



The Merritt Connection

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Dr. Marie-Elaine Burns, President

First Non-Credit Program at Merritt Sets ESL Students on Career Pathway to Child Development

Over the years teaching Child Development courses at the Fruitvale campus, Jennifer Briffa met a population of students eager to learn the communication skills to help them find employment. In working with other faculty and staff to promote the best use of the site, they realized the need for non-credit ESL classes that could be grouped with other classes to learn career skills.

“Many of the students are fearful of moving forward to take even pre-requisite classes at Merritt because they don’t have the confidence that they can succeed in regular college classes, and the cost is too high to take a chance,” says Jennifer. “So we needed to find a program that would allow them to transition to Merritt while learning language and career skills at the same time.”

After two years of research, planning, and approvals, Merritt’s first non-credit pilot program was launched at the Fruitvale site this semester with a healthy enrollment of 40 students. The Child Development/ESL Program offers two 8-week evening sessions of Introduction to Infant/Toddler Development as well as English for Infant/Toddler Development. By completing both sessions, students receive a State-approved Certificate of Completion. And, best of all, the classes are free.

“This was the perfect solution to preparing students for a career by learning Child Development skills and taking ESL classes geared toward their profession,” says Jennifer, who created the program with Laney ESL instructor Beth Maher, who teaches the ESL portion of the class, and Lisa Cook, previously an ESL instructor at BCC, now its Dean of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. “But the program could be geared toward any career. Students feel more confident in this setting where there is less risk because there are no grades, just an assessment of their strengths.”

The program is designed to allow in-home babysitters, nannies, childcare workers, teacher’s aides, or any profession taking care of children to receive a certificate that will make them more marketable in the field and can lead to furthering their education to earn a license and/or a certificate or degree in Child Development.

“It’s been very powerful and fulfilling for all of us,” says Jennifer, who also serves as the program’s coordinator. “We are excited to see the students engaged, enthusiastic, and determined, and we look forward to seeing many of them on campus as future Merritt students.”

This is the first in a series of non-credit classes that is currently being coordinated at Merritt College by Maria Spencer, Interim Dean of Educational Success, in such areas as Allied Health, Business, Communication, Disability Services, and Landscape Horticulture. For more information, contact Maria at mspencer@peralta.edu or Jennifer Briffa at jbriffa@peralta.edu



Jennifer Briffa teaching non-credit class at Fruitvale campus.