



# The Merritt Connection

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Dr. Marie-Elaine Burns, President

## Merritt Alumna Credits Histotech Program for Successful Career and Returns to Campus to Help Others

With a strong interest in science, Feather Ives headed from El Cerrito High School to San Diego State University as a first-generation college student to follow her passion.



Though her intended path did not work out as planned at first, she would end up years later with lots of real-life experiences behind her as she transitioned to an in-demand career in science.

“I ended up majoring in public administration at SDSU which enabled me to do something practical and get my professional life started,” says Feather. “My first ‘adult’ job was in an advertising sales position at the LA Daily News where I was put into leadership roles. Then I spent the next 10 years building my resume in various industries.”

So while her science dreams were put on hold, the rest of her life was most certainly moving at full speed: In business, she managed small and midsize teams, worked in business development, and

was an affordable housing property manager. She even spent a year and a half teaching English in South Korea. In pursuing her interest in public health, she provided re-entry assistance to prisoners at San Quentin, taught English online to girls in Afghanistan, and is a board member for an organization that provides integrative medicine to women with cancer living below the poverty line. In January 2015, she had a daughter and became a stay-at-home mom for two years.

It was during that time she attended a housewarming party for a friend who had recently completed the Merritt Histotechnology Program. The friend explained that histotechnology involved thinly slicing and staining biopsy tissue and preparing slides for viewing under a microscope to diagnose diseases. “I had always been interested in pathology and when I heard that the Merritt program would cost only \$2,000 and I could earn \$70,000 and up, I enrolled in the first courses that spring of 2016.

Feather credits Microscopy Program Director Gisele Giorgi with her success in getting through the rigorous schedule. “Gisele was my professor and my mentor, and she was so supportive,” says Feather. “She also has great connections with companies who are looking for interns, and I ended up being offered two internships at the same time—Gladstone Institute and Chan Zuckerberg Biohub—where I got on-the-job training and learned a ton working on the microscopes and in the wet lab.” She also was thrilled to have a scientific article published with several other authors in the prestigious journal *Nature* during her time at Biohub.

In two years, the hard work in classes and experience in internships paid off. Feather was offered her “dream job” at UC Berkeley where she is currently a Research Associate in the Molecular Imaging Center and works with director Holly Aaron who is on the Merritt Microscopy Program’s advisory board.

“It says a lot about the biosciences programs at Merritt,” says Feather. “There are no barriers to entry. You apply to Merritt and enroll in the intro microscopy course. Histotech and microscopy jobs are in high demand with openings across the country in private industry, universities, and hospitals. I also love this program because of its inclusion and diversity in age, gender, and race. Our program looks how science classrooms should look everywhere.”

To help others achieve success, Feather has been mentoring Merritt students to help them transition into higher-paying jobs so they can continue to live in the Bay Area. “Many of our students are mid-career,” she says, “and the goal is to train folks for jobs that get them out from under the \$20 per hour range and earning \$35 an hour or more.

Feather has recently been accepted into a Master’s of Public Health Program and is deciding which of her many interests she’ll pursue. But whatever she does, she says she’ll always remember the college’s slogan ‘We Change Lives’ and be grateful to Merritt for providing the program and support that changed hers.