, hardworking, and thoughtful. Utah State students are incredible, and I feel fortunate to get to rub shoulders with them every day.

Share about your work as the advisor of the Delta Omega student chapter of Beta Alpha Psi at the Huntsman School of Business. How does the organization foster hands-on learning for students?

Beta Alpha Psi is an accounting honors organization, and our chapter has a long tradition of excellence, including a 47-year streak of Gold Chapter status – the longest in the world. We focus on giving students meaningful opportunities to network, serve, lead, and build relationships. We have monthly meetings with professionals who share career insights, industry trends, and general life advice. We have hosted golf tournaments, pickleball tournaments, and service projects where we pair students with professionals from the accounting industry to provide networking opportunities in more casual, fun environments.

Members volunteer in the accounting tutor lab, helping fellow students learn and master difficult accounting concepts. They staff the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program where they provide free tax preparation services for low-income individuals. Club officers get to travel to conferences twice a year to learn from other Beta Alpha Psi clubs and compete in competitions. Some of my favorite memories at USU have come from working with students in Beta Alpha Psi!

What advice do you have for Huntsman students?

Show up. Be engaged. Build relationships. Take advantage of the opportunities around you – they're everywhere in the Huntsman School of Business. Don't wait until you feel ready. You never will. Just start. Be present and enjoy the college experience! This is a fun time of life. Enjoy it!