

# Butler Eagle

## **No question: Higher education a cornerstone of our society**

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These are unique times in our country.

Questions abound about our safety protocols during this global pandemic. About our behavior on social media. About impartial reporting by our national press.

Even about the importance of our higher education.

“Not All Americans Think College Is Worth It,” a Sept. 13 headline read on [insidehighered.com](https://www.insidehighered.com).

The percentage of respondents who indicated they had a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in higher education fell in 2018 to 48 percent from 57 percent in 2015, a Gallup poll showed.

There are questions about higher education’s return on investment — and about whether our colleges and universities are having a positive impact on our country. Only half of American adults think they do, a Pew Research Center 2019 survey found.

These statistics, these questions, these doubts, are far removed from President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s observation that education is the cornerstone of a democratic society. It is no mistake, he said, that authoritarian regimes often seek to dismantle the educational infrastructures of a country when they gain power.

Education *must* continue to be that cornerstone. The importance of post-secondary education, in particular, cannot be underestimated.

Our country’s higher education institutions produce results. Our colleges and universities have that positive impact on our country — through improving the quality of life, through increasing lifetime earnings and through preparing our citizens for a post-pandemic workforce.

Americans with a college degree are happier than those

without a college degree, according to respondents to a survey published by Forbes in 2019. They’re healthier. They’re enjoying a higher quality of life.

They earn more.

The median weekly earnings for Americans with only a high school diploma are \$524 less than those with a bachelor’s degree and \$157 less than those with an associate degree, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported this year.

And to remain employed in a post-pandemic workforce, according to a study this year by the McKinsey Global Institute, more than half of workers in lower-wage brackets and in declining occupations will need to shift jobs.

To shift jobs, the study states, those workers will need significant training and acquisition of new skills.

Training a post-pandemic workforce. Increased earnings. Quality of life. From my perspective as president of Butler County Community College, there is no question about the importance of our higher education.

“An educated citizenry,” Thomas Jefferson has been quoted as saying, “is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people.”

In their 1997 book, “The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy,” William Strauss and Neil Howe discuss the cycles of history. These cycles — from a high to an awakening to an unraveling to the fourth turning, a crisis — have a distinct pattern.

In other words, these unique times in our country shall pass.

Higher education will continue to have a positive impact on our country.

Education will remain a cornerstone of our democratic society.

Education is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people.

There is no question about it.

*Dr. Nicholas C. Neupauer is president of Butler County Community College. BC3 has been ranked as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania six times since 2015, most recently for 2022 by Niche.com.*