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## Op-ed: TCC's On Ramp Program

Words [Theresa Bryant](#)

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**Naikia Cherry-Hill, the student speaker at TCC's May 2010 commencement, is a true success story – and an example of the struggles of displaced workers in today's challenging economy.**

Just as she was about to begin classes at TCC, she was laid off from her job at a dental lab. She lost her house and was struggling to support her four children, yet she was determined to complete her degree in culinary arts at TCC. Thanks to her own dogged spirit and support from TCC, today she is a chef for ARAMARK and on her way to a successful career.

There's a promising new program designed to ease the burden of more students like Cherry-Hill. I say promising because the "On-Ramp Program: Blending Economic Recovery with Student Success" doesn't just give lip service to the struggling jobless, or send them down already trodden training paths. Rather, it expands access to timely career programs with both tuition coverage and career advising for dislocated workers, including follow-up support while they pursue new training and education.

The program, which is funded by the U. S. Department of Labor Workforce Investment Act Title I, defines dislocated workers primarily as those who have lost their jobs due to layoffs or plant closings. The program is also open to certain small business owners whose businesses have failed or individuals who have been out of the workforce for family care reasons

Here's the deal: The On-Ramp Program provides funds to cover tuition, fees, books and supplies for both credit and noncredit programs. In some cases, students may also be eligible for additional financial aid from other grant programs. That's a great opportunity, and more comprehensive than prior offerings.

### ABOUT THE WRITER

#### Theresa Bryant

As Vice President for Workforce Development at Tidewater Community College, Bryant is responsible for the delivery of all non-credit training and customized credit training offered through the college. These activities include extensive military contract training, customized corporate contract training programs (ranging from seminars to complete associate degree programs), and a wide array of professional open enrollment classes.

[Other posts by Theresa Bryant.](#)



On top of that, On-Ramp isn't just a faceless voice or a computer application; at TCC, a career advisor – Gale Harold – sets the On-Ramp Program apart from other grant and scholarship programs. She will provide on-going contact with students enrolled to be sure they can access all resources available to support their studies. In addition to program information, Harold is knowledgeable about the jobs forecast in Hampton Roads, and can direct students toward careers where local job openings are likely.



Gail with a student.

The Virginia Community College System is to be commended for making these funds available in workforce investment areas that are experiencing the highest statewide unemployment rates or are dealing with the impact of a major layoff event. As one of 16 colleges in Virginia to receive grant funds, TCC anticipates serving more than 100 students through the On-Ramp Program this academic year – allowing them to obtain the education and skills they need to successfully embark on new careers.

As we recover from the recession, it's critical to re-build a workforce we can count on to drive the region's economy forward. On-Ramp may well be an invaluable tool, and lead to future models for jobless assistance; stay tuned.

*The writer is the Vice President for Workforce Development at Tidewater Community College. Dislocated workers interested in the program can contact Gale Harold at [GHarold@tcc.edu](mailto:GHarold@tcc.edu) or 757-822-1152.*