

A.J. Merlino, DMA

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SKILLS

Product Strategy, Roadmaps & Prioritization	Workforce Pathways & Partner Ecosystems	Learning Systems & Assessment Design
User Research, Testing & Iteration	Competency-Based Learning & Skills Architecture	Rapid Prototyping & Workflow Automation
AI Product Development	Experiential Learning at Scale	Cross-Functional Product Delivery

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Western Governors University Salt Lake City, UT

Associate Dean of Academic Programs, School of Business

September 2025 – Present

- Oversee full P&L for a program portfolio, supporting more than \$20M in revenue; aligning resources with enrollment goals, contribution margins, and measurable return on investment.
- Designed a scalable personalized learning model with discipline-specific content and hands-on assessments.
- Created an AI-Enabled Design Studio delivering 24/7 feedback from digital twins of industry professionals, expanding individualized mentorship without increasing faculty headcount.
- Built an experiential learning ecosystem combining internal projects with external industry placements to provide work-based learning for every student.
- Launched an Industry Experts in Residence program, integrating active practitioners into mentoring and curriculum development.
- Use data, labor-market insights, and industry feedback to improve program quality, relevance, and student outcomes.

Harrisburg Area Community College Harrisburg, PA

Associate Dean, School of Business, Technology and Industry; Interim Department Chair, Communications, Humanities and Arts

February 2025 – September 2025

- Oversaw 35+ programs across business, technology, industry, communications, humanities, and the arts.
- Led faculty hiring, strategic planning, budget management, and regional workforce alignment.
- Supervised 90+ tenure-track, full-time, and adjunct faculty across five campuses during faculty unionization and a presidential transition.
- Represented the school in college-wide governance and economic development partnerships.
- Supported MSCHE and NASAD accreditation compliance while maintaining program continuity and instructional quality.

Thinking Through AI Remote

Executive Director, Learning Innovation and Workforce Solutions

December 2024 – September 2025

- Co-designed ThinkingThrough.AI and Readocracy, platforms delivering personalized learning, flexible competency assessments, and industry-recognized badges and certificates at no cost to learners.
- Aligned credentials with workforce skills using BLS and Lightcast data, creating pathways that connected learners directly with employer partners.

- Directed workforce learning initiatives across 300+ cross-sector partners and secured \$500K+ in grant and public funding, including a \$399K Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry award.
- Led business development for an iOS/Android learning platform and designed stackable credential pathways that increased non-credit and micro-credential participation.

Harrisburg University of Science and Technology Harrisburg, PA

Associate Vice President, Student Professional Development and Experiential Learning

August 2022 – November 2024

- Aligned program learning objectives with workforce skills using custom-build AI-enabled tools.
- Managed a \$400K budget and supervised staff, achieving 94% positive postgraduate outcomes within six months of graduation.
- Ensured hands-on learning for all undergraduate and graduate students through micro-internships, residencies, and apprenticeships with 300+ employer partners.
- Established the university as a registered apprenticeship sponsor and related technical instruction provider, securing \$800K+ in grant and workforce funding.
- Generated revenue through edtech joint ventures that produced AI-powered, industry-recognized credentials.

Associate Professor, Business and Live Entertainment

August 2022 – November 2024

- Served as Program Lead for the Learning Technology and Media Systems graduate program; developed the Entertainment Technology Certificate with Avid credentials and global partnerships

Albright College Reading, PA

Associate Dean, Student Professional Development and Experiential Learning

August 2019 – July 2022

- Led 17-person team; earned national recognition as a Best College for Career Development by Colleges of Distinction. Managed \$700K annual budget.
- Increased positive postgraduate outcomes from 84% to 91%; achieved 100% internship acquisition rate within four years; facilitated 4,000+ hands-on learning opportunities.
- Directed the 13th Street Educational Partnership (AmeriCorps VISTA) providing professional training, credit-for-prior-learning, and ESL education to adult learners from underserved communities.

Director, Music Industry Studies, Music Dept. Chair, and Asst. Professor

August 2015 – July 2022

- Led 20-person department with \$800K budget; grew Music Industry Studies enrollment from 12 to 75 students in under five years.
- Established partnerships with Atlantic Records, Warner Music Group, Universal Music Publishing, ASM Global, and Live Nation; produced the annual Music Business Forum.

EDUCATION AND CREDENTIALS

Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA)	University of Nevada, Las Vegas 2014
Master of Music	University of Nevada, Las Vegas 2012
Bachelor of Arts in Music	Kutztown University of Pennsylvania 2010
Business in the Metaverse Economy Certificate	Wharton Executive Education
Certified Scrum Master (CSM)	Scrum Alliance
Experiential Education Academy Certification	Society for Experiential Education
Professional Certificates in AI Fluency and Claude Code	Anthropic