

BC3 partnerships, multimedia spaces offer room to grow

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(Butler, PA) Former Butler County Community College students Briana Yoursh and Lawrence Weaver sit inside a small, square room, flanking an even smaller rectangular table. Its surface is nearly hidden by laptops and cell phones and slithering wires and softcover textbooks and the hard-shelled drink containers from which they will sip over the next 75 minutes.



Shortly after 2 p.m., accounting Professor Dr. Kreag Danvers asks, “Any questions about the project?”

Danvers sees they have none.

As if on cue, Yoursh and Weaver grab pencils and open notebooks when Danvers announces the introduction of Chapter 9 in their softcover textbook.

Just don’t ask these trend-setting students to pass their homework forward to Danvers.

He’s inside a Clarion University of Pennsylvania classroom 54 miles away, broadcasting his cost accounting class live onto a 32-inch flat-screen using a laptop logged on to ZOOM.US, a web-based video conferencing bridging system to which Clarion subscribes.

Yoursh and Weaver are inside Study Room 233 of BC3’s state-of-the-art Heaton Family Learning Commons, where they are pursuing a bachelor’s degree in accounting without stepping foot off the Butler Township campus or onto that of Clarion’s.

Neither, in fact, has ever visited Clarion University of Pennsylvania.

“I don’t even know what it looks like,” Yoursh says with a laugh.

And they may not until the day they graduate.

“That,” Weaver says, “will be different.”

As are BC3's partnerships with six universities that enable students to pursue bachelor's degrees from the Butler Township campus through video conferencing, called iTV at BC3, in face-to-face classes with instructors or online.

BC3 in March signed bachelor's degree completion agreements with Chatham University and Indiana University of Pennsylvania, joining those with Franklin University, La Roche College, the University of Pittsburgh and Clarion.

Clarion offers five courses to students at BC3 this semester, says Robert Morris, BC3's Dean of Admissions. La Roche offers three, Pitt two and Franklin one - either in face-to-face classes with visiting instructors or online.

IUP and Chatham plan to launch their programs by fall 2017, Morris says.

Four Clarion classes - Econ 222; Econ 310; Accounting 352, Yoursh and Weaver's cost accounting course; and Management 426 - are broadcast to BC3 from Clarion via ZOOM.

One - Accounting 350 - is taught live at BC3 and is broadcast to Clarion via BC3's iTV.

The future, says Ann McCandless, BC3's Dean of Educational Technology, is now - and it's convenient.

"It allows (students) the flexibility and the opportunity to pursue their Clarion bachelor's degree without having to be at Clarion," she says. "In the wintertime it will be great for these students to not have to drive to Clarion."

While paying the tuition and fees charged by the senior institution, students like Yoursh, of New Castle, and Weaver, of Renfrew, can save on room and board, or the three-hour round-trip costs of driving to Clarion.

"I can stay at home and save a lot of money," Yoursh says. "If I was staying on campus, it would be like 10 grand more."

Minimum room and board costs for an academic year at Clarion, Chatham, IUP, La Roche and Pitt range from \$9,500 to \$11,582. Franklin University, in Columbus, Ohio, is a commuter college.

"I can save the money," Yoursh says, "and I like staying at home."

As does Weaver, who leases a 2014 Honda Civic.

"I wouldn't want to put all the miles on that," he says. "That's a lot of wear and tear on a car. I wanted to stay at home, and I didn't want to drive up to Clarion every day for a couple of classes."

In fact, the next steps Yoursh, 22, and Weaver, 21, will take in pursuit of bachelor's degrees will literally be only next door, in Multimedia Classroom 232.

At 616 square feet, it is nearly five times the size of Study Room 233, equipped with three 60-inch flat-screens, two ball microphones suspended from the ceiling, a projector screen, and elevated videoconferencing cameras fore and aft. At each of the 20 work stations, students can fold a flat-screen computer monitor into its desk, or slide a keyboard under it to create a usable surface.

Multimedia Classroom 232 "could potentially be used for the most part of the day five days a week," McCandless says.

Clarion, she says, "is looking to use it probably from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. almost every day."

While she and Weaver would be lost in such an expansive space, Yoursh says attending larger classes in the larger classroom "will be nice."

Visiting senior institution instructors in the bachelor's degree completion partnerships teach at BC3's main campus, Morris says.

While Morris is unsure how many students are taking senior institution courses at BC3, he says that in most cases, collegians need not have attended BC3 to participate. All senior institutions in the program will accept a minimum of 60 BC3 credits – "and sometimes up to 90," Morris says - and none require the student to attend a course at the four-year school.

"Those who take advantage of these programs can do so without having to travel to the senior institution, which saves time and money," he says.

It is also advisable, he says, for students to identify soon in their BC3 career an intention to participate in the program.

"As early as possible, to ensure that they are in the correct BC3 program, and are taking the appropriate courses," Morris says.

BC3 offers bachelor's degree completion programs in business administration, online, from Franklin; in psychology from La Roche; in administration of justice from Pittsburgh; and in accounting from Clarion. Chatham will offer communications-public relations, and nursing, and IUP, in early childhood (Pre K-4) and special education (Pre K-8).

Clarion's program is accredited by AACSB International, placing it among the top business programs in the world; and Chatham's nursing was named a "Best Online Program" by U.S. News & World Report.

La Roche offers a tuition discount; Pitt, a \$1,000 scholarship that can be applied toward the tuition of one three-credit course in its program; and IUP, the opportunity to earn dual certification in Pennsylvania for Pre K-4 and special education Pre K-8.

Yoursh, who earned an associate degree in accounting from BC3, is pleased “almost” all her credits transferred to Clarion.

“I like this a lot,” she says. “I wish I could stay here for my four-year degree.”

Through BC3’s bachelor’s degree completion program, and technology, though, she will.

She just can’t hand in that homework or those tests directly to Danvers.

“We have access codes,” she says. “We can do the homework and exams online.”

And keep her college costs in line.

Photo Caption: Rear view of the Snyder Associated Companies Multimedia Classroom on the second floor of the Heaton Family Learning Commons on BC3’s main campus.