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BC3 is best community college for third year

Schools.com gives ranking

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Butler County Community College has been named the best community college in Pennsylvania for the third consecutive year by Schools.com.
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Citing affordable tuition, a plethora of degree and certificate programs and more than 100 online courses, Schools.com has named Butler County Community College the best community college in Pennsylvania for the third consecutive year.

BC3 President Nick Neupauer said he is pleased that the college received the recognition again and credited the staff, administration and board of trustees for the achievement.

“We're thrilled to receive this third consecutive recognition. I am honored to work for such a great group of individuals that have helped us achieve this ranking. I'm proud of the faculty, staff and administration that allowed us to achieve such great success,” Neupauer said.

County Commissioner Kimberly Geyer, a BC3 alumna and ex officio trustee, also commended staff, administrators and the trustees.

“I've always believed that success starts in the classroom. The staff, administration and leadership team are our greatest assets and that's what makes BC3 a leader statewide,” Geyer said.

Schools.com, which helps high school students and adults choose colleges, said tuition for county residents taking 24 credits in 2017 was less than \$4,000, which was about \$1,300 less than the state average.

BC3 offers nearly 80 degree and certificate programs, including 18 programs designed to transfer to university bachelor's degree programs, and about 70 percent of students are enrolled in programs that can transfer to four-year schools.

The college also has more than 100 online and distance courses. Certain certificates in business and technology can be earned entirely online, according to Schools.com.

Affordable tuition was an important factor when Michael Booser decided to attend BC3.

The 2017 Butler High School graduate said he will graduate in the spring with an associates degree in computer science and has been accepted into the cyber security program at Slippery Rock University for the fall.

“My debt before aid will be \$50,000 to \$60,000. It's remarkably high, but others I graduated with are closer to a quarter million. My debt will be nothing compared to that,” Booser said.

The aid he receives is \$2,500 per year through a tuition assistance program from McDonald's, where he works.

Booser said his schedule is “a little hectic” with work and the 17 credits he takes at BC3.

“Another advantage of BC3 is most people are able to work,” he said, adding that he works two other jobs in addition to McDonald's. “I saved about \$8,000 toward college, so I already have a decent chunk already saved.”

BC3's average net annual tuition of \$4,727 was the lowest among 43 public and private institutions in Western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio and West Virginia, according to U.S. Department of Education data published in January. The college said 75 percent of its students expect to graduate debt free.

Neupauer said affordability could be the crucial factor in the ranking.

“Affordability is incredibly important. As is the fact that students graduate with an associates degree that gets them into the workforce and senior institutions. We do a good job of making

sure these students can transfer to these senior institutions. If I had to prioritize, I'm incredibly proud that we have the lowest tuition and the best return on investment," he said.

Geyer, an executive board member of the nonprofit Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges, which advocates for the 14 community colleges in the state, said BC3 plays a vital role in the county economy.

"We're truly blessed because BC3 is more than just an education institution. The college is an employer, it's a buyer of goods and services. We've got students (who) benefit (from) local business in the local economy in the community. They're working in the community," Geyer said.