



Dr. Nicholas Neupauer Guest Column From The Butler Eagle

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As people have heard me say, Butler County Community College is proud to be "Butler County's community college."

However, BC3 holds an important place in the commonwealth, too. As one of 14 community colleges, our role extends across Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvania House and Senate faced a daunting task during this challenging economy as the 2010-11 budget vote drew near. The same certainly holds true as the election for a new governor commences. But a recent survey conducted by a well-known polling company indicates overwhelming support for Pennsylvania's community colleges — especially during such a tough economic climate. During a random sampling conducted by Zogby International in April, more than 90 percent of 1,003 adults participating noted that job training and education programs community colleges provide are important to the economy.

Furthermore, the poll went on to state that community colleges provide state and local workforces with a trained workforce and give students an opportunity for an affordable education.

BC3 became Western Pennsylvania's first community college in 1966. Since then, the college has prospered. As a matter of fact, we were the commonwealth's fastest-growing community college in 2009-10 with a head-count growth of 14.7 percent and credit increases of 17.3 percent.

Fall enrollment indicates further increases of 14 percent, which translates to more than 4,600 students taking classes at BC3.

We not only offer the first two years of a quality education, but provide occupational programs that lead graduates directly into the workforce.

For example, our robotics technology program prepares students for employment in all sectors of industry in which robotic devices and embedded intelligence systems are utilized.

Nursing continues to be an anchor program that prepares the graduate to provide and manage direct care to individual clients and their families.

And, our manufacturing program teaches science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) concepts through guitar-making.

Overall, Pennsylvania community college enrollment surged more than 10 percent in 2009-10. BC3's record enrollment figures do not include adults who receive job-related training or even our public safety offerings that help train volunteer firefighters from across the state.

Other facts about Pennsylvania community colleges might surprise some people. For example: Tuition averages less than \$1,500 per semester.

One in five Pennsylvania undergraduates attends a community college.

An average of 80 percent of Pennsylvania community college graduates are living and working within 25 miles of the campus they attended.

- Programs offered at Pennsylvania community colleges vary based upon the regional needs of employers and workforce trends.

Community colleges are lifelines for students, vital resources for businesses, and powerful economic engines in their communities and for the state as a whole. Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges provide 400,000 people with educational and economic opportunities.

BC3 supports AdvancePA: Community Colleges Lead the Way, a statewide advocacy campaign sponsored by the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges. We want policymakers, candidates running for public office and all citizens to understand that Pennsylvania needs its community colleges to educate and prepare students with skills for today's jobs and a better state economy.

Community colleges are part of the solution. We encourage residents of Butler County to support the campaign by signing an online petition at www.ad-vancepa.net.

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By NICHOLAS C. NEUPAUER