

Merritt College Histotechnician Program  
**Student Handbook**  
2020-2021

# Student Handbook Policies and Procedures

## Merritt College Histotechnician Program

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### Introduction

Merritt College, located at 12500 Campus Drive in Oakland, is one of four campuses operated by the Peralta Community College District.

The first run of the Merritt Histotechnician Program (MHP) commenced in August of 2014. With initial funding provided by the Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCT) federal grant, the Merritt Histotechnician Program provides training on tissue sample preparation in addition to special stains, such as immunohistochemistry and in situ hybridization. Students will work with samples typically observed in clinical and research facilities.

This program is accredited through the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS) to meet the requirements mandated by the American Society of Clinical Pathology (ASCP) Board of Certification for Histotechnicians and Histotechnologists.

### ASCP HT Certification Test Eligibility

We anticipate that as early as 2019 students may be required to have earned an AS or more advanced degree prior to sitting for the ASCP exam. Students may work on their AS degree while in the Merritt Histotech program and may complete their clinical rotations prior to receiving the AS degrees, but as of the date of this writing can be accredited as licensed histotechnicians without the aforementioned degree. ASCP also currently offers a "route 2" to certification by testing for those who have significant academic training plus one year of on the job full spectrum histotech work. For current eligibility requirements students should refer to the ASCP Board of Certification website <https://www.ascp.org/content/board-of-certification>.

Partnerships with clinical, reference, and research facilities will provide students with the opportunity to obtain work experience to qualify students for the Histotechnician Certificate of Achievement, as well as eligibility for the ASCP certification exam. Graduates may then choose to transfer to universities to complete baccalaureate degrees in related fields.

### Non-Discrimination Policy

Merritt College is proud to promote the pursuit of academic excellence for all students and staff members. Educational services and programs are available to provide support and enrichment. Merritt College will provide all available services without regard to race, color, age, sex, religious creed, marital status, national origin, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation. Discrimination, in any form, will not be tolerated.

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### Admission Requirements

Merritt College is a public institution, wherein admission cannot be denied to applicants. Currently, there is no application process or selection process for the Merritt College Histotechnician Program.

Before admission criteria can be established, a validation study must be conducted to indicate which skills are required before acceptance in to the Merritt Histotech Program is granted. A study of this nature must be done for at least 2 years.

### Assessment

Most classes have basic prerequisites that require assessment before registration. Prior to taking placement tests, an application for admission must be submitted.

### Essential Functions for Admission and Success of Students

The faculty of the Merritt College Histotechnician Program has specified the following non-academic criteria which all applicants and enrolled students are expected to meet to thrive in the program's setting and in professional practice.

1. **Observation.** The applicant/student must be able to actively participate in demonstrations, laboratory exercises, and clinical experiences. Analysis of tissue samples is critical in the Histotechnician/Histotechnologist profession; functional use of visual and somatic sensations is required.
2. **Communication.** The applicant/student must be able to effectively communicate with fellow students, faculty, staff, and members of clinical affiliations. Speaking, reading, and writing are essential skills.
3. **Motor.** The applicant/student must have sufficient motor skills to perform manual and automated techniques associated with tissue sample preparation and analysis.
4. **Intellectual/Conceptual, Integrative, and Quantitative Abilities.** The applicant/student must be able to measure, reason, calculate, analyze, evaluate and synthesize; long periods of concentration, an understanding of spatial relationships of structures, and the ability to complete tasks in a timely manner are necessary skills.
5. **Behavioral/Social Attributes.** The applicant/student must possess emotional health required for full utilization of his or her intellectual abilities. Applicants must be able to develop mature and effective relationships with fellow students, faculty, staff and working professionals. Additionally, applicants must be able to endure potentially taxing workloads and adapt to high stress environments, particularly in clinical settings.

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### Program Goals

The Merritt College Histotechnician Program aims to educate and to train students for work as histotechnicians/histotechnologists. The California histology industry is presently understaffed and in need of quality, certified histology professionals. The Merritt College Histotechnician Program plans to enroll 15 to a maximum of 36 students per cohort.

### Program Mission

The mission of the Merritt College Histotechnician Program is to prepare students to enter the workforce as qualified, employable histologic professionals in the health care industry, and pharmaceutical and biomedical research. This program teaches students to act ethically and respectfully, and to develop skills applicable to the histology profession and the patients served.

### Program Tracks

Students must complete the Histotechnician Certificate of Achievement program of study which includes fulfilling a 240-hour clinical rotation requirement, to become eligible to sit for the ASCP Board of Certification exam, as indicated by Track One of the ASCP eligibility guidelines.

### Course Requirements for Merritt College's Histotechnician Certificate of Achievement, and Notes on Sequence of Required Coursework

Starting Fall 2018 the Merritt Microscopy Program amalgamated several small courses so that **Biosci 101 Theory and Practice of Microscopy\*\*** is the entry course for the Merritt Microscopy program and is also a pre-requisite for the Merritt Histotech Program. Biosci 101 has no prerequisites. Biosci 101 consolidated and replaced the courses and content of the previous Biosci 02, 05, 06 and 11 courses. Likewise, in Spring 2019 the MMP course **Biosci 102 Fluorescence Microscopy and Specimen Prep** will consolidate the content of several historical small Microscopy courses: Biosci 07, 08 and 10. These changes are being made to simplify enrollment and strengthen instruction.

Starting Fall 2018 the following classes must be successfully completed as co-requisites of the Merritt Microscopy Program, and are Prerequisites for taking classes in the Merritt Histotechnician Program:

Introductory General Chemistry (Chem 30) 4 units or General Chemistry (Chem 1A) 5 units.

- Prerequisite Math 201 or Math 201D or Math 208

Human Anatomy (Bio 2) 5 units, and Human Physiology (Bio 4) 5 units, or Human Anatomy & Physiology (Bio 20A) 5 units and Human Anatomy & Physiology (Bio 20B), 5 units.

Microbiology (Bio 3), 5 units

- Prerequisite Chem 30A or Chem 1A.

General Histology (Biosci 9) 5 units

- Prerequisite Bio 2 Human Anatomy or Bio 20A Human Anatomy and Physiology part 1

\*\*Note that Biosci 101 Theory and Practice of Microscopy must also be taken before starting Biosci 55 Beginning Histotechniques. For students who have had Anatomy, Chemistry, and Biosci 9, they may take Biosci 55- Beginning Histotechniques concurrently with Biosci 101 in Fall semesters.

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### Core Courses for the Merritt Histotechnician Program

Genomics Theory (Biosc 30 ( <i>can be taken at any point</i>	4.0
Beginning Histotechniques (Biosc 55)	5.0
Advanced Histotechniques (Biosc 56)	5.0

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### Selected Microscopy and Histotech Course Descriptions

#### **Theory and Practice of Microscopy – Biosc 101**

**6.0 units**

Comprehensive survey of cutting-edge biological microscopy: Theory of brightfield, fluorescence, and confocal microscopy; extensive hands-on experience with digital brightfield, phase, and epifluorescence microscopes; basics of specimen preparation and digital image processing; exploration of careers in biotech, research, and biomedical sciences; fundamentals of lab safety and industrial and biomedical quality control; and exploration of bioethics.

#### **Fluorescence Microscopy and Specimen Prep – Biosc 102**

**6.0 units**

Fundamentals of theory of optical microscopy as applied to image optimization, troubleshooting and experimental design. Basics of specimen preparation for microscopy, including tissue culture, indirect immunofluorescence, immunohistochemistry, histotechnology and histotechnological stains. Laboratory includes: project-based learning with digital microscopes, including DIC, phase, darkfield and wide field fluorescence; mammalian cell culture and aseptic technique; specimen preparation, including immunofluorescence and H&E staining.

#### **General Histology – Biosc 9**

**5.0 units**

Survey of animal histology with an emphasis on human histology: Overview of cells, cellular organelles; plant, animal, and human tissues and relationship to organ system.

#### **Genomics Theory – Biosc 30**

**4.0 units**

Introduction to genetics and genomic technologies: Principles of genetics and data collection (DNA and RNA structure, mitochondrial DNA, nucleic acid replication, protein synthesis, mitosis-meiosis, Mendelian principles, mutation, molecular character alignment, evolution and phylogenetic reconstruction, combined with data handling (bioinformatics mining using GenBank data), and scientific writing; includes guest speakers and on-site tours of genomics institutions and labs. **Students may substitute Biosc 50, Genetic Diseases, for Biosci 30.**

#### **Beginning Histotechniques – Biosc 55**

**5.0 units**

Practical applications and skill-building in tissue fixation: processing, embedding, sectioning, hematoxylin-eosin staining, microorganism staining, quality control related to routine histological techniques and equipment management.

#### **Advanced Histotechniques – Biosc 56**

**5.0 units**

Focuses on special stains, automated tissue processing, quality assurance and quality control safety procedures as they apply to clinical histology and immunohistochemistry



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### Work Experience Credit

Students who are already working as histotechnicians or histotechnologists may be eligible for work experience credit. In some cases, this may allow students to bypass certain prerequisites or co-requisites. This will be determined by the Biosciences Programs Coordinator/Director and the Histotech Program Director. A letter from a current supervisor at the student's place of employment will be required. However, students should be aware that course content is designed to prepare students for histotech careers as well as convey key theory and practice needed in preparation for the ASCP certification exam.

### Clinical Rotation Eligibility

Clinical work experience is crucial to the applicant/student's success in the histology profession. Upon completion and passage of all Histotechnician specific courses with a "C" or better, the applicant/student is eligible to work on site in a clinical rotation under the supervision of a clinical liaison. Students will be placed based on factors such as course performance and instructor recommendations; we will try to accommodate student interests and commute distance needs. The applicant/student must complete 41.5-55.5 units to receive the complete Histotechnician Certificate of Achievement from Merritt College.

### Clinical Rotation Assignment

The Program Director will assign students to a clinical affiliate based on the following criteria:

- student preference
- geographical distance between the site and the student's residence
- availability of slots at a clinical site
- instructor's discretion and student performance in key coursework
- student's completion of core classes

### Selecting Clinical Rotation Sites

Students are responsible for finding transportation to and from the clinical sites, and all costs associated with transportation. Although there are multiple schedules available, each site has designated times and days for students. If a student cannot find a suitable site, he/she may need to adjust his/her schedule. Students are expected to be flexible with the times and days of work experience. Students may be assigned clinical experiences during evenings, nights, and/or weekends.

Students must be prepared to accept an assignment to any facility being utilized by the program. Students must have a physical examination completed prior to beginning work experience and are responsible for any fees associated with the physical.

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### Student Clinical Rotation Service Work

Students are permitted to work under the supervision of the clinical rotation site instructor during predetermined shifts. Under no circumstance will the student be allowed to work unsupervised and/or outside of scheduled shifts; students are not to perform tasks unrelated to histotechnology, nor are they to replace any technicians on the clinical site. Additionally, students are generally not employees and should not expect any form of compensation for work performed in clinical rotations.

### Dress Code Policy for Clinical Affiliates

Students are expected to adhere to the dress codes in place at clinical affiliates. Open-toed shoes are not permitted in laboratory settings. For safety reasons, long hair should be pulled back, and jewelry removed during work shifts. Depending on the site, jeans and shorts may not be worn while in the laboratory.

### Background Checks and Drug Testing

Depending on the selected site, a background check and drug test may be required. The student is responsible for covering the cost of fingerprinting, and making arrangements with an outside agency to perform the test. Additionally, a clinical affiliate may require students to attend an orientation.

### Current Clinical Rotation Affiliates

We are continuing to add clinical rotation affiliates; some recent affiliates include:

- DBS as Stanford Health Care-ValleyCare, Pleasanton, CA
- John Muir Medical Center, Walnut Creek, CA
- Pathology Services Inc. Berkeley, CA
- Stanford Health Care, Palo Alto, CA
- UCSF Mount Zion, San Francisco, CA
- Kaiser Permanente/The Permanente Medical Group (TPMG) (Kaiser is an in-house program for Kaiser employees. Kaiser employees take Merritt Histotechnician Program courses before entering Kaiser's program). Student's who come from Kaiser and complete Kaiser's program will take their ASCP certification exam through Kaiser, and not through the Merritt Histotechnician Program. See program website for updates: <http://www.merritt.edu/wp/histotech/>

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### Clinical Experience Evaluation

Students will be evaluated based on their performance and conduct while working on site. Students will be graded based on a “pass/no pass” system. Units are not awarded for clinical experience, and the grade has no impact on a student’s grade point average.

Students are expected to act in a professional manner. If a student is asked to leave a clinical experience site, the aforementioned student may jeopardize his or her chances of securing a slot in another clinical site.

### Clinical Grievance Policy

Conflicts or issues with a clinical affiliate can be addressed in the following steps:

1. All issues should be discussed with the Clinical Coordinator immediately. There is no formal, written complaint procedure—verbal accounts of incidents and issues are sufficient.
2. If the Clinical Coordinator and the student are unable to resolve the conflict, the Educational Coordinator will act as a neutral mediator. Again, there is no formal procedure for this step.
3. If the Educational Coordinator is unable to resolve the conflict, the Program Director will step in upon request. At this time, a formal complaint will be lodged with documentation of the grievances. The Program Director will resolve the conflict through the use of Merritt College’s student grievance policy.

### College Requirements

Students are subject to the rules and regulations of Merritt College. Please refer to the New Student Orientation Handbook, Student Discipline Policy, and Schedule of Classes for specific policies and procedures.

### Program Requirements

Students in the Merritt College Histotechnician Program must maintain a “C” or better in all academic courses and achieve a “pass” in clinical work experience to ensure successful completion.

### Previous Coursework

All coursework taken at another college, in or outside of the United States, requires evaluation by a Counselor and the Program Director. The student is responsible for requesting a variance from the

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Program Director. The Bioscience Department Director and the Division III Dean must approve the variance once completed; the variance will be forwarded to the Admissions office for verification and recording.

### Attendance

Students are expected to attend classes, lab hours, and clinical site shifts regularly and **on time**. The policy for attendance is highlighted in each course syllabi.

If a student is unable to attend a lecture, lab, or site shift, he or she must make prior arrangements with the Program Director or the Clinical Coordinator. Attendance is recorded in the Clinical Work Experience evaluation.

### Grading

Grades are distributed upon the completion of each semester. If classes are not withdrawn or dropped by the respected deadlines, the grade received will be on a student's permanent record. The grading breakdown is as follows:

Grade	Definition	Grade Point Value
A	excellent	4
B	good	3
C	satisfactory	2
D	passing less than satisfactory	1
F	failing	0
P	credit	
NP	no credit	

### Student Injury Policy

Students will be subjected to microtomes and other potentially hazardous objects. In the event of an injury sustained on campus or an affiliate site, contact a faculty member immediately. The faculty member will complete the necessary forms and procedure with treatment of the injury according to district policy.

### Health Policy

Please note: Clinical affiliates and NAACLS require students to present proof of a **current** physical examination on file; additionally, all immunizations must be up-to-date. The record of the physical examination will be kept in the office of the Educational Coordinator. Students are responsible for the cost of the physical examination, should one be needed.

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### Tuition

Merritt College currently has an enrollment fee of \$46.00 per unit for California residents. There is an additional fee for out-of-state and international students. Please refer to the Admissions and Records department for exact fees. Additionally, students are required to pay an \$18.00 health fee. If a class requires a material fee, it will be listed in the Schedule of Classes. Other fees include student activities fees, material cards, a chemistry deposit and parking fees. Students are responsible for purchasing the required textbooks and any additional supplies required by the program.

### Financial Aid

Financial Aid opportunities are available for qualified students. For more information please contact the Financial Aid Office.

### Scholarships

Opportunities for scholarships are available at the Peralta Community College District's website: [www.peralta.edu](http://www.peralta.edu). Periodically, Bioscience faculty will share scholarship opportunities directly to students.

### Graduation

Graduation from the Merritt College Histotechnician Program results in the attainment of the Histotechnician Certificate of Achievement. The Certificate of Achievement is awarded upon the successful completion of all academic coursework listed in the approved program of study, and the completion of a 240-hour clinical rotation at an approved affiliate site. Once the Program Director has verified a student's successful completion, said student may petition for graduation through Counseling and the Admissions and Records Department.

### Program Accreditation

The Merritt College Histotechnician Program is accredited through the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS). For more information on accreditation, please contact NAACLS at 5600 N. River Road, Suite 720, Rosemont, IL 60018-5119, (773 714-8880 or visit the NAACLS website at [www.naacls.org](http://www.naacls.org).

### Student ASCP Certification

Eligible students will apply for certification through the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP). The ASCP Board of Certification Procedures for Examination and Certification booklet will be available from the Education Coordinator. For complete instructions contact the ASCP Board of Certification at 33 W. Monroe St., Suite 1600, Chicago, IL 60603, (312 541-4999 or visit the ASCP website at [www.ascp.org/bor](http://www.ascp.org/bor).

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### Documentation Required for Student ASCP HT Certification Exam Eligibility

An official transcript from Merritt College, bearing the embossed seal of the college, the signature of the Registrar and the date your degree was conferred must be submitted to the ASCP BOC. All degree requirements must be completed before you will be able to sit for the examination. The Merritt College Histotechnician Program Director must sign or approve the application. The student has a period of five years from completion of the program to sit the exam. After that period eligibility will be based on clinical laboratory experience.

### ASCP Certification Exam Application Fees

The application fee must be submitted with the application form. The current fee for the HT ASCP examination is \$215. This fee is non-refundable.

The application is valid for a period of three (3) years.

### ASCP Examination Format

The ASCP Histotechnician Examination is an exam made up of 100 multiple-choice questions. The multiple-choice component uses computer adaptive testing (CAT). The CAT exam is held at NCS Pearson Professional Centers. Two hours and thirty minutes are allowed for the 100 questions. Computer adaptive testing format is based upon the examinee's ability. Initially questions of moderated difficulty are given to the examinee. Each time an examinee answers a question the computer re-estimates the examinee's ability. Then, based upon that estimate, the computer selects questions to challenge the examinee. The advantage to this format is that examinees are not asked questions that are far beyond their ability. The scores are adjusted for level of difficulty. The BOC transforms the scores into scaled scores that can range from 100 to 999.

### ASCP HT Examination Grading

A score of 400 is required for passing the ASCP CAT HT exam. At the completion of the exam applicants will know whether or not they have passed. Examination scores will be sent within 10 working days after completing the examination. Scores will also be released to the HT Program Director (unless instructed otherwise). An applicant must successfully complete the examination to receive HT ASCP certification.

### ASCP Re-examination

Students are permitted to take the HT examination a total of five times. After five unsuccessful attempts a student is ineligible for further examination in the HT category under the same route.

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### ASCP Certification Maintenance Program

Individuals certified beginning in January 2004 will be required to participate in the BOC Certification Maintenance Program in order to maintain their certification status. The Certification Maintenance Program (CMP) requires 36 hours of documented continued competency every three years. Information on the CMP is available at the ASCP website.

### Merritt Histotechnician Program Dismissal Policy

Students enrolled in the Histotechnician Certificate of Achievement program of study are responsible for adhering to the policies and regulations established by the Board of Trustees (see College Catalog and the Department of Biology at Merritt College).

The College, in order to maintain standards of student conduct, commensurate with the academic and social level of higher education shall enforce proper student behavior in the classroom, campus grounds and in authorized activities related to the College. Upon recommendation of the President or designee, a student will be disciplined when his/her attitude, actions, or conduct are detrimental to the College. Disciplinary action will be taken in support of local, state, and federal laws. A professor can remove a student from his/her class for the day of the removal and the next class meeting. This student is then subject to suspension or expulsion from the College. Refer to the Student Standard of Conduct on suspension.

### Merritt Histotechnician Program Faculty

Feather Ives, Histotech Program Director

Yohannes Kidane, HTL, Adjunct Faculty

Shirley Pan, HTL, Educational Coordinator

Candy Mintz, PhD, Clinical Rotation Coordinator

Gisele Giorgi, PhD, Bioscience Programs Director and Microscopy Program Director

Program Website <http://www.merritt.edu/wp/histotech/>

### References

Mt San Antonio College Histotechnician Training Program Student Handbook. 2013 Revision.  
Merritt College Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) Program Student Handbook. 2013 Revision.

### Program Accreditation

The Merritt Histotechnician Program is accredited by the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS), 5600 N River Rd, Des Plaines, IL 60018; 773-714-8880, [info@naaccls.org](mailto:info@naaccls.org)

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### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

#### **Where do I start?**

Histotech students start by taking Biosci 101 and then Biosci 102, these are the revised Microscopy Program classes that give students critical histotech imaging skills - they have no pre-requisites. (If you have very advanced microscopy experience/skills already it is possible to test out of these classes, but this is usually rare).

#### **Are there classes you must take before you actually start the program?**

There are no prerequisites for starting the two Microscopy program classes, but the Histotechnician courses have prerequisites. Please check the catalog and schedule for current course prerequisites.

#### **When is the next class?**

Biosci 101 will next be offered the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters. But you could start working toward the histotechnician program by taking some of the above co-requisite or prerequisite classes anytime.

#### **Are any classes from a previous community college transferable (if needed) for the program?**

Courses from other California community colleges, California State Colleges, UCs, and other U.S. institutions are simple to transfer in for credit. Once enrolled students can talk with counselors to go about the transfer of units earned from other schools in the US; transfer of credits or units from international schools may also be possible but may vary depending on type of course and school. Courses must be the equivalent of the Merritt program requirements.

#### **How long is the program?**

The length of the program will depend on what coursework a student has already accomplished, and active course load at Merritt (e.g. whether Summer courses are also taken); typically, it will be anywhere from 1 to 3 years.

#### **Is this program do-able while also working a full-time job?**

Yes, many past and recent students have worked full time while also taking the classes. Classes are offered in the evenings and on weekends; there may be some lab sections offered in late afternoons, but usually with a lab section offered in the evening or weekend as an alternative.

#### **Program Cost and Financial Aid?**

The cost per unit in the Peralta Community College System is currently \$46 for California residents, so multiply the total number of units anticipated for each semester by \$46, then multiply by the anticipated number of semesters. Usually it takes 12 units each semester to qualify for financial aid, so that works out to about \$552 per 12-unit semester. There is an additional fee for out-of-state and international students. Please refer to the Admissions and Records department for exact fees. Additionally, students are required to pay an \$18.00 health fee. If a class requires a material fee, it will be listed in the Schedule of Classes. Other fees include student activities fees, material cards, a chemistry deposit and parking fees. Students are responsible for purchasing the required textbooks and any additional supplies required by the program.

Histotech students who aim to earn an AS degree can qualify for financial aid. There are also scholarships (both needs based and need independent) to apply for, and some students may be eligible for a Board of Governors "BOG" fees waiver. Note other expenses would include books, meals, transportation etc. of course. Talk to a counselor about the financial aid application process once you are enrolled (unfortunately they are so busy that they only want to talk to enrolled students).

Although the specific category BIOSC Histotechnician is not listed for financial aid, we recommend that Histotech bound students aim to earn an Associate's Degree, which does qualify students for financial aid. Earning an AS better prepares students for future educational advancement and career opportunities. Either aim to earn an AS in Health Science, which only requires taking Nutrition 10 with the Histotech program's set of classes, or along with the Histotech program's set of pre-nursing type coursework you are also essentially earning units towards an AS



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in Natural Science (just add taking organic chemistry, etc). Some Histotech students have easily earned BOTH of these two Associates Degrees and their Microscopy and Histotech certificates, since the type of required coursework overlaps so much, and working towards either AS counts toward being eligible for receiving financial aid. *At present an Associate's Degree is not required for ASCP (HT) certification but we anticipate at some point that will happen.*