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**BAY AREA CYBERSECURITY DEMAND GROWS DURING PANDEMIC, AS
CYBERSECURITY PROGRAMS LIKE MERRITT COLLEGE'S SEE ENROLLMENT SURGE
-- Laid-Off Workers, Students Shift To Cybersecurity in Age of COVID --**

OAKLAND, Calif. – As Bay Area workers adjust to historically high unemployment numbers due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, many are seeking new careers in Pandemic-proof industries like cybersecurity. As a result, programs like the Merritt College Cybersecurity Program have seen an uptick in fall registration.

At the same time, Bay Area companies are reporting a growing need for cybersecurity experts, as they move more operations and business online during COVID-19, and many are turning to alternative sources for expertise, such as community colleges like Merritt.

Industries such as retail, restaurants, hotels and the gig economy have been decimated by COVID-19, with workers being displaced in record numbers. Many are seeking new careers in the digital space, and demand seems to support this migration. According to Glassdoor, postings for information technology specialists shot up 33% from early March to May.

Cybersecurity was a fast-growing field even before COVID, with Cybersecurity Ventures predicting late last year that there would be 3.5 million unfilled cybersecurity jobs globally by 2021. In the U.S., companies' appetite for cybersecurity experts has been rising rapidly in real time during the past four months, and many are hiring paid and unpaid interns from community colleges with a track record in cybersecurity.

Communities of color that have been hit hardest economically by COVID might be an ideal recruiting pool for programs like Merritt's. More than 70% of its students are of color, and the program was founded on the principle that diversity makes cybersecurity more effective. The program's founders believe that viewing threats and cyberattacks from many different viewpoints makes defending against them more successful and that individuals with experience navigating different cultures may be best suited to quickly address attacks.

Arlita Shelby, a recent graduate of the program who now works in cybersecurity as an information security analyst at Satellite Healthcare in San Jose, says she understands why the program is so appealing during these times.

"What drew me to the program was not only that the industry is secure and interesting, but also the program's commitment to diversity in helping fill the industry gap in terms of the number of women and people of color working in professional positions," said Shelby. "These things are really important during COVID, and I understand why people might now be even more attracted to the program, since there is a high demand and bright future for cybersecurity, and most jobs in the field can be done remotely."

Displaced workers hoping to duplicate Shelby's success may also find Merritt's two-year Associate of Science program appealing, especially since it outperforms many four-year programs. Every year, more than 700 colleges and universities from across the U.S. participate in National Cyber League (NCL) competitions. The Merritt Cybersecurity student team has placed in the top five nationally for the past three years.

(more)

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Merritt also bests many four-year programs in job placement after graduation, with more than 50% of students finding full-time jobs in their field. With the most recent cybersecurity graduates, the program anticipates almost all graduates will land security positions within the next 3 months because of increased demand. Many graduates believe that the program's success stems from classes being led by professionals actively working the field, which allows them to provide students with real-world insights and practical guidance in finding a job.

"We're delighted to see that word is getting out about our success with both students and employers, and that enrollment is increasing during this tough economy," said Jim Cates, co-founder of the Merritt College Cybersecurity Program. "We provide a dynamic, people-centered cybersecurity program that inspires students from diverse backgrounds to bring their whole selves to a career that will help make the world a safer place, and this message really resonates in these challenging times."

Bay Area employers such as ConSol USA are looking not only to add cybersecurity experts during this challenging time but to also diversify their teams to meet their challenges.

"We've never seen a more critical need for cybersecurity in business than we're seeing now, and companies like ours need to be able to move fast to build teams to address it," said Robert Tibbs, founder and CEO of ConSol USA. "Programs such as Merritt's allow us to quickly recruit diverse cybersecurity experts and interns who've learned from top industry experts, so we're confident they can hit the ground running."

With an open approach to admission and the offer of financial aid and other vital resources, Merritt's Cybersecurity Program is accepting applications for Fall 2020. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, all classes will be fully online for Fall 2020.

About Merritt College Cybersecurity Program

Merritt College offers the rare opportunity to learn cybersecurity from the world's leading industry experts—for a fraction of the cost of boot camps or four-year universities. And with the California Promise Grant, first-year registration fees are free. The program offers one of the few accredited cybersecurity Associate degree programs in California, with flexibility that allows students to prepare for a new career while keeping up with other obligations. The program is now in its sixth year of helping students win national competitions and find jobs with top companies. Located in the beautiful rolling hills of Oakland, California, Merritt College welcomes students from all backgrounds to apply. Learn more at <https://merrittsecurity.com/>.

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