



# THE MERRITT CONNECTION

## President's Message



In the past month, Merritt College has sponsored events honoring heroes like Cesar Chavez, Dr. Terrence Roberts, and Minnijean Brown Trickey. These individuals made significant contributions during the era of the civil rights movement.

The Puente Club and ASMC selected Dr. Juan Carlos Arzuz for Cesar Chavez Day to reflect on community and educational programs. His presentation best symbolized the challenges of moving forward in society, where the educational system may judge you by your appearance, language, or immigration status. This is translated into the experiences of overt and/or covert racism or being stereotyped.

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***The Merritt Connection***  
***Merritt College***  
***Peralta Community College***  
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## Bay Area IT Leaders Partner with Merritt to Make Cybersecurity Program a Success



In an effort to help academically talented but financially challenged students establish career paths in the high-tech world, two Silicon Valley executives have worked with Merritt College to develop a program in the in-demand career of cybersecurity.

Students in the Application and Infrastructure Security Program have just completing its first successful semester and will be placed in internships this summer to gain real-life experience as part of the curriculum.

“We feel privileged to have helped Merritt College update its IT curriculum and give this opportunity to students,” says Jim Cates, president of LOBI Group. Cates and Mark Egan, a partner in StrataFusion, belong to a CIO networking community which sponsors a non-profit organization called CISE Education Fund. “We are excited to have received an overwhelming response to our first semester of courses.



Over the past 10 years, the fund has given more than \$750,000 to support students in IT programs. The courses are taught by both Merritt instructors and industry professionals and the program has an 18-member advisory board of top executives in Silicon Valley security.

Says Anita M. Black, Program Coordinator of this latest addition to Merritt's Computer Information Systems Department: “We are thrilled to have been chosen to partner with CISE to allow our students this important career opportunity.”

*Pictured above: Todd Barnum (top left), industry lecturer and VP of Security Risk at Forrester Research, and Isaias Leiva (center right), computer networking instructor, teach in the program.*

## President's Message *(continued)*

Dr. Arzuz introduced the concept of cultural resiliency and provided a live demonstration of his educational journey from grade school to college that reinforced the impact educational systems have on students.

Terrence and Minnijean were members of the "Little Rock Nine." These two individuals shared their personal experiences of what they endured as teenagers and as participants in desegregating Little Rock Central High School.

They both suffered name-calling, shoving, and repeated harassment, yet they showed up every day. Minnijean inspired others to share their stories and warned the audience that fighting against poverty and social and racial injustices places you in the line of fire.

These events have clearly reinforced the fact that our personal journey shapes the person we become. Our students become our future leaders of our communities.

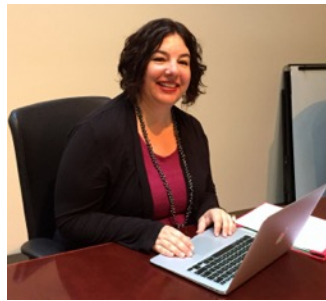
I'm reminded how lucky I am to serve at an institution that recognizes the personal stories of our students to further engage them toward greater self-confidence and success.

That's how we change lives.

*Dr. Norma Ambriz-Galaviz*  
President

## *Administrator Spotlight*

### **Div. I Dean Brings Passion for Equality**



Sitting at her desk recently as Merritt College's new Instructional Dean Dr. Tina Vasconcellos received her usual after-school text from her 15-year-old son Zachary, a sophomore at Berkeley High School. "Guess where I am?" she read, assuming he was at home doing his homework. "I'm at BCC registering for French in the Concurrent Enrollment Program."

For any other 15-year-old, this may be unusual. But not for Zachary who grew up at community colleges following his mother's career in the Peralta District and learning about the value of the community college system that has become his mother's career and passion since he was an infant.

Spanning both the instructional and student services sides over her 14 years so far in the system, Dr. Vasconcellos has created innovative programs and pioneered new avenues to make the system a better and more equitable place for all students.

"Community college is where the access is and where we can have the most impact from an educational perspective," she says. "I don't feel the four-year colleges have the same ability to impact the community."

Dr. Vasconcellos' own educational journey was neither traditional nor easy. Growing up in San Leandro, she was a first-generation college student with little support from a family where higher education had little value. "Having a strong work ethic was important in my family," she says. "They thought I was successful enough just to have a good job. My grandfather always said, 'You work hard and that is how you get ahead.' The importance of continuing education was antithetical to his belief system and history of migrant farm workers."

But she had higher aspirations. So just before graduating from Moreau High School, she drove herself to Southern California to look at colleges. But when she got there, she soon realized she was out of her element both financially and culturally and turned around and came home. She soon gravitated toward the community college system and began her studies in psychology at Chabot College, transferring to Cal State Hayward, and continuing on to get her master's in Counseling Psychology at John F. Kennedy University. She worked full-time throughout all her studies.

She began working in the Hayward Unified School District as a special education vocational evaluator, then to the Regional

## NEWS BRIEFS

### New Guaranteed Transfer Agreements with Black Colleges

Beginning in Fall 2015,



California community college transfer students who meet certain academic criteria will be guaranteed

admission to nine historically black colleges and universities, thanks to an agreement the California Community Colleges Board of Governors and the leaders of the institutions signed at a recent board meeting.

“The California Community Colleges is working on multiple fronts to open avenues of opportunity for our students,” said California Community Colleges Chancellor Brice W. Harris. “This agreement opens a new and streamlined transfer pathway for our students to some of the finest and culturally diverse institutions of higher learning in the United States. I thank our nine partners for working with us to make it possible.”

It has been found that the retention and graduation rates of California community college students who have transferred to HBCUs are high, and the Chancellor’s Office encourages students to take advantage of this opportunity.

To find out more details, go to [cccco.edu](http://cccco.edu).

Occupational Program serving adults seeking vocational training, then to Chabot College as an EOPS and CalWORKs counselor, and then to her own private counseling practice. But it was the subsequent counseling experience at Vista College (now BCC) that inspired her to get a Ph.D. in community college leadership at Colorado State University. Upon completion, she returned to the system and became dean of matriculation at Laney in 2008.

“My whole career has focused around engaging and supporting the community,” says Dr. Vasconcellos, who has volunteered in community organizations throughout her career. “The degrees and certificates I have created are all about how we can better serve those in the community and empower them to move forward. I can identify with students who don’t have family support and are struggling to navigate the system.”

*“It’s very important to me to be able to understand other individuals and other cultures . . .*

*I grew up in a judgmental system where being ‘other’ was not okay.”*

She also says that the diversity is one of the main reasons she has enjoyed her work in the Peralta system and currently at Merritt. “I value differences in culture, background, and thought,” she says. “I feel it is in differences that we can find connections and commonality we may not have been aware of.”

“It’s very important to me to be able to understand other individuals and other cultures,” says Dr. Vasconcellos, who wrote her doctoral dissertation on the life stories of African-Americans females and the messages they got about themselves in the educational system. “I grew up in a judgmental system where being ‘other’ was not okay. I’ve taught Zachary that it’s important to expand his world and not think that his is the norm. Through his experience with me, including sitting in classes and meetings, he has developed a strong sense of social justice, and I’m very proud of him for being able to recognize and speak out against inequality.”

Dr. Vasconcellos embraces the diversity and opportunities she now has at Merritt College. “I’m excited about being back in instruction and the chance I have to meet the needs of the students and the community and make a difference. I am very committed to my work at Merritt.”

## Merritt Media Alerts

—Jon Drinnon’s English student Aerin Monroe had an opinion piece published in the SF Chronicle titled *The Cost of a Drink of Water*.

—Landscape Horticulture instructor and award-winning landscape designer Patricia St. John had one of her design projects highlighted in the SF Chronicle in an article titled *Big Impact in a Pint-Size SF Plot*.

## Homeland Security Emergency Training



Administration of Justice Students in the Homeland Security track proudly hold their Certificates of Completion from the Governor's Office of Emergency Services for successfully completing 24 hours of training in School Vulnerability Assessments. The students are (front row l-r): Nancy Flores and Maria Najera and (back row l-r): Tracey Christian, Jose Alejo, Alfonso Flores, and Gonzalo Flores. Standing with them are instructors Howard Jordan and Elaine Wallace and Department Chair Margaret Dixon.

## Library Book Store Sale

For a limited time only, the Library is offering books on sale at half of their original sale price, from less than 25 cents to \$1. There are both hardback and paperback books that have been weeded out to make room for new ones. Come and get them!

## Student Spotlight

### Rising Track Star Gets New Start



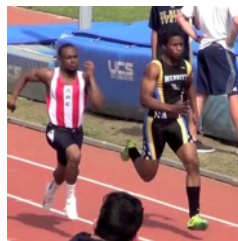
After winning the NorCal finals in his senior year of high school, Adeeb Nasir’s shining track career came to a halt. He ran for Merritt for a year but was injured, became depressed, and dropped out. He later enrolled in Laney because it was nearby but soon knew he had made a mistake.

“I missed track and I realized that Merritt offered me more

opportunities. It feels like a community here, and everyone helped me analyze myself and the way I was acting with too much anger and attitude and not giving things a chance.”

As he began to get his speed back in track, his interest in studies also increased and he suddenly wanted to try everything. “It took me awhile to get up early,” Adeeb admits, “but I’ve become interested in a lot of things—philosophy, biology, history, anthropology, I really want to develop my mind. That’s the good thing about community college, they give you the opportunity to try a lot of different things.”

Adeeb attributes his new attitudes to the teachers and his coach. “There are so many great teachers here. They get a kid like me who is lazy and not interested in school, and they really try to make me work harder and do better,” he says. “And my coach drives me and pushes me because he really wants me to succeed. I’m glad he gave me a second chance.”



Coach Drazen calls Adeeb a great example of why community colleges

work. “When I first recruited him from Hayward High School, he was immature, introverted, and lacked focus. Speaking with him now it is clear that the buffer of community colleges has allowed him to safely struggle, to discover himself, and to begin believing in his own ability both athletically and academically. He’s another example of a student that you never give up on no matter how dire it appears.”

Adeeb plans to transfer at the end of fall 2015.

*(See Adeeb Nasir on video at [www.merritt.edu/wp/track](http://www.merritt.edu/wp/track) as he sets an early season personal best sprinting the 100m in 10.73 at UC Davis, putting him 6th in Northern California and in the hunt for a spot at the state championship.)*