



Board of Trustees Report



April 14, 2026

Dr. David M. Johnson, President

Beyond Survival: Reclaiming Power, Purpose, and Possibility
 Alameda County Behavioral Health Department Re-entry Conference

Merritt College
 12500 Campus Dr., Oakland, CA 94619

Thursday, March 26, 2026
 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Focus will be on:

- Community-centered and culturally responsive approaches
- Workforce development and student engagement
- Navigating Behavioral Health Services After Re-Entry
- Housing Pathways: From Transitional to Permanent Housing
- Employment After Incarceration: Getting Back to Work

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Office of Ethnic Services Health Equity Division



I am pleased to share with you that last month's 2nd Annual Alameda County Behavioral Health Department Re-Entry Conference, which Merritt College had the honor of hosting again this year, proved to be a phenomenal success. The theme: "Beyond Survival: Reclaiming Power, Purpose, and Possibility," exemplified the transformative power of cross-sector collaboration in service of our most vulnerable community members. This year's conference brought together an impressive coalition of stakeholders, including representatives from county agencies such as behavioral health and probation, nearly 200 registered participants, over 50 community-based organizations dedicated to serving the re-entry population, and Merritt College students. One of the most meaningful outcomes of this conference was the

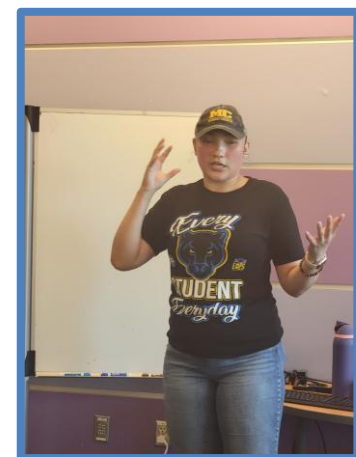
opportunity to reaffirm the partnership between Alameda County and COSER (Community Social Services), a program that continues to serve as a bridge between our institution and the re-entry community.

The keynote speaker for the morning was rapper and activist Mistah F.A.B., who focused on such critical topics as the importance of community-centered and culturally responsive approaches, workforce development and student engagement, navigating behavioral health services after re-entry, housing pathways from transitional to permanent housing, and employment opportunities after incarceration. In short, the conference created invaluable opportunities for connection, resource sharing, and community building that will have lasting impact well beyond the event itself.



Merritt College puts students first. Through our rich educational programs, we foster a culture of equity and inclusion that empowers students to achieve their greatest potential and make meaningful contributions to their respective communities and our global society.

I want to take a moment to highlight the ongoing work that was recently underscored at the “Finish What You Start” workshop. This event represents a strong and intentional step in aligning NextUp programming (which supports current and former foster youth) with the priorities outlined by the Chancellor’s Office and the Vision 2030 framework particularly as it pertains to persistence, completion, and student-centered support. Designed as one of four targeted activities, this session focused on helping students stay committed to their goals, and overcoming personal, academic, or emotional challenges. Grounded in real-life application, the workshop created space for reflection, accountability, and forward movement.



A powerful highlight of the session was the presentation by NextUp Merritt College alumna Juliet Courtney, Class of 2025, who brought authenticity and relatability to the room. She expanded on the themes “See it Through” and “Show Up Anyway,” sharing her personal academic journey including a semester marked by poor academic performance. Her transparency resonated deeply with students, as she demonstrated what it means to push past setbacks. Today, as a student at Samuel Merritt University pursuing a nursing degree and achieving

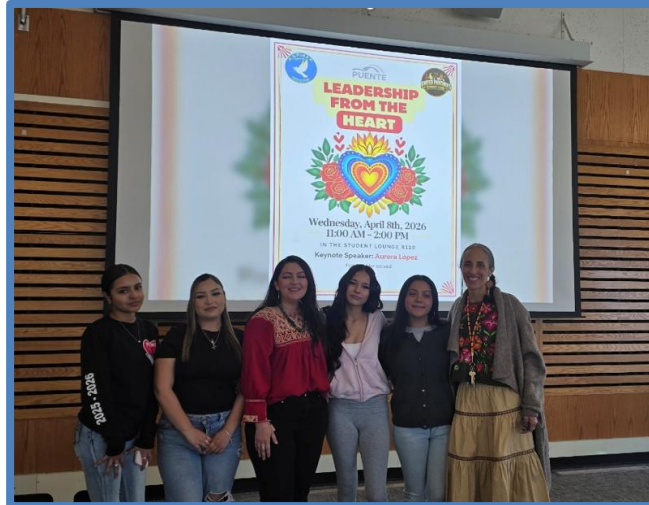
Dean’s List honors, she embodies the very message of the workshop: finishing what you start is not about perfection—it is about persistence! Ms. Courtney’s experience reinforces our collective belief in the resilience and potential of NextUp students. When given the right tools, support, and real examples of transformation, they rise.



On April 8th, The Puente Project at Merritt College held its 21st Annual Spring Event, with the theme “Leadership From the Heart.” Our keynote speaker Aurora Carmelita López, founder of Semillas of Love (SOL) and Oakland-based public health educator, addressed several issues and themes in her remarks, including: community organizing, decolonizing self-care, and nurturing and partnering with the next generation. Puente Club student officers took the lead in planning and executing virtually every part of the program, and Puente Coordinators and Faculty Club Advisors Isela

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González Santana and Judit Trinidad López ensured that students remained at the heart of the event. Professor Santana noted that too often faculty, staff, and administrators say 'We put students first,' but even when we have good intentions, we often default to taking control of planning events meant to center students. Indeed, *the only way students learn to lead is by leading*, and this event was a perfect demonstration of that!



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