

Merritt College

Application for Designation as a California Black-Serving Institution



Submitted to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office

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Application Request for Information:

Institutional Commitment and Mission Alignment

Merritt College’s commitment to Black student success is both historic and ongoing. It is reflected in our Mission: Merritt College Puts Students First. As an institution rooted in Oakland’s vibrant Black community, Merritt recognizes its responsibility to create educational environments that foster equity, opportunity, and cultural affirmation. 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. This commitment is aligned with the goals of a Black-Serving Institution (BSI), and is embedded in our core values:

- **Student Access and Success:** We provide engaging, accessible learning experiences that support achievement.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** We ensure students receive the resources and instruction needed to succeed.
- **Diversity:** We honor and respect the broad spectrum of backgrounds, experiences, languages, values, and cultures reflected by our campus community.
- **Social Justice:** We strive to create a student-centered environment that promotes systemic change.

Through culturally-grounded learning communities, targeted academic support, and deep community partnerships, Merritt College remains dedicated to closing equity gaps and elevating the success of Black and African American students across disciplines.

Merritt College has a deep and enduring legacy rooted in Black history, activism, and educational access. Established in 1929 as the Merritt School of Business, the college was originally located on what is now Martin Luther King Jr. Way (formerly Grove Street) in North Oakland. In 1954, the Oakland Unified School District formed Oakland Junior College, combining Merritt and Laney Trade and Technical School. In 1960, plans were made to relocate Merritt from its original site to the hills of East Oakland with the new campus officially opening in 1971. The move positioned Merritt at the heart of East Oakland—a region with the highest concentration of African American residents in the city and one of the most

socioeconomically underserved communities in Alameda County. East Oakland has long experienced systemic disinvestment, redlining, environmental injustice, and disproportionately high levels of unemployment and incarceration. Despite these challenges, it remains a vibrant center of Black culture, identity, and resilience. During the Great Migration, East Oakland became a destination for thousands of Black families seeking economic opportunity in the postwar industries and shipyards of the Bay Area. Oakland is also internationally recognized as the birthplace of the Black Panther Party—a legacy of political activism that continues to inspire local pride and institutional purpose. Merritt College itself played a central role in this legacy of resistance and empowerment. In 1967, Merritt became the first college in the United States to establish a Black Studies department. That same decade, the Soul Students Advisory Council—later known as the Black Student Union—advocated for greater student involvement in college governance. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, co-founders of the Black Panther Party, were Merritt students when they launched the organization in 1966. Today, the student lounge on campus bears their name in tribute to their vision and legacy.

This history is not only celebrated but actively integrated into Merritt’s educational mission. The Associate in Arts (AA) degree in African American Studies invites students to examine the political, cultural, and economic experiences of people of African descent across the Black Atlantic, including the United States, Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, and Africa. Additionally, Merritt’s Africana Center and Digital Africana Curriculum offer unique learning opportunities grounded in the Black experience. Currently hosted on local servers at Merritt and McClymond High School, this digital curriculum will be enhanced and relaunched in Fall 2025, featuring interactive content including melanin dosage tools, maps, and critical thinking activities designed to foster deeper identity connections among students. Merritt’s location, history, and continued engagement with East Oakland position it as a culturally responsive institution uniquely capable of serving Black students with authenticity and depth.

Enrollment Percentage of Black/African American Students

The percent of Merritt College’s enrolled student population identifying as Black/African American for the current term is 30%. According to the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office MIS Data Mart, Merritt College enrolled 1,605 African-American students in Fall 2024, representing 23% of the total

student body. This ranks Merritt third in the state among community colleges for the highest percentage of students identifying solely as Black/African-American. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Black/African-American student population, it's important to include students who identify with multiple racial or ethnic groups. Using local data sources that account for students who identified as Black/African-American in combination with another race or ethnicity, total enrollment for this group in Fall 2024 was 2,180—equivalent to 31% of the student body. However, statewide comparisons for these multi-racial identifications are not possible, as the CCCCO Data Mart does not support this type of disaggregation. As of Spring 2025, 2,047 students—or 30% of the student population—identify as Black/African-American, either alone or in combination with another racial or ethnic group.

Current Enrollment Count

During this current term, Spring 2025, there are 2,047 Black/African American students enrolled at Merritt College.

Five-Year Academic Goals

Merritt College has identified the following academic goals to improve retention, time-to-degree, and graduation rates for Black students by 2030:

- Increasing the number of Dual Enrolled Black students in our service area by 20%
- Increase by 20% the number of students who acquire associate degrees, credentials, certificates or specific skill sets that prepare them for an in-demand job
- Increase by 35% the number of students who transfer annually to UC, CSU, or HBCU systems

To achieve these outcomes, Merritt College is scaling targeted academic interventions, strengthening onboarding processes, embedding tutoring and peer mentoring into our gateway courses, and reimagining the structure/curriculum of our Sankofa (Umoja) programming. The main strategy with dual enrollment is to prioritize and increase offering CCAP courses at high schools that have high numbers of Black students. We will assess our progress by reviewing

disaggregated data dashboards and annual program reports to ensure interventions are effective and responsive to the needs of Black students.

Five-Year Academic Equity Goals and Timeline

Our goals are to close equity gaps between Black students and the overall student population, by the following:

- Reduce equity gaps across all above measures by 40%
- Improve persistence by 15%
- Increase transfer rates by 6%

To accomplish this, we will adhere to the following BSI Five-Year Timeline while implementing the following:

Year 1 - 2025-2026

- Form the Black Student Success Taskforce as part of the college's Student Equity and Enrollment Development Committee (SEED). Integrating the Taskforce into the college's governance structure enhances its credibility and expands its reach. Recommendations made by the Taskforce will be brought to the full SEED Committee for deliberation and adoption. The Taskforce will include students, faculty, classified professionals, and administrators working together to plan and implement equity initiatives. Conduct campus climate surveys and focus groups to gather data on Black student experiences and identify barriers to success.
- Collaborate with Institutional Research to review established baseline metrics for term-to-term persistence, successful course completion, degree/certificate completion, and transfer rates-present metrics and data to the college community and report back to the SEED Committee. Based on initial findings, implement targeted interventions in counseling, course access, and onboarding processes.
- Host campus events that highlight Black culture, identity, and academic achievement.

Year 2 - 2026-2027

- Develop a structured peer mentoring program connecting Black students with trained mentors to foster engagement and support.

- Integrate career exploration modules into orientation and first-year seminars to align academic pathways with career goals.
- Partner with local organizations to provide workshops on financial literacy, time management, and study skills tailored for Black students.
- Host campus events that highlight Black culture, identity, and academic achievement.

Year 3 - 2027-2028

- Continue supporting Black students through peer mentoring and tutoring in core courses.
- Provide professional development for faculty and staff focused on inclusive teaching.
- Host campus events that highlight Black culture, identity, and academic achievement.

Year 4 - 2028-2029

- Evaluate the effectiveness of implemented strategies using disaggregated data on retention, completion, and transfer rates.
- Scale successful programs and revise or discontinue those that do not demonstrate measurable impact.
- Host campus events that highlight Black culture, identity, and academic achievement.

Year 5 - 2029-2030

- Publish and present on BSI progress and lessons learned.
- Submit updated BSI application for renewal with revised five-year targets.
- Institutionalize effective practices by integrating them into standard operating procedures and securing ongoing funding.
- Host campus events that highlight Black culture, identity, and academic achievement.

Institutional Memberships, Charters, and Affiliations

- Institutional

Peralta Association of African American Affairs (PAAAA) - a districtwide employee affinity group dedicated to supporting Black students and professionals through scholarships, cultural programming, mentorship, and institutional advocacy.

- Community Partners

Sankofa—Merritt College’s Sankofa (Umoja) Learning Community is a culturally responsive program designed to foster academic excellence, personal growth, and cultural affirmation for Black students. The plan is to expand Sankofa by offering more linked course sections, increasing recruitment efforts through outreach to local high schools, and enhancing wraparound supports such as tutoring and mental health services. Sankofa will continue to serve as a hub for peer leadership and academic empowerment.

- Dual Enrollment Partnerships
- AIMS College Prep High School
- ARISE High School
- ASPIRE College Academy
- East Bay Innovative Academy
- San Leandro High School
- Madison Park Academy
- Skyline High School
- Oakland Technical High School
- McClymonds High School
- Lodestar Charter School
- San Lorenzo High School
- Sojourner Truth Academy
- Lighthouse Community Public School
- Oakland Military Institute (OMI)
- Leadership Public School (LPS)
- Panoramic Learning Academy
- Unity High School

Community Engagement: Partnering for Impact

East Oakland Youth Development Center (EOYDC) – an organization purposed to nurture the holistic development of youth from kindergarten into adulthood so that they can live a life of prosperity, integrity and purpose

Boys and Girls Clubs – provides a safe place, caring mentors, and life-enhancing programs for kid and teens.

Oakland Adult School – a key partner dual enrollment and the adult education ecosystem, providing, early learning experiences for course academic transfer and other foundational courses, and foundational GED and High School Diploma. This long-standing collaboration ensures that high school students and adult learners can seamlessly transition from secondary-level instruction into postsecondary programs.

Men of Valor - a faith-based organization supporting formerly incarcerated Black men and youth, Men of Valor provides mentorship, transitional support, and job training. Merritt College works with Men of Valor to offer on-site enrollment services, financial aid guidance, and academic counseling, creating clear pathways for formally incarcerated students.

The Salvation Army – operates recovery centers, shelters, and job readiness programs, the Salvation Army serves a significant number of African American adults experiencing homelessness or addiction recovery.

Alameda County Social Services Agency (SSA) - provides family support, employment services, and public benefits to East Oakland's low-income population. Through a formal partnership, Merritt College connects with SSA's CalWORKs recipients, many of whom are Black single mothers, and helps them enroll in short-term certificate and degree programs that align with their goals.

Alameda County Probation Department – Merritt College works directly with probation officers and reentry navigators to guide justice-involved adults, particularly Black men, toward college success. Our team assists with FAFSA, ATB pathways, and case management to reduce recidivism and build academic persistence.

Alameda County Juvenile Detention Center - Merritt's Community and Social Services Program (COSER) and Adult Education Programs support reentry planning for youth in detention, many of whom are Black youth from East Oakland.

We facilitate educational planning pre-release and offer dual enrollment options, providing them with an opportunity for transformation and upward mobility.

Hidden Genius Project – immerses high school men of color in coding, web and app design, team building and other skills intended to give them a leg up in the tech economy.

Oakland Black Culture Zone – addresses the disparate impact that decades of disinvestment in East Oakland and the more recent displacement of Black people and Black businesses from their legacy communities in Oakland by centering Black Arts and Culture within a community development framework

Business Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS) – offers community support programs to combat homelessness and incarceration.

Roots Community Health – uplifts those impacted by systematic inequalities and poverty, accomplished through medical and behavioral health care.

Strategic Plan for Black-Serving Institution Goals

- Goals
- Increase the number of dual enrolled Black students in our service area by 20%

Strengthen participation by 20% and expand our Umoja/Sankofa programs to ensure a greater sense of community and collaboration

Dramatically increase the number of Black students transferring by 20% with an emphasis on HBCU, CSU and UC Transfer.

Mission Statement: To increase the number of Black dual-enrolled students in our service area; strengthen and expand our Umoja/Sankofa program; and dramatically increase the number of Black students transferring HBCUs, CSUs, and UCs we have outlined plans to enhance program offerings for Umoja/Sankofa students, to prepare students for transfer through course offerings, degree and certificate programs for MESA/STEM; core course offerings in Artificial Intelligence (AI), and guided Equity Education for Adult Black Learners. Through a multi-year plan, our intention is to focus on areas where we believe Black students will excel with the appropriate support and expanded opportunities to learn, engage, and transfer. These plans are driven by measurable outcomes all pointing to engagement and success for Black students.

The Sankofa/Umoja Program represents a culturally grounded initiative that supports Black students in their efforts to complete transfer-level English and Math. Engagement in MESA and STEM coursework extends preparation for college transfer and success in these areas and affirms membership and identity, while cultivating leadership skills and pathways to promising futures. AI is reshaping education, the job market, and civic life. Teaching Black students how to engage critically and skillfully with AI tools at the high school level through dual-enrollment promotes empowerment, not just access. Merritt's plan does not just teach tech, it focuses on algorithmic bias, digital justice, and AI's intersection with racial equity, which fits squarely under the mission of BSI. AI is a key industry across multiple sectors (healthcare, government, finance, education). Black adult learners represented 39.04% (301) of the student population at Merritt College, 42.24% (348) 2023-2024, and 15.82% (122) 2024-2025 and as such, careful attention is paid to shaping their education around work and family responsibilities. These plans embody our broader college mission by putting our students first, providing personalized support services, educational equity, and community empowerment.

Year 1 2025 – 2026

- SANKOFA/UMOJA
- Initiate outreach campaign to target middle and high school students
- Train and launch peer recruiters through (Student Ambassador Program)
- Host campus and off-site Sankofa/Umoja Membership campaigns and Umoja Open House
- Formalize cohorts and learning communities for AFRAM, Math, English, and other disciplines
- Identify HBCU, CSU, and UC transfer program opportunities and mentorships
- Plan College visits
- MESA/STEM
- Establish Taskforce to increase participation/retention in STEM fields

Target courses: Math 1 (pre-calculus) Math 3A (Calculus 1)

Target audience: High school students

- Identify career mentors who will highlight areas of focus for study and link with community-based programs

- Identify HBCU, UC, HBCU transfer program opportunities; create pipelines from high school to HBCU, CSU, UC
- Identify STEM programs that can assist with transfer
- Develop retention strategies
- Use available Student Equity funds and/or fund-raise for college visits
- ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
- Pilot AI-enhanced assignments in 2-3 core AFRAM courses
- Launch first AI teaching workshop
- Partner with UC Berkeley Mentors
- EQUITY EDUCATION FOR BLACK ADULT LEARNERS

Expand course offerings: evening, weekend, online, and hybrid classes

Employ the Integrated Education Training (IET) model aligned with healthcare, Career Technical Education (CTE), and public service careers

- Enhance outreach campaigns led by community-based partners

Year 2 2026 – 2027

- SANKOFA/UMOJA

Formalize English C1000E (Composition and Reading) and English C1001 (Critical Thinking in Reading and Writing) into cohort model with African American Studies and Counseling

- Ensure that tutors are embedded in courses
- Launch STAT 13 (Introduction to Statistics) as a transferable mathematics course
- Host Sankofa/Umoja Open House
- Plan site visit(s) local and distant
- Collaborate with faculty to engage students in Study Abroad programs
- MESA/STEM
- Identify cohorts to participate in math for STEM (Math 1/Math 3A)
- Establish on-going tutoring support
- Integrate retention strategies
- ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
- Integrate AI curriculum/assignments into 50% of program courses

- Secure and offer AI research fellowships in conjunction with UC Berkeley
- Establish and Host annual AI & Justice Symposium
- EQUITY EDUCATION FOR BLACK ADULT LEARNERS
- Integration of services and transitions
- Coordinate with trusted partners to improve transitions, access, and wraparound services

Year 3 2027 - 2028

- SANKOFA/UMOJA
- Expand peer mentorships to include academic and transfer
- Increase community partner engagement in workshops
- Work with HBCUs to create partnership study abroad programs
- Plan and implement UC and HBCU college tours (site visits)
- Introduce application writing/completion seminars
- MESA/STEM
- Identify new cohort for STEM and MESA programs
- Enroll Year-2 cohort into Math 3A or Math3B or Math 3E (Linear Algebra)
- Year-2 participants become mentors for new cohort
- Year-2 participants connect with host schools to transfer to STEM and MESA programs
- ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
- Launch interdisciplinary capstone writing course: AI and Black Liberation
- Expand mentorship network
- EQUITY EDUCATION FOR BLACK ADULT LEARNERS
- Adopt a shared-student management system
- Standardize onboarding, counseling, and academic support
- Provide faculty and staff training in anti-racist, trauma-informed pedagogy

Year 4 2028 - 2029

- SANKOFA/UMOJA
- Launch winter/summer bridge programs to accelerate degree retention and degree completion
- Conduct mid-semester academic check-in
- Achieve 80% compliance in Student Education Plans (SEPs)

- Plan study abroad trip in conjunction with selected HBCU
- Fund-raising activities
- MESA/STEM
- Expand cohort to include additional high school and charter schools through dual-enrollment
- Create STEM and MESA-based math courses and STEM and MESA-readiness certificates
- ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
- Assess student progress and faculty outcomes
- Refine assignments from lessons-learned, workshops, professional development options
- Publish results
- EQUITY EDUCATION FOR BLACK ADULT LEARNERS
- Review previous three years
- Survey participants and community partners
- Collect data

Year 5 2029 – 2030

- SANKOFA/UMOJA
- Host an annual transfer readiness series, resource nights, and FAFS/CADAA drives
- Track transfer rates to CSU, UC, HBCU and private colleges
- Celebrate student milestones
- Complete study abroad trip and assess outcomes
- Assess outcomes and prepare to enhance, improve program as warranted
- MESA/STEM
- Plan, review, and assess
- Discern areas where improvement is required
- Expand program and partnerships
- ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
- Consider assessment and outcomes
- Fully institutionalize AI education
- Expand curriculum/assignments in other disciplines
- EQUITY EDUCATION FOR BLACK ADULT LEARNERS

- Meet with community-based partners to review program outcomes
- Expand program

At the end of this five-year period (2025-2030), we will review, measure and report on the effectiveness of our plan towards increasing enrollment, retention, certificate and degree completion, and transfer to four-year institutions with a particular emphasis on HBCUs. Our efforts will be published and presented within our renewal application for Black Serving Institution designation. We will continue to secure and develop partnerships in support of our students and college program efforts. As these programs serve to attract students, and enhance our purpose as an educational institution, we will incorporate successful outcomes as best practices to strengthen our institution and to secure eligibility for funding.

Community College applicants submit the following for the previous three academic years: (A) The number of degree and certificate programs completed by all students, and by Black and or African American students. (B) The number of all students, and of Black and or African American students, who completed degree and certificate programs within normal time and up to 300 percent of normal time to degree completion. (C) The student transfer rates for all students, and for Black and or African American students, to four-year colleges and universities.

Table A shows the distinct number of students—not the number of credentials—who earned an associate degree or certificate in each of the past three academic years. Counts are provided for (1) all students and (2) students who identify as Black/African American. For the latter group, we include every student who self-reports Black/African American heritage, even if they are classified as Hispanic/Latinx or of multiple races in standard IPEDS or state reporting.

Tables B1 and B2 present distinct student headcounts—not counts of credentials—for those who completed a credit certificate or associate degree (a) within the standard “normal time” and (b) within 300 percent of that time. For credit certificate programs, normal time is defined as one academic year (3 semesters, including summer), and 300 percent of normal time is defined as three academic years (9 semesters). For associate degree programs, normal time is defined as two academic years (6 semesters, including summers), and 300 percent of normal time is defined as six academic years (18 semesters).

The calculation is based on each student’s first certificate or degree awarded and their first term of enrollment in the Peralta District as a non-high-school student.

As in Table A, the counts for Black/African American students include everyone who self-identifies as Black or African American, even when they are also reported as Hispanic/Latinx or multi-racial under standard IPEDS or state categories.

Table C summarizes transfer rates for the three most recent academic years available, using data downloaded from the Chancellor’s Office Data Vista portal (SEP Report: https://datavista.cccco.edu/data_views/sep_report). The rates follow the CCCCO Equity

Metric 620C definition: the share of first-time cohort students who left the California Community College system during the stated academic year and enrolled at a four-year university by the end of the next academic year. Because universities report enrollment to the system with a delay, these figures are necessarily lagged. For this table, “Black/African American” follows the standard federal and state-reporting definition—students who identify solely as Black or African American (those who also select another race or ethnicity are grouped under multiracial and are not included in this category).

Campus Resources Promoting Equity and Inclusion

- Available support programs and services include:
- EOPS
- Veterans Resource Center
- Next-Up
- Foster Youth Services
- Student Accessibility Services (SAS)
- CalWorks
- Online, Face-to-Face, and Embedded tutoring services
- Associated Students at Merritt College (ASMC)
- Black Student Union (BSU)
- Hire Up Pilot Program
- Basic Needs
- Career Education
- Transfer Center

Additional Information for Governing Board Consideration

Merritt College is uniquely positioned to serve as a model for California Black-Serving Institutions. Our deep-rooted history, strategic community engagement, and innovative academic programming underscore our unwavering commitment to Black student achievement.

Data Tables

Table A. Associate Degrees and Certificates Awarded by Student Group

Academic Year	All Students	Black/African American
2021-2022	1,047	291
2022-2023	953	254
2023-2024	1,056	299

Table B1. Credit Certificates Completion Time

Academic Year	All Students Normal Time	All Students Within 300%	Black/African American Normal Time	Black/African American Within 300%
2021-2022	23	119	2	16
2022-2023	15	129	3	20
2023-2024	34	172	15	37

Table B2. Associate Degrees Completion Time

Academic Year	All Students Normal Time	All Students Within 300%	Black/African American Normal Time	Black/African American Within 300%
2021-2022	12	209	2	52
2022-2023	11	192	3	49
2023-2024	23	195	6	53

Table C. Transfer Rates to Four-Year Institutions by Student Group

Academic Year	All Students	Black/African American
2017-2018	19%	14%
2018-2019	19%	24%
2019-2020	21%	25%