

STEFANIE HARDING – May 2015

Following in Her Parents' Footsteps and Thriving at Merritt College



It's doubtful there is anyone who knows Merritt College's underground tunnel system better than Stefanie Harding. Starting at age 7, she spent her childhood traversing through them after school while waiting for her father, Jim, to finish his work as the college's audiovisual specialist.

Over the years she got to know the campus well—she hung out in the library, played games in the computer labs, and bought treats at the book store. And often she would even help her dad set up for events, do mic checks, and run the cords. Years later when she had to decide where to go to college, it wasn't a tough call.

“Of course I was going to go to Merritt,” says Stefanie. “It was comfortable, safe, and easy for me to navigate, and by then my mother worked here as well. I also had an extended family of faculty and staff to keep me on track.”

Stefanie went on to transfer to Cal State Hayward (now East Bay), and held several administrative jobs in the corporate world to see what it was like outside of academia. But after a number of years, she knew where her heart was. In 2008 she became Staff Assistant in the President's Office. Her lifetime of Merritt experience and her ability to retain details that others may not quickly made her the “walking encyclopedia” of Merritt College policies and procedures.

“Everything surfaces in the President's Office so that's part of the reason I'm familiar with as much as I am,” says Stefanie. “I have to have answers when situations arise or know what form to send or who to contact and help guide the situation. And I need to be able to connect the dots between the college and the District and know who the key players are.”

Not only is Stefanie familiar with names and numbers, she cares deeply about the college and has served on numerous shared governance committees over the years to help make the college a better place.

“Part of the reason I agreed to be Classified Senate President was to challenge myself in a leadership role, but it also helped to be actively involved in the governing process and take a key role in the institution as a whole, she says. “Most importantly, I feel like the voice of the Classified Senate has been muted over the years, and we need to bring it back to be

stronger. Because of my history, I know how to make things work and share the needs of the Classified Staff.”

Stefanie credits her strong team with the success she has seen. “My team has really been hands-on and helped me succeed as a leader. I’ve had phenomenal support with talented individuals who have helped keep me focused.”

Her contributions were recognized at the recent Annual Achievement Award Celebration (pictured above) when she was “totally surprised” to see her own name flash across the screen as the recipient of the “President’s Award” and received a standing ovation. In presenting the award, President Dr. Norma Ambriz-Galaviz said, “Stefanie is a role model for the rest of the Classified Staff as how one can not only express their voice but also put their words into action.”

For Stefanie, it all comes back to the connections she formed as a child. “People always talk about their memories surrounding Merritt College,” she says. “But for me there is something so significant when it’s part of your childhood and part of your learning experiences, and then you become an adult and serve the same population you grew up with. It’s a special relationship. It’s not just a place that I work. It’s home.”

—*Susan May*