

>> Hello, and welcome to the valley today. I am your host, Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community College Day. That means I am back on the Zoom with Guy Curtis talking about some cool program or educational opportunity that Laurel Ridge offers. I'm pretty stoked today Guy, because you invited Vivi to talk with us today about the TRIO programs.

>> Yes. It's a great spot to be in and share all these great services and programs at the college. I feel like there's always a hidden gem about what Laurel Ridge offers, and so I was excited to say, hey Vivi, could you come on the show and talk about TRIO? It's been a while and there are many folks out there who could take advantage of the services and programs you offer, and TRIO is one of those great opportunities. So excited to have Vivi on today.

>> Vivi Meder is joining us. She is the director of the TRIO program at Laurel Ridge Community College. Vivi, somebody who doesn't know what the TRIO program is, give me the overview. Tell me about it.

>> TRIO is actually not just a Laurel Ridge program, it's a federally funded grant program. It's been around for decades at this point literally way before my time. It started in 1964. If you love history, good news because here's a hot take. Remember that time that Lyndon B. Johnson was president? I don't because again, I was not born yet. But maybe some people remember Lyndon B. Johnson. He started this thing called the war on poverty. A part of the war on poverty were all of these different acts to try to embrace educating groups of people that historically would not find themselves in positions to be educated. TRIO was born out of that. It started with three programs, that's why it's called TRIO. There is an upward bound program, a talent search program, and a student success program. What we have is a student success program. Our whole intention here is to take this group of students, and it's our job to get them graduated from this institution in five years or less, and then to hopefully also transfer them onto a four-year program where they'll continue their education. Every TRIO program has a slightly different goal, so it depends on what type of TRIO program you have. Also, they shouldn't probably even call it TRIO anymore, because there's way more than three programs. Now, there's six or seven. But there's different programs now for graduate students and offshoots of them. There's a student success program that's just for STEM, students who are in sciences and math and things like that, all different programs. The way that you get a TRIO program, it is a federally funded grant, so you do have to apply for the grant. They took a look at the need in the area, the graduation rates in the area, the employment rates in the area, the trends in the employment rates in the area, so on and so forth, and they determine whether or not you can get this grant in the first place and how many students you should be serving. We have a grant, it runs in five year cycles. We've had one since 2000, so we're a pretty well established TRIO grant. We're actually up to rewrite here in a hot minute in 2025 for the next five years and we serve 160 students. Those students have to be one of three things. They have to either be first generation meaning neither caregiver. Maybe you weren't raised

by your parents, maybe you were raised by someone else, that's fine too. Neither caregiver graduated from college. They can have attended, taken some classes. But if they did not graduate and they raised you, then you are a first generation student. Second category is if they are what we consider to be low income. The government loves to make things easy. Just roughly 20 different charts that we consult to determine whether or not you are a low income person. Then the last category is if you are a student who has a documented disability. Maybe you're a student who also receives academic accommodations or you're a student who happens to be on disability, whatever the case may be, that would be another qualifier.

>> We're not just talking about physical disabilities either, we're talking about people that have intellectual disabilities. Even someone who may have ADHD or have some dyslexia, have a learning disability as well.

>> Another thing about that, in the college setting that I think it can be a little confusing for students, we do a lot of education around this as well, is that mental health diagnoses will also qualify you. If you are a student who, for example, has generalized anxiety disorder in the collegiate setting, you would qualify for academic accommodations, you go, you would qualify as having a documented disability. The definition in college doesn't necessarily match the definition of what social services would have, so there's a couple of different ways that a student really could find themselves in the TRIO program. We're federally required to meet certain ratios of students too. Two-thirds of them have to be both first generation and low income students. Of the students that have a documented disability, 1/4 of them have to also be low income. We are beholden to meet these different categories of students and to meet the overall general number, and then meet this ratio too at the same time.

>> Sometimes you're looking for a trifecta.

>> The trifecta is great. That is wonderful news because you can move them where you need them and you're still helping someone that really needs it. But if you can get the trifecta, then you're in good shape. We're lucky, because we have a lot of trifecta in the community college setting. It's not unusual for students to be all three of them, so we don't have to try that hard, which is fantastic.

>> Many times people in our region will disqualify themselves from even applying for something because they assume. They hear that term low income and they think, oh, I make too much. As I've learned over the last couple of years, it depends on where you're applying, what you're asking for, and what your actual level of income is, because it really is different depending on different things. I'm sure a lot of people think, oh, that won't apply to me, and it could if they just reach out and ask and make that first step.

>> That's exactly right. We try to visit a lot of STV classes. STV is like you're

entered to college class. It's a one credit class. Pretty much everyone is required to take it. They come and they learn how to be a good college student, basically. We try to do presentations in that class, in particular, because these are generally first time in college students, this is their first semester. They probably see a lot of our flyers around or they hear people mentioning it, but you're right, they don't necessarily understand that they qualify for it or what even all of the qualifiers mean. One thing that I've learned too is that people are really adverse to asking questions if they feel like it's going to make them look silly. That is not just true of students who are interested in TRIO, that is true in general. We do this awful thing to brand new students who we dump all this information on them. We're like, well, let me take 20 minutes and just tell you all about how financial aid works, and then we say all these jargony words. Then we say, does anyone have any questions? They're all like, absolutely not. I'm not asking you a single thing. That was a terrifying conversation. I don't know any of the English words that you just used, and I'm certainly not going to alert you to the fact that I have no idea what you just said. They have tons of questions. You have to treat it as if you're telling someone something brand new for the very first time every single time that you talk to them, which can be hard and annoying when you've done it 80 million times because sometimes you got to take it back to step 1, and FASFA means this. These are what the letters stands for.

>> In your program, your office, you're dealing specifically with students that fall into 1, 2, or 3 of these different criteria, so there's no even any real need to feel embarrassed or ashamed, or hesitant to come to your office because that's who you're talking to. There's no reason to not at least pop your head in or make an appointment and say, I just have a couple of questions. They may be dumb and you're going to say no, there are no dumb questions if it means we're going to get you something that you need.

>> Our staff here is great. because I think working in a TRIO department, you really have to be a human being first. I think there's always this need when you get a job to be a professional first. It can be hard to flip that switch, and the staff here is really wonderful about it. I like to tell people all the time about dumb things that I do. Just over Labor Day, I heard the word Kansas, and I had to say it five times aloud to myself to remember oh, it's a state, I forgot because I literally never think of Kansas ever, like ever. I apologize, if you're from Kansas. I just don't think about it. Someone was like Kansas and I was like, Kansas? Where have I heard that before? Use it in a sentence. I just don't know. You know what I mean? But especially if you're a younger, you have limited life experience and you come in here and I'm like I'm wearing my fancy outfit, and just the whole facade of college can be very intimidating. But don't fret, because you could be talking to some dumb dumb who doesn't remember what Kansas is. That can be your whole life. Your whole life can be that.

>> Guy Curtis Director of Marketing, I think that Vivi should be the poster child of don't be intimidated by community college.

>> No.

>> I agree. I think one of the best guests we've had to date because of her great witty words and punchy lines, so it's awesome. I do have a question for you, Vivi in terms of income and maybe making folks understand. If we're talking about income, is there a certain threshold that we should be considered when thinking about the TRIO program? We mentioned some of the disabilities that we could possibly be covered under and first-generation, but is there an income threshold that you guys work through?

>> There definitely is. I think one good way, like a pre-question that we'll ask people if they're concerned about where's my income lying in all of these graphs and charts and things like that? We'll ask things like are you receiving financial aid? Did you get a financial aid package?

>> Does the word Pell Grant mean anything to you? If that phrase sounds familiar, there's a good chance that you are considered a low income individual. We try to pick up on key words, especially when it comes to income. I think income can be a really sensitive topic. Mental health has been stigmatized a lot recently. It's still not for everybody, but I think it's easier sometimes for people to talk about that than it is their income level. We try to hang onto certain financial aid phrases that they may have heard apply to them, rather than being like, just straight up, tell me how much money you make.

>> It's complicated because if you are someone say you're an older student, then the likelihood that you're married and maybe even have children is fairly high. You're going to have probably a higher income than say, a student who's 22 just moving out on their own in an apartment, and those levels change based on those life circumstances. That married person, mother of two, father of two, isn't going to have the same income level that that 21-year old single person is going to have. You got to ask the questions to know, where do I fall in all of it?

>> Another important question that people don't even really think about as being related to their income with these chart is how many people live in your house? Because a certain dollar amount, if there's only one person in your house looks different than that same dollar amount if there's five people living in your home. There's other contributing factors.

>> Let's take a break when we come back, one of the things you did not mention in the list of three is that you have to have a particular program of study. I'm guessing there is no limitation necessarily on what you can and can't study under the TRIO program. Can we dig into that in the next segment?

>> Yeah, for sure.

>> We are on the screen for Laurel Ridge Community College. The Guy Curtis

is here with us along with Vivi Mita. She is the Trio director. We're talking about the TRIO program, we're going to do more of that when we come back in just a couple of minutes.

>> Hi, I'm Martin, a senior at Mountain Vista Governor School, together with environmental non-profit sustainability matters we're rebranding recycling. Did you know that the rules of recycling vary dramatically by location? Some facilities take glass, others don't. Some take many kinds of plastic, others only take bottles. How can you know how to recycle right? Look for the rules listed on your local recycling or solid waste department's website. For more information on how we're rebranding recycling, look for hashtag rebranding recycling on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok or visit sustainabilitymatters.org.

>> Welcome back to the Valley Today I am your host, Janet Michael. We are on the screen today with Guy Curtis from Lower Ridge Community College. Vivi Mita is joining us as well. She is the Trio director. We're talking about the Trio program, which I am just fascinated by, and I'm a little sad now, Vivi, because in the first segment, you referenced Lyndon B. Johnson as president. I too am not old enough to remember that. Which means I am old enough to have been able to take advantage of a TRIO program when I was in my younger years and I didn't. But as Guy Curtis and I have talked about and over again, you were never too old. In my mid '50s, I could still come and apply and maybe get into the Trio program.

>> Yeah, exactly. Here's the thing about it, for us if you've already earned a bachelor's degree, that's a nonstarter. But yeah, if you are a person who's been working for a while but you never earned his degree, but you want to come back and maybe get some job credentialing or whatever to advance in your career or what have you and you did not earn a bachelor's degree, then you do still qualify for the program absolutely. Because there's no age restriction on Trio. It's not as if it's for people who are 25 and younger, it's not, it's for literally anyone who does not already haven't been through college yet. So you don't really know all the ins and outs of college, and you were one of or a combination of those three qualifiers that we talked about before, then yeah, 100% you can apply.

>> It doesn't matter if I want to study nursing or I want to do criminology or I want to learn to operate a crane. That's a wide range of interest.

>> It is, that's very representative of the TRIO population. As long as you are working actively towards either a certificate or one of the degrees, then you can be in TRIO. Now if you come because you want to take an art class, because it sounds cool, it's just for fun, that's not going to be the best fit for you because the intention is to graduate you and move you on to the next thing. But yeah, there's no limitation for what you're studying for our program. It can be any of the certificate programs or hopefully we'd like to see the associates degrees. A lot of our students will start out in the certificate

programs because they'll think it's easy. It's just a couple of classes I can get through this. Then once they realize they can do it then they will stick around and finish up with an actual Associate's degree, which is really great.

>> Let's say I meet one or all of the criteria, and I am accepted into the program. First is accepted, even the right language, but then what happens? What does it look like?

>> Yeah, I think you can go with accepted. Again, there is limited space. We do generally take a few more than 160 anyway. Last year I think we went up to 174 or something like that. I don't know what will happen to me in the long term if I continue to do that. Punitive action. I have not experienced it yet. But we just feel like you have a good candidate then. You take a good candidate because you never know. Some people might move or whatever. But yeah, you get into the program, and we have a physical location at the Middletown campus. We have our own office space and a lounge space affiliated with us. That lounge space has computers, it's where the food pantry is located. We have free printing back here, and just a variety of other random resources like school supplies. Since there's space, they can come back here, it's quiet, they can study. They oftentimes become friendly with each other, and within their own little cohorts, their own moral support, which is great to see. They come back here also for academic advising and tutoring. We have two of our own tutors. We have a math specialist and a writing specialist. There is, of course, general tutoring too, but the general tutors are open for business for anybody. You're in competition for appointment slots with 1,000 plus of your best friends who are all taking English 111, whereas our tutors are just for the 160. They just have a lot more time and availability, and they can give you more one on one attention, which is the benefit of using them. But we also have a Canvas page all classes have a canvas page. The canvas page is like your classes hug. That's where you go to see your assignments and your grades and things that your teachers have posted. In Trio, we've created our own canvas page, and all of our students are linked onto the Canvas page. From that page we are also able to make announcements about things. We're able to offer free financial literacy classes that are on line that they can do any time that they want. We do virtual workshops, we do cultural events. We go out and take them places and just expose them to things that maybe they wouldn't be able to be exposed to. Actually, last week, I think last Wednesday, Jeanette Walls, the author, was at the Fauquier campus. We took a small group of students and on the car right up. One of the students was like, you know what I really am scared about is the question and answer part. Whenever I go to something like this, the question and answer part always makes me really nervous. I don't know why, it's like a public speaking thing. I know that they don't call on you, but always feel like they're going to call on you. We go to this thing and Jeanette Walls is lovely. She's great, she's just such a human and she's so funny and relatable. My student, the same one who was in the van, just talking about how this is terrifying, I don't like that part. Raises their hand and asks a question to Jeanette Walls saying, I was like, that was really just a moment. We

had my math tutor with me and we were both just two proud parents. You did it. That's amazing. We were so happy about it. You take them out to expose them to different things in the hope that something like that might transpire. Where they actually get out of their comfort zone and do something different and get a new experience to put in their little bucket and carry with them. That's a big part of the program too.

>> I feel like it's really you're finding your trap. Because it is such a smaller group, and all of you have at least a couple of things in common. Even I'm sure there's a lot of overlap in classwork and classes themselves, but you have this overlap probably from being in the same area, potentially, maybe even going to the same high school where parents knowing parents or kids knowing kids, that sort of thing. But it really gives you this connection that you may not find anywhere else in your life while you're also getting an education.

>> Exactly. We serve a lot of counties. Like the actual land mass that we serve is pretty significantly sized, but none of these places are really large. Strasbourg is not a particularly large place, Berryville is not a particularly large place. Exactly. People tend to have these little connections and so you see people finding their own groups even within Trio too, or certain people tend to gravitate towards each other because of a common experience. Then there's a group that the common experience is TRIO. Yeah, it can just be being in the program last year or the year before. I can't remember now, mom's emotion came and so that group of people that attended that, they're all moms, so now they're seeing visibly, oh, there's other moms in this program. That's great. Exposure is very important as we know because when you see someone else in your same position, you're more likely to be successful yourself if they're being successful. It's this whole network really is what it is more than anything, I think. There's all kinds of ways that Trio programs have changed in the decades that it's been in existence. Stuff that the federal government for a long time will be like, yeah, this is part of TRIO. You have to do it and then they'll change that. They'll change it up a little bit and throw this new branch at you. You're like, oh, now I got to do whatever. It does take a lot of creativity to play along with that. But I think that it's good too because it really shows some ingenuity within the program itself, on a national level, that the people that are really in charge of the Department of Education is recognizing that student populations now are a lot different than they were in the '60s and they have different needs. Then we do have a lot more older students, students that are coming back a little later in life, or students that are parents. Maybe that wasn't the case in the 1960s, but now we have to adapt to it. We have to meet you where you are. We need to be cognizant of who our audience is.

>> What is graduation day like for you? Because I would imagine when you have Trio students that are actually going to walk across that stage who probably just a few short years earlier thought this was never going to be a possibility for them. Are you sobbing, hot Kleenex filled mess?

>> I generally am anyway, yeah.

>> Oh, I saw a cute cat. Now I'm sobbing personal. But yeah, graduation is super cool because it's a hard job. Anything that works with special populations is a really hard job. Not everybody can do it. It takes certain people, I think, to work with individuals who have a lot of barriers. You're going to hear a lot of things, you're going to see a lot of things and it is very difficult to let that just roll off your shoulder at the end of the day especially. But a lot of times in programs like this, you can feel like you're just running on a treadmill. You're doing all of this stuff, and you have no idea if people are getting anything out of it in the midst of the semester. Sometimes you can really just feel like, are they getting something out of this? Is this meaningful for them? Is all this hard work really worth it? Then you get to that graduation date and you can actually see, and you see your students, how many of them and their families, and their kids. We do a graduation celebration for our students too, so we have a little party for them. Then last year we did a picnic. It was up on the hill, and we did a bonfire and we had games and people brought their kids and stuff and it was just awesome just to see them celebrating all together in all the different groups and then reflecting on everybody's journey. That really cool. That's a cool moment. Graduation, is it. That's where it's at. It's the payoff.

>> Emm like you said, ideally the hope is that they're graduating with probably that associates and they are moving on to a four-year university or they're moving on to continue their education. How many of them stay in touch, do you hear back from them talking about what they've done when they maybe have their second graduation?

>> Yeah, we have quite a few students actually that they'll friend you on social media after they leave. This past weekend I was at an event in town and it was a thing that had different vendors and I saw a former student there, so there's always hugs and catching up. But we also this year started a very intentional alumni program because we've never really done that before at Laurel Ridge. We know certain people, some of them will come back and say, hey, but we didn't never have a formal system and so we were like, just start that, we should put their stuff together and maybe write phone numbers down on one piece of paper. Our office specialist, Lisa has taken that on and she's got this whole running document now, our previous graduates, and we actually are intentionally reaching out to them currently to say, we just want to know how you're doing. Did you graduate? Did you move on to your masters? Are you working? What's going on? We can put all of this in one giant, I hate Excel, but Excel spreadsheet and someone else can manage that because I just cannot.

>> You and I share that problem. Do I hate Excel?

>> [inaudible 00:24:29] so bad.

>> But I Curtis can I take a class at Laurel Ridge on Excel because I don't understand how it makes the numbers work.

>> I think math is probably witchcraft of some kind anyway. I don't think they all are teaching this, like they don't know what they're talking about. They're all just doing it different and that's why none of us understand it.

>> I think they're called formulas, not witchcraft.

>> No, I don't think though.

>> Yeah.

>> That doesn't sound right.

>> Crazy thing here if you come to a class we definitely can help you out.

>> Vivi, where can people go? People that are listening today and they want to give it a shot. They want to find out more for themselves or for a family member, or maybe even know a little bit so they can tell a coworker about it. Where is the best first place for them to go?

>> The best place is our landing page on the Laurel Ridge website. If you just go to laurelridge.edu/trio or even if you're like, I don't know what a backslash is, don't say that word at me ever again. Just go to the Laurel Ridge site and then the search bar, type in Trio and hit "Enter", and it will come up and you just click on it. That is our page and we have information there, you can sleuth through that at your leisure. Another way is you can physically show up, especially in the mornings if you come before 12 o'clock we tend to have more staffing in the mornings and it's a little more active in here. If you just are on campus and you're just curious and you want to ask some questions, just come to our office, just stop by and whoever is free or freest will come out and answer your questions.

>> I feel like I want to come over. I feel like just down the street. I feel like I should just come over and have you show me the lounge and show me all the things.

>> Yeah, we can do all the things. We can eat snacks, whatever. It's fine.

>> Then Guy Curtis, what else is happening at Laurel Ridge Community College?

>> We have a lot going on, but I do want to thank Vivi for her time. We have so much activities going on in terms of supporting students through their educational goals. Trio is just one of many of them that we offer. I'm so happy that she came on today. I will share that we have a couple of updates if you are looking to to our campuses or meet with some of our staff one on one, we have

awesome new feature where you can self book some of those appointments through our website. If you visit laurelridge.edu/visit, you can schedule a tour or one on one meeting, either virtually or in person at any one of our locations in Fauquier campus, Middletown campus, as well as the Right Page center. Very excited about that. Also as well, we have our new viewbook for the 2024 spring semester that's available to the public. If you'd like to learn more about some of our upcoming programs, as well as the support services for students that help them along the way. Visit laurelridge.edu/viewbook. That'll show you all the great highlights, messages from our president, Kim Blosser. Awesome student success stories, as well as all the programs we offer. I don't know if you knew Janet, but we offer over 120 certificate, degrees, credential programs at our college, and they're all high demand for specific industries and jobs. Or if you're looking to transfer onto a institution before your school within Virginia where it may be, we have a number of transfer opportunities. Depending on your goal, which you're looking to do long term, we have a number of options. A hundred and twenty, I didn't realize, we just counted them all up in the viewbook and that's amazing.

>> That's crazy.

>> Yeah, unbelievable.

>> We've been doing this together for almost eight years now and I feel like we probably haven't even talked about half of those.

>> We have so many more topics to get through the next year, so awesome.

>> Here's my old school question for you though. Do you still print the old fashioned college catalog? Because I feel like I need one of those.

>> Your old fashioned catalog is available on print request. That's your traditional look at your class schedules and different classes and things. But the viewbook is actually a shorter document. It is a 16-page piece, but we have printed several copies of those and we did distribute them on September 1st in our communities in our area, as well as another mailings going to come out in October. If you'd like a copy of your own, feel free to come by the campus or we can mail you one or going to our web page. You can view the digital versions. Yes, we do print some things and other things we do save on paper, but the viewbook is a little bit different. It's a quick snapshot, a menu, if you will, of all of our offerings and programs like Trio and others are highlighted within it. It's an awesome place to see everything we offer.

>> Thank you both for taking some time today Vivi, it's always fun to talk to you and Guy, I learn something every single time, so keep up the good work.

>> Same here. It's like half the fun of these shows. I get to learn more and get to share the awesome stories we have.

>> Thanks for having me too. I really appreciate the opportunity to come and talk about Trio.

>> I will be back tomorrow. It is Extension Office Friday. Karen Poff is going to join me with a newbie to the extension office. Meet back here for that conversation just a few minutes afternooon.