

A Butler County Community College student is shown Oct. 8, 2015, outside the Student Success Center on BC3's main campus in Butler Township. In eclipsing 560 graduates, each of BC3's past four graduating classes have been its largest of the century. Eighty percent of BC3's Class of 2020 graduated debt-free.



Butler County Community College students are shown Sept. 20, 2020, in the Heaton Family Learning Commons, a 24,000-square-foot, two-story academic and community facility that opened on the college's main campus in Butler Township in August 2016. The architecture of the state-of-the-art building has been recognized by *Library Journal*.

Butler County Community College students are shown Sept. 25, 2019, in the Heaton Family Learning Commons on BC3's main campus in Butler Township. BC3 was established as western Pennsylvania's first community college in 1965.





Community Colleges an Economic Driver of Boroughs, State

With nearly 300,000 students and making up approximately 2% of the gross state product in 2016-17, the Commonwealth's 14 community colleges have a large footprint.

Not every community college is in a borough, but its impact affects those communities by providing an economic boost from students and faculty stopping in boroughs for a cup of morning joe to the workforce development and training that borough businesses are hungering for to the amenities like cultural events, walking trails, and lifelong learning opportunities.

Workforce Development

Commonwealth public community colleges are the largest providers of post-secondary education and workforce training in PA, according to the PA Commission for Community Colleges.

For example, in western PA, the Tri-State Energy and Advanced Manufacturing (TEAM) Consortium was formed to respond to the need for a properly trained workforce in the high-demand energy fields.

Additionally, the Workforce and Economic Development Network of Pennsylvania, an alliance of educational providers, uses

community colleges to deliver the Commonwealth's Guaranteed Free Training program, which offers qualified in-state businesses and out-of-state companies relocating to the Commonwealth access to funding for a wide range of training.

"The Community College of Beaver County has placed great importance on understanding the needs of the companies in our region and establishing distinct career pathways that respond to industry demand," said John Goberish, the community college's dean of the School of Industrial Technology & Continuing Education on the PA Commission for Community Colleges' website. "In particular, the

continues on page 28...

TEAM Consortium has created a 27-county network of industry, education, workforce, and economic development.”

At the same time, the institution launched a high school academy so students could complete half of their associates degree while still in high school.

Industries have taken notice of these efforts.

Katie Hager, workforce development manager at DMI Companies in the City of Monongahela, Washington County, said that her experience has been that community colleges can “pivot based on our workforce needs, ensuring they have the right equipment, curriculum, and faculty to fill the manufacturing skills gap.”



Dr. Nicholas C. Neupauer has served as president of Butler County Community College since 2007. His presidency at a single institution exceeds that of any current chief executive officer among Pennsylvania’s 14 community colleges, its 14 State System of Higher Education universities and its four state-related institutions.

Having an educated and ready-for-work population is what can attract and keep businesses in any size community.

Municipal Economies

Beyond workforce development, community colleges can be a direct economic driver for regions.

Nicholas Neupauer, president of Butler County Community College (BC3) since 2007, pointed to a “multiplier” effect that his and other community colleges have on their home counties and communities.

He explained that as students and employees drive to work they may stop for gas, coffee, treats, and other needs. When that one trip is multiplied by several hundred full- and part-time employees along with the 20,000 who take classes, that’s a lot of impact on local economies.

This impact isn’t just while a student is taking classes, according to a study released in 2018. Its alumni in the Butler County workforce, its student spending, and the college’s expenditures on facilities, professional services and supplies, and construction, provided \$147.5 million in additional income, which was approximately 1.4% of Butler County’s gross regional product.

Overall, BC3’s alumni accounted for \$112.4 million of the \$147.5 million in added income in Butler County alone. Student spending

totaled \$8.1 million in 2016-17 with the college’s expenditures in the same time span adding up to \$7 million.

The off-campus expenditures of out-of-county students who relocated to Butler County supported jobs and created new income in Butler County’s economy, according to the study.

While BC3 is a non-profit, they have used a model that can benefit the communities where they are located beyond money spent.

“Our model is to lease property,” such as in Ford City Borough, Armstrong County, the most recent campus expansion, which Neupauer called “the truest town-gown.”

The Nonprofit Development Corp. will own the facility that will house four classrooms, a multi-purpose room, a natural science laboratory, student meeting space, and staff and faculty offices.

The state-of-the-art BC3 @ Armstrong facility will be built at the century-old Ford City Junior-Senior High School, which was razed in late 2018. The monies for the redevelopment came from state and county coffers as well as the private sector.

“This location, which has historical value, is literally in the heart of Ford City. We might even have some students who will move to Armstrong County to get the full college experience,” Neupauer

said previously in a college press release about the project.

Other community colleges across the state have similar impacts on their communities.

More than Dollars

As part of BC3's Strategic Plan, the college has established the office of Community Leadership Initiatives in the City of Butler, Butler County, as part of its main-campus operations

Its strategic plan objectives include the promotion of service to non-profit organizations among BC3 employees, increasing the number of non-credit lifelong learning courses, and new workforce development programming. But perhaps the most unusual is the Hope is Dope initiative, an optimistic approach to healing that uses science and analogies from the text *Hope is Dope* by Steve Treu.

As part of the initiative, BC3 offers:

- a 10-week program in partnership with the local Center for Community Resources, as part of the state opioid response/opioid use disorder program;
- housing assistance and recovery-support tools and education to individuals seeking recovery;
- educational classes for the public; and
- a separate training for



A Butler County Community College student is shown Sept. 20, 2020, in the Heaton Family Learning Commons.

professionals in which continuing education units are offered.

For more information, visit www.bc3.edu/about/community-leadership/opioid-initiative.html.

Seat at the Table

Whether its BC3 or any other school, "it's incredibly important to allow higher education to have a seat at the table," Neupauer said, adding that institutions like his can help local governments (and businesses) solve their problems.

Municipalities often rely on nearby community colleges for interns and other help for specific projects, but there is more higher education can do.

Neupauer said that sometimes government may think a college is far removed from the community and its problems, but he said in the case of Butler, they proved how "well-versed and diversified we are."

He pointed to the Hope is Dope initiative, which not only solves a social/health issue but has been a means of economic development by helping individuals re-enter the workforce.

Having a seat can also lead to expansions, according to Neupauer.

He said the Ford City project would not have been possible without a coming together of state, local, and private dollars

continues on page 30...

“buying into the vision of what it is we can do for the county and Ford City specifically.”

He said that the same things that attract students to the college are what may attract others to the community, such as walking trails, workout facilities, theater, and lifelong learning opportunities.

Sense of Place

While community colleges and other higher education institutions have continued to invest in their infrastructure, the pandemic has made online/virtual classes more prevalent. Still, Neupauer is a firm believer in a sense of place, so he does not see brick-and-mortar community colleges going away.

However, he can imagine that higher education will be looking at bringing in partners to utilize current spaces.

“Much like retail, there is going to be a different way of using spaces. ... In moving forward, there will be a deeper analysis of what appropriate space will be” as the world of higher education moves to attract generation alpha (the group of students after Gen Z).

“Post-pandemic a sense of place will be more important than ever before,” he added that “non-verbal behavior, group dynamics, etc. will be just as important.”



A portion of Butler County Community College’s 330-acre main campus in Butler Township is shown in this undated file photo. BC3 has expanded to educate students at additional locations in Armstrong, Butler, Jefferson, Lawrence, and Mercer counties, as well as online.

Community College No. 15

Perhaps the greatest proof of the importance of community colleges is the fact that a new one was officially created on July 8, 2020. Erie County Community College (ECCC) was born with an official vote from the PA State Board of Education, ending the “first step” in the process of opening a new institution of higher education that was begun by the county in 2017.

An economic impact study completed as part of the planning for ECCC identified a range of ways that it would drive growth in *A Ripple Effect for Erie County: The Economic Impact of a Stand-Alone Community College in Erie County* including:

- the leasing and eventual renovating or construction of the community college will stimulate more than \$44 million of economic growth in Erie,

supporting jobs, taxes, and the local economy;

- Creation, by year five of operation, of as many as 200 part- and full-time jobs, adding more than \$6.5 million in taxable income to the local economy;
- Combatting “brain drain” by helping teach and keep local talent at home; and
- Another \$6.3 million in income for the economy when students rent, shop, and play in Erie.

The highlights that ECCC has outlined are the same for any community college across the state though the details and the numbers will look different. So from fighting brain drain to adding dollars to the economy, community colleges can be a borough’s best friend.

For more on the state’s community colleges, visit pacommunity-colleges.org. ^B