

2017 freshmen: BC3's affordability pays off



Incoming students and others walk across Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township during Welcome Day on Friday, Aug. 25, 2017.

Criminology major “definitely trying to save money” in college

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(Butler, PA) Michael Booser, Eric Homa and Patrick Kresh have just started their studies at Butler County Community College, and are already anticipating their savings by pursuing higher education at what the Pittsburgh Business Times reported in January as the school with the least expensive tuition among 24 regional colleges and universities.

“I am getting the most education for the least amount of cost,” Booser said.

Added Homa: “It benefits you in the long run because you are not in as much debt when you leave college and get into your career.”



From left, Michael Booser, of Herman, Eric Homa, of Renfrew, and Patrick Kresh, of Butler, are shown on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township during Welcome Day on Friday, Aug. 25, 2017.

psychology cost a lot more than BC3," said Kresh, who is pursuing 17 credits. "That makes it a better start to go through BC3 than to another college that would cost two times as much. It is easier to save money going to BC3, then transfer to a four-year school."

Booser, Homa and Kresh were among nearly 450 incoming students who attended Welcome Day on BC3's main campus in Butler Township on Friday, three days before BC3's 14-week fall session began.

Transferring credits “opens up a bunch of doors for me”

Students toured campus, attended academic division meetings and learned during presentations that those who attain an associate degree will earn an average of \$1.7 million in their lifetimes. That's compared with \$1.3 million for those holding only a high school diploma and \$973,000 for those with less than a diploma, according to Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce.

They also learned that the 2016 jobless rate for those with a high school diploma was 5.4 percent, and for those with an associate degree, only 3.8 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Booser, of Herman, a 2017 graduate of Butler Area Senior High, is studying computer science and will attempt 16 credits this fall.

“BC3 credits are readily accepted by most every nearby school,” Booser said. “It opens up a bunch of doors for me. I'm not spending all that money here. I can spend it elsewhere.”

Homa, of Renfrew, also graduated this spring from St. Joseph's in Natrona.

Forbes.com reported Feb. 23 that the average graduate in the Class of 2016 carried \$37,172 in student loan debt. Seventy-five percent of students at BC3, ranked as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania by Schools.com, graduate debt-free.

Kresh, of Butler, graduated in 2017 from St. Joseph High School in Natrona and is studying psychology at BC3.

“Other schools that have

The criminology major who is attempting 15 credits this fall said he chose BC3 because the main campus “is not a far drive from my house.”

“I can stay home for at least a couple more years and then when I transfer to a four-year college the credits will transfer,” he said. “I am definitely trying to save money when going to college.”

Beaver County resident not “spending like \$30,000”

BC3’s credits are recognized by public, private, state-related and online colleges and universities. Its tuition and fees cost \$160 per credit hour for Butler County residents and \$260 per credit hour for residents of other Pennsylvania counties. Out-of-state residents pay \$360 per credit hour.

Nearly 36 percent of BC3’s 2,900 credit students this fall will study at off-campus locations. Enrollment at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle is 357, according to Sharla Anke, BC3’s assistant dean of institutional research. Enrollment at BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township, is 279; at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage, 227; at BC3 @ Armstrong in Ford City, 114; and at BC3 @ Brockway in Brockway, 77.

Forty-four percent of BC3 students received a Pell grant in the 2016-17 academic year, according to Becky Smith, BC3’s assistant director of financial aid. Additionally, the BC3 Education Foundation will award more than \$200,000 in scholarships this year.

Justin Baust, 19, of Marion Township, Beaver County, said he will attend BC3’s main campus in Butler Township this fall, then continue his general studies at BC3 @ Cranberry in the spring.

“I’ll finish there,” he said. “It’s closer to home.”

Baust said he followed his sister, Jordan, in attending BC3.

“And I am saving money, not going to another school and spending like \$30,000,” Baust said. “I’m spending like \$3,000. I think more students are thinking that way. My friends had scholarships or half-scholarships to go elsewhere and they all went to community colleges to save money because they don’t think it’s worth it anymore.”

BC3 also offers a 12-week session that starts Sept. 11 and a 10-week session that begins Sept. 25. Five-week Fast Track courses begin Oct. 2 and Nov. 6.

BC3’s academic year will culminate in the spring with its 50th commencement.