



Merritt College Commencement 2018

News & Information

Merritt College is proud to introduce our highest achieving students of the Class of 2018 who were honored at the 63rd Annual Commencement Ceremonies on May 23. In a reflection of Oakland's diverse culture, they come from all over the world, have studied a wide range of academic interests, and have bold opinions of their own. But they all share the belief that Merritt has been a great educational beginning to their lives as they move on to help shape the world.

Alessandra Chimienti: From Italy to Merritt College With a 4.0 GPA and Role as Valedictorian



After just one semester at Merritt College, Alessandra Chimienti's business instructor, Fereshteh Mofidi told her that she would be Valedictorian of her graduating class. Alessandra found that hard to believe at the time, given the fact that she had arrived from Italy less than two years earlier without knowing a word of English. Plus she was still trying to get accustomed to an American college and the language.

But on May 23, her instructor's prediction came true as Alessandra was called to the podium to deliver her speech as the Valedictorian. She was also chosen to represent Peralta District's International Students community by being the Valedictorian and delivering a speech for their graduation as well.

Despite the initial language difficulties, Alessandra achieved this incredible honor as Valedictorian for receiving the highest GPA in all her studies, maintaining a 4.0 throughout her two years at Merritt College. She received three Associate Degrees in Accounting, Business Administration, and General Business, and three Certificates, all in business.

"It's not easy for international students to leave their friends and family to pursue their education in another country," says Ms. Mofidi. "But it shows how strong they are about their goals. Alessandra is so intelligent that she would ask me questions that I had to research myself to find the answer. That's why I knew she was destined to be the Valedictorian. I wish her the best of luck."

Born in Puglia, in the south of Italy, Alessandra earned a Bachelor's Degree in Education with highest honors (*summa cum laude*) before coming to the United States as an Au Pair for an Oakland family who she loves and considers her "American family" for their ongoing support and for serving as a role model for her.

With a future goal of studying business, her first challenge was to learn the language. She accomplished this by taking intensive English classes, volunteering as a tutor for two years in an elementary school in Oakland, and following subtitles on American television shows on Netflix. When she felt comfortable enough to start college, she ended up at Merritt and has never looked back.

During her two years, she has served as treasurer of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and worked in Business Services where, she says, Dr. Dettie Del Rosario has mentored her and been an inspiration. "I felt so honored working in the Business Office and being the PTK treasurer," says Alessandra, "as they have exposed me to the

business operations of the community college system, taught me skills that I would have never learned just by studying, and allowed me to utilize the education I have achieved at Merritt.”

Dr. Del Rosario says she feels blessed to have the opportunity to mentor Alessandra. “She is willing to learn and always shows enthusiasm and commitment. She displays professionalism in dealing with faculty, staff, and students who come to the office. Her attention to details, her resourcefulness, and her great personality will be her keys to a successful career.”

Alessandra’s next goal is to get an MBA, and she doesn’t hesitate to give credit to Merritt for getting her to a place where that is possible. “All of my family in Italy is thrilled and proud of me for my accomplishments, and this alone makes all my hard work worthwhile. I miss them every day, and my achievements are my way of telling them that I love them,” she says. “Even my mother is coming to America for the first time to see my graduation. I couldn’t have had a better experience at Merritt. I’ve loved my time here at this beautiful college, and I will cherish these memories for the rest of my life.”