



# THE MERRITT CONNECTION

## President's Message



This year was a whirlwind of activities – it's hard to believe that it's nearly at an end.

Last week's ASMC Scholarship Banquet reminded me of all the success stories we have on campus from so many students: First-year students and retirees, those who are challenged with hardships but succeed, our athletes who make us proud with their amazing talents, and our student leaders who are dedicated to making Merritt College a better place for all students.

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### **The Merritt Connection**

Merritt College

Peralta Community College District  
Office of the President

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## Merritt Students in NIH Grant Program On Their Way to Bright Careers in Science

Scott Aposhian never thought he would go to college. In fact, he wasn't even interested in high school and dropped out when he was barely in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Today he is headed to UCLA to study molecular and cell biology with the dream of becoming a doctor. Though he may have had other influences in his life to get to this point, the chance to participate in Merritt's Bridges to Baccalaureate Program was definitely a major factor.

"This opportunity came at the perfect time," says Scott, who became interested in science once he was back on the education track. "I wasn't sure if the course loads would be too crazy. But I knew that if I was accepted into this program, I would get the help I needed to get through. I was overwhelmed at the time, and this was a glimmer of hope."



*Scott Aposhian*

The Bridges to Baccalaureate program is Merritt's name for the National Institutes for Health Grant which counselor Tanya Ilarde helped develop and co-counsel in for six years. It provides support to underrepresented students who want to pursue a four-year degree in the sciences. Each year, the grant has helped 7 to 10 students reach their goals by partnering with UC Berkeley's Center for Educational Partnerships to provide tutoring, counseling, and an 8-week paid summer research internship on its campus.



*Alice Onu*

"It's been a great collaboration of efforts with our four-year partners, our science faculty and our student services staff towards transfer," says Tanya, "and it's been a thrill to see our students' achievements."

Along the way, Dr. Jennifer Shanoski, Chemistry Department Chair, has taken the lead as science faculty to direct the grant program and encourage her chemistry students and others who met the demographics to apply for the program.

"From a science perspective, community college students don't have the chance to do research or look at what science really

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## President's Message

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The well-deserved courage and perseverance awards were given to three truly amazing students who fought tremendous odds to be at Merritt.

That kind of endurance is often the case for a large percentage of our students who struggle with obstacles like finances, childcare, and other personal issues to get an education and better themselves. It is for all of our students that we continue to offer and create new services to help them succeed, like our newest program, Sankofa (see article in this issue).

Among the many diverse activities this year, we were excited to have back on campus a Native American celebration that has been missing for several years. This inspirational event ended with the large diverse crowd all holding hands and winding through the Student Lounge in a traditional native Friendship Dance.



The stories in this last issue of *The Merritt Connection* for the year also represent the diverse interests and opportunities here at Merritt. More to come in the fall. Have a great summer!

*Dr. Norma Ambriz-Galaviz*  
President

is,” says Jennifer, who earned her Ph.D. at Cal. “An opportunity to do research gives them a leg up not only in their experience but when they are applying to transfer. It’s a unique experience. I didn’t have that opportunity in my own first two years of college.”



*David Quintanilla*

It was that research experience that changed David Quintanilla’s mind about the field of medicine. “It was a totally different experience than I thought it would be, and it opened my mind toward going into research,” says David, who will continue his work at UC San Diego this summer before heading to UC Berkeley to study bio chemistry and molecular biology. “It exposed me to the whole research environment. I worked with instruments, and I learned about new technologies. Doing the research really boosted my application.”

Alice Onu came out of her summer research with a new accomplishment to put on her resume – creating an enzyme. “I worked in an infectious disease lab finding out whether bacterias were resistant to disease or causing it. After hours and hours with my lab mentor, I finally got it, and I was able to clone the disease and create an enzyme. It was really enlightening.”

Since that time, Alice has been at UC Santa Barbara studying psychology, but she is now thinking of making a change toward more of a medical career. “This program helped me in a lot of ways, she says. “You don’t hear about students like me given the chance to go to Cal and work in a lab for free for the summer.”

Sierra Selby was studying kinesiology at Merritt and nervous about taking a chemistry class when she heard about the program. “I always thought science was too hard—until I took Dr. Shanoski’s class. She’s a great teacher and super passionate and she makes everything interesting.”



*Sierra Selby*

Sierra delayed her 8-week research lab because of work, but this summer she will get work in a genetics and neurobiology lab. She became interested in the topic after taking a biology class from instructor Hank Fabian who then suggested she take Merritt’s class in genomics. She really liked the topic and the high-tech equipment at Merritt’s Alameda facility.

“That class really got me interested in the subject,” she says. “I’m hoping the lab and my courses at Berkeley will help me narrow down my field of science. I’ve had nothing but good experiences in this program!”

*For more information, call Tanya Ilarde at (510) 436-2559.*

## Sankofa Program Opens Its Doors to Great Praise

Sankofa, the newest student support service at Merritt College, got a big round of



appause and lots of kudos from the speakers at its Grand Opening Celebration on May 12. The primary focus of the program is on the achievement of African-American students, but Sankofa's services are open to all students who can use the extra nurturing needed to be successful. With an emphasis on English, math, science, and technology, Sankofa will assist students in SEPs, course selection, personal concerns, and connections to other support services on campus.

"We are giving students the power to successfully get through their education and enter their career path," said Mario Rivas, new Faculty Senate president.



*Sankofa Counselor Ronda Johnson and assistant Danielle Parker enjoy cake.*

The program is coordinated by Debra Jacks and Dr. Audrey Trotter. For more info, call (510) 464-3958 or go to R-106F.

## Design Concept of Science Building Reflects Open Communication

We've all been watching the cool new building going up for years, and now it's almost time for the nurses, scientists, and professionals among us to move in. But what many may not know are the design concepts and the philosophy behind the beautiful façade.



Justin Smith, the Construction Project Manager hired by the District's Department of General Services to oversee the entire project, recently gave *The Merritt Connection* a sneak peek and talked about the designers' philosophy.

"There are many great features within the building that have been carefully planned by the designers to please its occupants," says Smith. "Everyone from the president to the deans to the first-year students will find something new and exciting in this building."

As Smith explains, there were three specific objects that shaped the conceptual design:

1) **New Approach** –

Enhancing communication by using public areas to

create opportunities for stronger interactions;

2) **New Heart** – Using the central courtyard,

defined by the helix stairway, to energize the building and the campus with clear visibility to instructional and social areas;

3) **New Energy** – Contributing to learning outcomes through sustainability in acoustics, lighting, indoor air quality, daylight, and views integrated with new technologies.



In keeping with these design concepts, "Learning Neighborhoods" were created — well-defined, dedicated zones spread in key points throughout the building for interaction among students, faculty, and staff. These areas are identified by comfortable furniture, large windows, and soft lighting to encourage active learning through open exchange.



And there is actually more of a scientific philosophy behind the gold-hued screening than just keeping out the glare. According to the designers, it is "artistic abstractions of scientific principles with

the coding signifying a genetic legacy that unites all people while recognizing diversity in our population." In other words, it represents our DNA!

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## Four Faculty Invited to Help “Cultivate a Growth Mindset”



“Stay tuned for some culture shifting!” says Ann Elliott.

She and three other faculty members — Dan Lawson, Mario Rivas, and Marta Zielke — have been selected to participate as an inquiry team in the “Cultivating a Growth Mindset” series of workshops organized by the California Community College Sharing Network’s (3CSN) Habits of Mind Project.

The organization provides professional learning opportunities and resources for building students’ academic dispositions and attitudes.

The Merritt team will develop classroom and campus activities to help students cultivate a growth mindset — a research-based habit of mind that promotes persistence and success. The team will also collaborate with a Stanford researcher who is working with colleges in the Bay Area to adapt online growth mindset programs specifically for community college students. One of the ways will be through focus groups and interviews with students (paid) and faculty.

Watch here for news of their progress!

## Classified Employee Spotlight

### Growing Up on the Merritt Campus



*Stefanie Harding is presented with the “President’s Award” by Dr. Norma Ambriz-Galaviz at the 6th Annual Achievement Awards Celebration on April 24.*

It’s doubtful there is anyone who knows Merritt College’s underground tunnel system better than Stefanie Harding.

Starting at age 7, she spent her childhood traversing through them after school while waiting for her father, Jim, to finish his work as the college’s audiovisual specialist. Over the years she got to know the campus well—she hung out in the library, played games in the computer labs, and bought treats at the book store. And often she would even help her dad set up for events, do mic checks, and run the cords.

Years later when she had to decide where to go to college, it wasn’t a tough call. “Of course I was going to go to Merritt,” says Stefanie. “It was comfortable, safe, and easy for me to navigate, and by then my mother worked here as well. I also had an extended family of faculty and staff to keep me on track.”

Stefanie went on to transfer to Cal State Hayward (now East Bay), and held several administrative jobs in the corporate world to see what it was like outside of academia. But after a number of years, she knew where her heart was. In 2008 she became Staff Assistant in the President’s Office.

Her lifetime of Merritt experience and her ability to retain details that others may not quickly made her the “walking encyclopedia” of Merritt College policies and procedures.

“Everything surfaces in the President’s Office so that’s part of the reason I’m familiar with as much as I am,” says Stefanie. “I have to have answers when situations arise or know what form to send or who to contact and help guide the situation. And I need to be able to connect the dots between the college and the District and know who the key players are.”

Not only is Stefanie familiar with names and numbers, she cares deeply about the college and has served on numerous shared governance committees over the years to help make the college a better place.

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## A Big Thank You To Our Awesome Student Ambassadors!



*Brenda Perez, Yesenia Araiza, Lissette Espinal, Will Smith, and Roseland Bailey*

You couldn't have missed them this semester. They were everywhere you saw a student in need. They were at the Welcome Center, helping with registration, giving out information about scholarships, taking groups on tours, helping with activities, and lots more.

Thanks to our great Student Ambassadors — and to their advisor Debra Jacks — for serving our students so well this semester. Hope you'll be back next year!

## Representing in L.A.: Senators Join the 2.1



A group of our ASMC senators joined a student leadership conference in L.A. called "The Power of 2.1" which represents the 2.1 million student leaders in California community colleges.

"Part of the reason I agreed to be Classified Senate President was to challenge myself in a leadership role, but it also helped to be actively involved in the governing process and take a key role in the institution as a whole, she says. "Most importantly, I feel like the voice of the Classified Senate has been muted over the years, and we need to bring it back to be stronger. Because of my history, I know how to make things work and share the needs of the Classified Staff."

Stefanie credits her strong team with the success she has seen. "My team has really been hands-on and helped me succeed as a leader. I've had phenomenal support with talented individuals who have helped keep me focused."



Her contributions were recognized at the recent Annual Achievement Award Celebration when she was "totally surprised" to see her own name flash across the screen as the recipient of the "President's Award" and received a standing ovation. In presenting the award, President Dr. Norma Ambriz-Galaviz said, "Stefanie is a role model for the rest of the Classified Staff as how one can not only express their voice but also put their words into action."

For Stefanie, it all comes back to the connections she formed as a child.

"People always talk about their memories surrounding Merritt College," she says. "But for me there is something so significant when it's part of your childhood and part of your learning experiences, and then you become an adult and serve the same population you grew up with. It's a special relationship. It's not just a place that I work. It's home."

## Yoga Training Inside and Out

*Track and Field Coach Brock Drazen demonstrates the "tree pose," one of the yoga positions he taught at the Classified Senate's popular wellness event in April. With him are Tatiana Misco and Kaori Nguyen.*



## Editorial

### We Change Lives? Tell Us How!

While Merritt College has a longtime slogan, “We Change Lives,” I’ve always thought it begged the question, “How?”

Wouldn’t it be great, I’ve thought, if we could have a link on the homepage called, “How We’ve Changed Lives,” with a few sentences and a photo from alumni (and current students) who could tell us where they are now and how Merritt helped them get there?

While it seems a daunting task to do for the entire college, I’d like to start small and grow with your help.

I proposed the idea at a recent CTE focus group and everyone thought it was a great idea. But Jennifer Yates in Radiologic Science actually went back and wrote to her alumni. The result is a link I put on her website called Student Testimonials which I add to every time she sends me another one. Check it out!

Email me if you’d like to participate ([smay@peralta.edu](mailto:smay@peralta.edu)). Testimonials are a great way to market your program!



*Alumni/rap star “Master P” recently came back to visit.*

## Alumni Profile

### A Tragic Past Leads to a Satisfying Future



*Herman Roque at Commencement in 2014.*

Eight years ago Herman Roque’s doctor told him he was going to die. He had been an addict for 20 years while hiding it from his family, his friends, and his co-workers. But after two decades it caught up with him, and he got a blood infection that caused respiratory failure, kidney failure, and paralyzation from the neck down. At that point, says Herman, he started going through the five

stages of grief and stopped at No. 3.

“When I got to bargaining,” he says, “I began bargaining my tail off. I said, ‘If I get out of this, I promise I’ll help others to not get in this situation.’”

Although Herman “coded” three times and required two tracheotomies, he didn’t die. He spent more than two years in the hospital getting therapy (and gained some movement in his upper body as a result), and he started a lifetime of dialysis.

“When I got to the lowest point, I knew I had to get off drugs to save my life. That’s when my life changed. As soon as I was well enough, I started my journey to make good on my promise.”

He earned his GED at adult school and then searched for a way to help others. When he found out about Merritt’s Community Social Services Program, he knew that was his calling. Last year Herman got his certificate in substance abuse counseling with a high GPA, multiple awards, and a membership in the Phi Theta Kappa honor society. He plans to attend Cal State East Bay.

He is also interning at Second Chances in Hayward to complete the 2200 hours he needs to become a state-certified counselor. “This is the best job I’ve ever had. I can’t believe they are going to pay me to do it someday,” he says. “There’s no better feeling than to help someone get their life back.”

Herman thanks his instructor Dr. Bill Love for being “tough” on him and the Disability Services folks, including Ron Nelson and Mary Ciddio, for all of their support. Says Mary: “Herman is a determined and humble man and always has a smile on his face. He is an inspiration to us all!

*Herman is in great need of a van to take himself to work and school as he cannot sit for long periods without being in a lot of pain. If anyone has resources to help him, please call him directly at (510) 575-7917.*

## Child Development Offers Lab School, Resource Center, and More!

by Alice Hale  
Acting Professional Development Coordinator  
Child Development Department



*Counselor Angela Khoo and her CARES Plus cohort of Child Development students working on finishing their degree in a professional development program.*

There's a lot going on in Child Development!

If you are around the A building on a Tuesday or Thursday morning, you might be fooled into thinking that Merritt Students are, indeed, getting younger. But no, those are just the children headed into the Lab Preschool, where students in Child Development are getting their student teaching experience working with young children from the community, under the watchful eye and careful supervision of Christine Olsen, chair of the department.

Known as the Lab Practicum (or CHDEV 55A), this course gives students a chance to put all the theory

they have learned in their other child development classes into practice. "This is our capstone course," says Olsen, "It gives the students a chance to not only work with young children, but have an opportunity for feedback and reflection on their classroom practice. It is an essential step to being a good early childhood teacher." Olsen will again teach the course next fall on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, while full-time CHDEV Faculty member Newt McDonald will teach another section of the course on Monday and Wednesday afternoons.

But all the Child Development action is not just in the Lab Preschool in Room 106. Next fall the Child Development Department will continue its series of community-based bilingual Spanish/English classes with CHDEV 50 on Wednesday evenings. It will be taught at Merritt's Fruitvale Center, by the third full-time member of the Child Development faculty, Jenny Briffa.

Meanwhile, back at campus, right next door to the Lab School, in A-109 is the Child Development Resource Center. Here students can get help in planning their Child Development course load, petitioning for Certificates, and applying for Child Development Permits.

The Resource Center, funded by tobacco taxes through First 5 of Alameda County, this semester has been staffed by Myeisha Jones, Marisol Roque, and me, Alice Hale (substituting for Berenise Herrera, who has been on maternity leave since November). And we have been busy! Since last fall, A-109 has:

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- v Had about 400 contacts with Merritt students, who have come in to ask about courses, degree programs, certificates and Child Development Permits.
- v Helped 103 students apply for new Child Development Permits, or upgrade or renew permits they already have. (A Child Development Permit is the certification that someone is prepared to be a preschool teacher. It is required by many centers, especially publicly-funded programs like Head Start.)
- v Helped students petition for Child Development Certificates. Thanks to Marisol Roque, who devoted several hours to this effort this semester, 187 Assistant, Associate or Teacher certificates are going to be awarded to Child Development Students this spring.



*Teachers from Foothill Square Early Head Start who completed the CARES Plus professional development program and earned a stipend.*

The efforts of the Child Development

Department were felt off-campus, too! Almost 50 teachers currently working in the field participated in the professional development program CARES Plus, also funded by First 5, and administered through our office. These teachers completed a series of online training videos aimed at improving their classroom interactions with children.

Counselor Angela Khoo advised a cohort of 25 teachers who were also working on finishing their Associate Degrees. I got to work with 23 teachers in the community who completed the online video program, and also met with me to talk to write a professional development plan. Many of the teachers plan on returning to school to finish a degree, or to take courses to allow them to upgrade their Child Development Permit to be a Master Teacher or Site Supervisor.

And don't forget A-112, the Child Development Department office where students can meet with faculty and leave messages and items for their professors. The office also has resource binders and job postings and can get help and referrals to the proper offices or services they may need. The office also is a place to get help with technology questions such as how to apply, enroll and access Moodle.

A lot is happening in the field of early childhood education, and as a result, a lot is happening in Merritt's Child Development Department, too. School districts are adding Transitional Kindergarten classes, and teachers in those classes need to earn Child Development units. A new rating system for preschools and day care centers - Quality Counts, Alameda County - is now being put into place, and it gives centers higher ratings if their teachers and directors have degrees and high-level permits. Merritt is where these educators will turn to continue their professional development and the Child Development Department, with new courses, certificate offerings, and a transfer degree, is ready to help!