

# outbursts

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spotlight on talent search

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## Celebrating 40 years of talent recognition

### *TRIO Talent Search at Virginia Tech has history of making college accessible*

By Keith Pierce

Ron Masri, the son of Lebanese immigrants, often thinks back to his childhood when his parents came to the United States, refugees of the civil war in Lebanon that began in the mid-1970s.

"We had only the shirts on our backs," he recalls. "The only pictures we had were what my mom could stuff into her purse."

Masri also remembers the day a high school guidance counselor discouraged him from "applying to big schools like U.Va. or Virginia Tech." But then Tom Wilson came along. Wilson, former director of Talent Search and Upward Bound at Virginia Tech, was Masri's counselor. "He saw something in me that others didn't," Masri says.



Ron Masri

A graduate of Giles High School, Masri went on to earn a bachelor's in sports medicine and athletic training from U.Va., a master's in physical therapy from Old Dominion University, and a doctorate in physical therapy

from the Medical College of Virginia. He is the founder of Total Motion Physical Therapy in Christiansburg and credits his parents as well as his participation in Talent Search and Upward Bound programs at Virginia Tech as driving forces behind his motivation to succeed.

Since 1973, Talent Search, one of two federally funded programs at Virginia Tech, commonly known as TRIO programs, has stimulated student success by helping students make the transition from high school to college. This year marks the 40th anniversary. Thousands of students in Southwest Virginia have benefited from the services of these programs. Funding for Talent Search was last renewed in 2011.

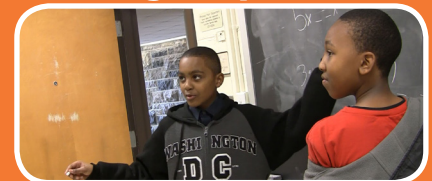
"Funding for TRIO is consistently being threatened by federal budget cuts. Our program has continued to thrive and be awarded in consecutive grant cycles. This is a testament to the program staff who have devoted so much of their time and energy to making college access a reality for thousands of students over our 40-year history on the VT campus," says Sarah Umbarger-Wells, assistant director and counselor for Talent Search at Virginia Tech.



Talent Search targets students from families with financial need or with parents who did not earn four-year degrees. Students receive tutoring and other support as early as sixth grade. Results prove that students who participate in the programs are much more likely to graduate from college than they would be without the help.

Talent Search is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to encourage students to complete high school and to pursue a college education. Educational, cultural, and social experiences throughout the year help accomplish this goal.

### College is possible



De'Mon Poe, left, and Aric Boyd from Linkhorne Middle School in Lynchburg, Va., visit Virginia Tech for a Talent Search tutorial session.

Students who might think college is an impossible dream can renew their hopes in the messages of two new videos. Taped and produced at Virginia Tech, with help from Virginia high school and college students, the videos feature participants in the two federally funded TRIO programs at Virginia Tech. <http://tinyurl.com/VTTalentSearch> and <http://tinyurl.com/VTUpwardBound>

Talent Search offers services such as tutoring, college visits, assistance with college, scholarship and financial aid applications, and numerous other services meant to address barriers to college. Parents and partner schools team with TRIO staff to insure each student has the best opportunity possible to achieve his or her college dreams.

TRIO alumni reside in all corners of the country working in business, industry, government, medicine, law, education, finance, law enforcement, science, technology, engineering, and more.

# Breaking down barriers

*Talent Search program helps thousands of students beat the odds*

By Keith Pierce

According to a report by the American City Business Journal, a typical college graduate earns 80 percent more income than a typical high school graduate. Studies also indicate that college graduates are more likely to maintain better health, will vote more often, and are less likely to be unemployed. College-educated married couples are less likely to divorce than less-educated couples, a study by the National Center for Family and Marriage Research (NCFMR) at Bowling Green State University even found.

"We all know there are barriers to success rooted in family history," says Kimberly Andrews, director of TRIO Programs at Virginia Tech, which includes Upward Bound and Talent Search. "Our job is to break down as many of these barriers as possible starting with basic information



Kimberly Andrews

and opportunities that prove college is possible for all. Talent Search opens doors and establishes new trends for families without a history of higher education. That's a good feeling."

Dedicated to encouraging and preparing low-income and first-generation students to pursue a college education, Talent Search at Virginia Tech has provided support for more than 10,000 students and has helped organize more than 200 college visits from Canada to Florida, and as far west as the Mississippi River, since 1974.

"Many of these students have hardly ventured outside of their own state or even their city. It's priceless to see their reaction when they go on a college visit and realize their dreams are within reach. TRIO programs simply transform lives," says Sarah Umbarger-Wells, assistant director and counselor for TRIO Talent Search at Virginia Tech.

***"Talent Search opens doors and establishes new trends for families without a history of higher education. That's a good feeling."***



TRIO student Byronae Lewis from Blacksburg High School leads a discussion on bullying with students from Blacksburg and Floyd High Schools.



TRIO students listen to a presentation on financial aid at Virginia Tech. The last Saturday of February is National TRIO Day, a day of service. According to the 1986 Congressional resolution, National TRIO Day is meant to focus the nation's "attention on the needs of disadvantaged young people and adults aspiring to improve their lives, to the necessary investment if they are to become contributing citizens of the country, and to the talent which will be wasted if that investment is not made."

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