From March 1st to March 4th Merritt College had the pleasure of hosting the ACCJC Peer Review Visiting Team lead by Dr. Keith Flamer, President/Superintendent of the College of the Redwoods. Throughout the course of the week, members of the team met with Merritt administrators, faculty, staff, and students to get a better sense of the institution and appraise our progress since the Midterm Report, Special Report, and Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER). I want to thank the Peer Visiting Team for the collegial and collaborative approach they brought to this work, and express our appreciation for the comments they provided. Incorporating their feedback is going to make Merritt College even stronger going forward. I also want to take a moment to acknowledge everyone who contributed to the preparation of the ISER, and getting Merritt ready for the visit (our campus community, the Chancellor/District Office, and the Board of Trustees). We look forward to receiving the final report from the ACCJC in June.

I am pleased to report some good news shared with me by our Financial Aid Director Ernesto Nery. Through our default prevention efforts, Merritt College has reduced the risk of student defaults to below the national average of 9.7%. The official 3-year cohort default rate for Merritt College has dropped from 19.3% in 2020 to 6.7% in 2021. Student loan default can not only have negative impacts on the student borrower, but it can also impact an institution’s federal funding if the cohort default rate exceeds a threshold of 30%. So we are focused on keeping our cohort default rate as low as possible. Thank you to the Financial Aid Team for their hard work and dedication!

As our close-out event for Black History Month the program coordinators of NextUp, CalWORKs, EOPS/CARE, Sankofa, and Puente hosted an on-campus “Grab & Go” for students on February 25. Students received hot meals catered by Everett & Jones, and PPE packages. This collaborative effort was meant to show our students that we are still here working hard to assist them in meeting basic needs. For many students Merritt College remains a safe haven and place of refuge, so while there are many organizations that are providing “grab & go” in the community, we have decided to host our own event each month until in-person classes resume in earnest. And it is not just the students who benefit—to see the smiles of appreciation was an indescribable feeling for those who participated.