

23 early college credits key as 19-year-old to graduate from BC3 @ Armstrong

May 7, 2019

(Templeton, PA) Butler County Community College's Class of 2019 will be its largest of the century with 599 graduates – 14 more than in 2017, its previous top class since 2000.

Five-hundred-twenty-seven graduates will receive at least one associate degree, and 72 at least one certificate during BC3's commencement exercises, set for 7 p.m. May 15 in the Field House on BC3's main campus in Butler Township.

Among the 599 graduates are 32 student-veterans. A 70-year-old grandmother of three who is the Class of 2019's most senior graduate. A 35-year-old married mother of six. BC3's first two-sport All-American. Six high school students who achieved a Workplace Certificate in Entrepreneurship by completing the first Riv-El Entrepreneurship Program.

And Courage Houston, of Templeton, who as a student at Grace Christian School in Kittanning earned 23 credits toward his associate degree in business administration from BC3 @ Armstrong in Ford City through BC3's College Pathways and College Within the High School programs.

The 2018 Grace Christian School alumnus will also be the fourth-youngest graduate in BC3's Class of 2019 on May 15 at 19 years, four months and 21 days. He plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in economics from a senior institution and then, a juris doctorate.



Courage Houston, 19, of Templeton, a student at BC3 @ Armstrong in Ford City, earned 23 credits toward the associate degree in business administration he will receive May 15 by attending BC3's College Pathways and College Within the High School programs. He will also be the fourth-youngest graduate in BC3's Class of 2019.

“BC3 @ Armstrong wants their students to succeed”

Houston earned six credits – in speech and western civilization I – through BC3's College Within the High School program, which is taught within high schools; and 17 credits – in intermediate algebra, college writing, college algebra, health science, research writing and

macroeconomics – through BC3’s College Pathway’s program, in which students can take BC3 classes online or at any BC3 location.

“I was really trying to take advantage of that,” Houston said of BC3’s high school programming. “I am going to be in school for a very long time because I want to get my doctorate degree and that would take seven or eight years. I feel like that time in high school was a little bit more important to me.”

Houston, who has seven siblings and wants to become a lawyer to “help this country administer justice,” will be among the 75 percent of BC3 graduates who are debt-free, which, he said, “allows me to move forward to the next step in my life without having to worry about that weight on my back.”

Pennsylvania college students owe an average of \$36,193 in student-loan debt, the highest in the nation, LendEdu reported Aug. 8.

BC3 has the highest salary-to-cost ratio and the most affordable tuition among 43 regional colleges and universities, according to U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard data. BC3 has also been selected as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania in three consecutive rankings by Schools.com.

“BC3 @ Armstrong wants their students to succeed and do well both in their studies and in their future career,” Houston said. “They want you to do what you need to do and move on to what you want to accomplish.”

Houston was able to accomplish his associate degree by way of BC3’s high school programming.

“If you really want to go to college and you know what you are doing, if you have your plans mapped out, then I would definitely consider it, because a lot of the credits are dual, so you don’t have to take that credit in high school. It is one of those things that is very good in the long run.”

Evans City woman most senior graduate

Seventeen BC3 graduates will receive two associate degrees, two will receive two certificates, and 13 will receive one associate degree and one certificate.

Evans City resident Deborah Carter, at 70 years, one month and 12 days on May 15 will be BC3’s most senior graduate, 285 days more senior than Brenda Haney, of Cranberry Township. Carter will receive an associate degree in social work and Haney, in criminology.

Vanessa Eberle, 35, of Butler, a married mother of six, will receive an associate degree in psychology, as will her husband, Ethan, 41.

Mackenzie Craig, of Karns City, who since December was named a National Junior College Athletic Association Division III All-American in volleyball and in women's basketball, will receive an associate degree in criminology.

Ellwood City resident Mikayla Beachem, at 17 years, eight months and 22 days will be BC3's youngest graduate, 37 days younger than fellow Riv-Ell classmate Destiny DiMaggio, also of Ellwood City.

Ellwood City and Riverside high school students were able to participate in the first, yearlong Riv-Ell Entrepreneurship Program, a collaborative effort among BC3, the Community College of Beaver County and the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce, which blended classroom learning with real-world experience. Students who completed the program earned 16 tuition-free, transferrable credits.

Past three graduating classes largest since 2000

BC3 will also graduate its second class of Presidential Scholars. Meghan Hyatt, of Butler, will receive an associate degree in mathematics; Kelly Kriley, of Butler, in chemistry; Drew Meier, of Fenelton, in electronics technology with CADD; Noah Pollock, of Chicora, in business administration; Claire Rodgers, of Saxonburg, in history; and Haley Vissari, of Renfrew, in early childhood education (Pre K-4).

The Presidential Scholars program is in its third year at BC3. The full-tuition President's Scholarship is presented to students in the Top 10 percent of their graduating class and who have achieved at least a 3.5 grade-point average at any of Butler County's public high schools. A cyber school student counted in those public schools' graduating classes is also eligible. Students must also enroll at BC3 in the first semester following their high school graduation to be eligible for the scholarship, and are required to take Scholars-only courses and maintain at least a 3.5 GPA at BC3.

More than 125 members of BC3's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, an international academic honor society, will graduate, as will 13 members of Delta Theta, BC3's chapter of Kappa Beta Delta, an international honor society for business students.

Eight students will receive from BC3 11 reverse-transfer degrees, an opportunity created in 2016 as part of an agreement among Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges and 14 Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education institutions.

Seven employees of Oberg Industries, a precision manufacturer in Freeport, will receive apprenticeship technology workplace certificates as a result of a program instructed onsite by BC3. BC3's 26-credit apprenticeship technology workplace certificate program, launched in fall 2016, is taught entirely at Oberg Industries.

Dr. Steve Tyrell, president of North Country Community College, Saranac Lake, N.Y., will be the keynote speaker. Sandra J. Ihlenfeld, a 2007 BC3 graduate and executive director of the Butler YMCA, will be the distinguished alumni speaker.

BC3's three most recent graduating classes have been its largest of the century. The college's Class of 2017 had 585 graduates and of 2018, 578. BC3's Class of 2018 also had 32 student-veterans. Its class of 2012 had 34.