



# The Merritt Connection

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Dr. Marie-Elaine Burns, President

## Go From Environmental Courses to Green Jobs in Natural History & Sustainability Program

When Analisa Brown was 8 years old, she began watching the Discovery Channel and fell in love with the ocean, along with the sharks, dolphin, and whales who lived in it. That early passion led to an education in marine biology and a desire to teach and inspire others about the scientific wonders of the ocean, including diverse groups of students who traditionally do not go into that field.



Analisa will get to do just that at Merritt in the upcoming Spring semester when she will be teaching Merritt's first-ever Intro to Marine Biology course (BIOL 9) as part of the college's new Natural History and Sustainability Program (NHS). This newest addition to Merritt's Career Education Programs consists of a variety of environmentally-minded, interdepartmental courses leading to degrees and certificates that educate students about the biodiversity and ecology of the Bay Area and give them the opportunity to explore careers in a number of fields.

"It makes sense to have a program like this in the Bay Area where the environmental movement began and where people are passionate about their green spaces," says Dr. Brad Balukjian, a Merritt biology instructor, who has been building the program from the ground up. "Merritt already has a long tradition of teaching environmental science and natural history courses dating back to the late 1950s. Now we are specifically focusing on providing students with a solid, all-around foundation in the areas that will lead to the careers that are most in demand."



The 15 courses offered for Spring 2019 present an exciting spectrum of choices throughout college departments, from Crop Production, Marketing & Sales in Landscape Horticulture (LANHT 77, taught by Nia Hill, below) to Bay Area Field Studies in Geology (GEOL 21) to Botanical Drawing in Art (ART 166) to the first-time class California Indian Ecology in Native American Studies (NARAM 76E). (See the entire list and descriptions at [www.merritt.edu/wp/nhs](http://www.merritt.edu/wp/nhs)).



The courses will count toward Certificates of Achievement in the areas of Conservation & Resource Management, Urban Agroecology, and Natural History & Resources, which are currently being developed to address job needs. Once these programs are in place (estimated to debut in January 2020), students will be trained for such careers as park ranger, environmental technician, naturalist/interpreter, urban farmer, food production specialist, and conservation worker.

As the program continues to grow, Brad will always be reminded of the program's mission by looking at the official logo of a lichen (right) which represents both the interdisciplinary nature of the program because it's made up of two to three organisms living together (fungus, alga, and bacterium) and because it is an underrepresented and underappreciated organism, symbolic of the people of color who have historically been underrepresented in environmental science.



"Merritt has a proud history of being the alma mater of the Black Panther founders and the site of its first African-American Studies Program," says Brad. "But unfortunately the black community was not historically embraced by the environmental movement which is one reason why African-American participation in nature is so low." In the NHS program, he adds, "diversity is at the core of our program and, as our mission states, we pledge to educate all of our students in an inclusive and equitable way as we commit to ensuring nature's long-term future."

For more information, contact Dr. Brad Balukjian at [bbalukjian@peralta.edu](mailto:bbalukjian@peralta.edu) or go to [www.merritt.edu/wp/nhs](http://www.merritt.edu/wp/nhs).