



# THE MERRITT CONNECTION

## President's Message



The start of the Fall 2015 term began and continues to be a whirlwind of activities on the Merritt campus. It is an exciting time to witness the high levels of energy and enthusiasm by students, staff and faculty. Perhaps, it's the focused attention to excellence through student equity or completion of the Barbara Lee Center for Science and Allied Health building or the arrival of Chancellor Laguerre marking a fresh start. *(continued on page 2)*

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## "S" Building Opens for Classes, Bringing Prestige and New Energy to Campus



Just a month shy of its 2013 groundbreaking, the 107,000-square-foot Barbara Lee Science and Allied Health Building opened right on schedule with students and faculty enjoying brand-new classrooms, labs, equipment, and furniture, not to mention outstanding views of the entire Bay Area from the top floor.

"I really like these break areas on every floor," said math student Anya Edwards as she tapped away on her laptop. "It's a great place to catch up on homework, meet friends, and form study groups."



*Students take advantage of the break areas on every floor to study or chat.*

Jennifer Yates of Radiologic Science said the space was "one thousand times better" than before. "It's clean and light and smells like a new car," she said. "The classrooms are beautiful with a view of the hills. It's esteem-building for the students to learn in this kind of environment."

The District recently sent a "save the date" notice for the building's Grand Opening on Friday, November 6, at 11:30 a.m. Watch for more details - all are welcome!



*The spiral staircase - or belix - marks the building's center.*

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## President's Message

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I'm proud of the many faculty, staff, students and District staff who pulled together to ensure the opening of the new building on August 24. The construction and architectural companies are working on the finishing touches. "Save the Date" for the building's grand opening on November 6, at 11:30 a.m.

Foremost, please be sure that our campus is clean and representative of its breathtaking views for teaching and service. If you see something that needs our attention, please contact Facilities at extension, 3967.

On a special note, Chancellor Laguerre is actively involved in our community and becoming familiar with each college's history and programs. Our Administration of Justice and Microscopy/ Histotech programs have already introduced their latest offerings to him, and in the coming weeks he and the Board of Trustees are invited to the annual Horticulture Club Plant sale on October 3 and 4, as well as the Africana Center opening. If you have something from your program, please let me know and we will work with the Chancellor's availability.

Lastly, as we strive for excellence and affirmation of our accreditation status, a special thanks to Dr. Audrey Trotter and Dr. Mia Kelly for stepping up in addressing the nine college recommendations and eight district recommendations to ACCJC.

*Dr. Norma Ambriz-Galaviz  
President, Merritt College*

## Faculty Spotlight

### New Academic Senate President's Diverse Upbringing Led to His Career



*Dr. Mario Rivas*

Growing up in a low-income North Oakland neighborhood, Mario Rivas would have probably been considered the least likely to succeed. He hung out in the streets, barely achieved a 1.5 GPA after 1-1/2 years at Laney, and was a self-described "light-weight thug."

But the things he instinctively learned — about diversity and respect, tolerance and perseverance, his personal strengths and his worst fears — would end up not only shaping his life but contributing toward the self-esteem and success of thousands of students whose lives he would touch.

"My mother was a single parent who cleaned houses from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day so I could do something with my life to help poor people," says Rivas. "But it wasn't until I flunked out of Laney and was in the Air Force that I knew she was right."

After the service, Rivas entered Cal State Hayward as an EOPS student and earned a B.A. in psychology, then received an M.A. in counseling at SF State and a Ph.D. in counseling psychology at the University of Minnesota. His dissertation was on an academic and psychological intervention for underprepared minority students, and his job in UM's Martin Luther King advising office was serving as primary advisor for students of color.

Back in California his career began taking shape. He taught psychology at CSU Hayward, then at SF State was Director of Advising Services, started a learning center, then served as its Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies. He then left to become VP of Student Services at BCC for seven years. Today at Merritt he is a much-loved psychology instructor where he is passionate about his work and his students. He also regularly speaks throughout the country on improving the achievement and learning success of students of color. His most prized achievement was his 5-year training at the Gestalt Institute in SF.

As the new Academic Senate President, Rivas says he will continue to encourage and support Merritt's dedicated faculty as they help students in this diverse institution achieve their goals in the classroom as well as develop the skills necessary to serve as leaders in making a difference throughout the community.

"Many of the kids at Merritt are from the inner city and grew up learning what I did on the streets, so I can identify with them," says Rivas. "My high school counselor told me I was never going to make it. I would never do that to students. They need guidance and support to be successful, and that's what I love to do."

## News of AJ's Pre-Academy Applauded



Announcement of the college's new Law Enforcement Pre-Academy spread far and wide in a community that welcomes the opportunity to increase the number of "homegrown" police officers in Oakland.

A press conference led by the Pre-Academy's creator, Margaret Dixon, and instructor Howard Jordan, drew multiple media outlets as well as Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf, law enforcement executives, Chancellor Jowel Laguerre, President Norma Ambriz-Galaviz, and AJ students.



This 13-week Pre-Academy, which started last week with a full class, will give Merritt students a leg-up when they have to go through the real police academy and will erase some of the barriers they face. Said Mayor Schaaf at the event: "We want to get more homegrown officers who can be compassionate and effective guardians of this community."

## Tobacco-Less Club President Leads the Effort for a 100% Smoke-Free Campus



*Showing support at Club Rush*

As president of Merritt's Tobacco-Less Club, Marlene has taken the lead in turning Merritt into a 100% Smoke-Free Campus, following Laney and Berkeley City College. (For now, there are designated smoking signs at Merritt which are not always adhered to.) For the past year, Marlene and club advocates have been taking the necessary steps to get the college's buy-in and present it to the Board of Trustees for approval.

"I don't want to see smokers endanger their lives, and I don't want others to breathe in second-hand smoke from cigarettes or e-cigarettes," says Marlene. "I want to build the facts and get support."



*Presenting at the Board Meeting*

She's glad to say she already has many positive votes, including several District administrators, President Ambriz-Galaviz, and the Classified Senate who "fully support any initiative that will promote a healthy and safe working environment."



*Receiving award from ATCC*

To further promote this issue, Marlene has applied for a \$5,000 Legacy Smoke-Free and Tobacco-Free Community College Grant Initiative offered by the American College Health Association.

Marlene's efforts have also been recognized outside of campus when she recently received an award from the Alameda Tobacco Control Coalition (ATCC) for her dedication to making the District's colleges smoke-free and impacting so many students.

"If we can save one person's life by educating them on the dangers of smoking and second-hand smoke," says Marlene, "this effort will all be worthwhile."

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## Welcome to New Merritt Employees

### Administrators

**Dr. Lilia Chavez**, Director of Student Activities and Campus Life

**Dr. Rosemary Delia**, Interim Dean of Workforce Development and Applied Sciences (Division II)

**Romeo Garcia**, Interim Dean of Special Projects and Grants

### Faculty

Monica Ambalal - Music  
Courtney Brown - CIS  
Frances Moy - DSPS Counselor

### Classified

**Samantha Knappenberger**, Research and Planning Officer

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## We're Reaching Out!

District Board of Trustee member Linda Handy (right) stopped by Merritt's booth at the Laurel Street Fair this summer to show her support! To participate in outreach activities or send promotional materials for the table, email Romeo Garcia or Maria Spencer. (Romeo is pictured along with Susan May.)

## ASMC Retreat Helps Strengthen Partnerships and Build Leadership



*Students bonded during the rigorous ropes course in San Francisco.*

While other Merritt College students were enjoying time off during the last days of summer, the new 2015-16 team of Associated Students of Merritt College was building its leadership skills and getting to know the college inside and out in the ASMC Summer Institute Retreat.

"We've spent a month of training and team building as we focused on leadership and how to work together," says Dr. Lilia Chavez, Director of Student Activities, who planned the Retreat and implemented a first-time Leadership Employment Pilot. "We are also working on procedures and practices and learning from each other."

Dr. Chavez also invited Dr. Bruce Bishop to train students on parliamentary procedures, as well as Merritt faculty and staff to encourage them to form campus partnerships which could possibly lead to campus jobs.



*Academic Senate President Mario Rivas trained the ASMC Council on Leadership Development.*

In a letter to President Ambriz-Galaviz, the ASMC thanked her for her support and summed up their experience:

"During the retreat we were able to plan, accomplish tasks, obtain hands-on training and leave with some fundamental life skills by working with different departments. It was through this retreat that we were able to work together, collaborate, communicate, and learn how to support the campus and ourselves."