

BC3 state's No. 1 community college for third time in row, Schools.com says

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Students at Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township, Butler County, are shown in this Oct. 3, 2018, file photo. BC3, with six locations serving eight counties, has been ranked the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania for a third consecutive time by Schools.com.

(Butler, PA) Butler County Community College has been ranked as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania by Schools.com for a third time in a row, a recognition that validates the college's continued excellence on its main campus in Butler Township and at its five additional locations, said Dr. Nick Neupauer, BC3's president.

"What is remarkable about this is that the bar has been set so high, and yet for a third consecutive ranking, we have achieved that No. 1 status," Neupauer said. "It's not just a single variable that resulted in this ranking."

Schools.com, a Foster City, Calif., organization, used a 10-point scale and National Center for Education Statistics in ranking each of the 14 Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges' members in categories that included percentage of students enrolled in distance education, total cost of attendance, student-to-faculty ratio and outgoing transfer rate.

"From a board of trustees' perspective, it's keeping that tuition low," said Neupauer, whose 12-year presidency at a single institution exceeds that of any current chief executive officer among Pennsylvania's community colleges, its 14 State System of Higher Education institutions and its four state-related schools – Lincoln, Penn State and Temple universities, and the University of Pittsburgh. "It factors in our distance education program. And to have our students move along to graduation takes efforts from our outstanding faculty members."

BC3's Classes of 2017, with 585 graduates, and of 2018, with 578, have been its largest this century.

The third consecutive No. 1 ranking follows BC3 being recognized in January and for a second year in a row as having the most affordable tuition and the highest salary-to-cost ratio among more than 40 regional colleges and universities, according to U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard data analyzed and published by the Pittsburgh Business Times.

"I believe that this ranking makes it clear that the faculty, administration and staff of the college are committed to providing students with the highest quality and most affordable education and training possible," said Joseph E. Kubit, chairman of BC3's board of trustees. "This third ranking by Schools.com should serve to prospective students as another objective indicator of the high quality of this institution that they can and should consider when choosing a college."

BC3, said Kim Geyer, a Butler County commissioner, 1984 BC3 graduate and BC3 trustee since 2011, "consistently rises to the top because of the stability of its leadership and collaborative efforts in the classroom. In a day and age in which most institutions are experiencing declining enrollments, and students nationwide are incurring higher student debt, it is refreshing to recognize that BC3 provides an alternative solution for a quality and affordable education that propels students toward future success."



Students at BC3 @ Armstrong, Ford City, Armstrong County, are shown in this Nov. 28, 2018, file photo. Butler County Community College, with six locations serving eight counties, has been ranked the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania for a third consecutive time by Schools.com.

Added Danny Tran, Schools.com marketing director: “(The third No. 1 ranking) speaks a lot to the quality of education, cost, all the different factors that we looked at of how BC3 compares to the other community colleges in the state.”

Nearly 30 percent of BC3’s students this spring are enrolled at BC3’s additional locations, according to Sharla Anke, BC3’s assistant dean of institutional research. Those sites are BC3 @ Armstrong in Ford City, Armstrong County; BC3 @ Brockway in Brockway, Jefferson County; BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township, Butler County; BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage, Mercer County; and BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing, New Castle, Lawrence County.



Students at BC3 @ Brockway, Brockway, Jefferson County, are shown in this Nov. 27, 2018, file photo. Butler County Community College, with six locations serving eight counties, has been ranked the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania for a third consecutive time by Schools.com.

“Online courses help a lot”

More than 290 BC3 students this spring are taking only distance education courses and are included in the 875 enrolled in at least one online class, according to Anke.

Among them, Kelsey Scott, of Greenville, Mercer County, the mother of a 7-year-old daughter who this spring is taking financial accounting and income taxation courses online from BC3 toward her goal of becoming an accountant.

“Online courses help a lot,” Scott said. “I can still work and my daughter can still do her sports and all of her activities. When she goes to sleep, I can do all of my homework and all of my classes instead of going to an actual building and trying to fit everything in. That would be more difficult.”

Online classes account for more than 10 percent of credit hours pursued this spring by BC3 students, Anke said.

BC3 offers more than 100 courses that are fully online, and nearly 30 hybrid – online and face-to-face – courses, said Ann McCandless, BC3’s dean of educational technology. It also offers five-week online Fast Tracks, held consecutively throughout the semester; and online certificates of achievement in business skills and human resource management specialist; online workplace certificates in Microsoft Office specialist and basic manufacturing; and an online certificate in management of applied technology, McCandless said.

“I have no intention of carrying debt”

BC3's average net annual price 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 College Scorecard data published in January.

"I have no intention of carrying debt through life," said Michael Booser, of Butler, a computer science major who attends BC3's main campus. "BC3's affordability is appealing to me because I am able to radically reduce the cost of pursuing a bachelor's degree."

BC3's salary-to-cost ratio – a measurement of graduates' salaries 10 years after commencement for every dollar a student pays to attend the institution – was the highest at 7.45, according to U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard data published in January.

BC3 in 2017 topped 41 other regional institutions in average net annual price and salary-to-cost ratio.

Additionally, the BC3 Education Foundation awards more than \$200,000 in scholarships annually.

Like 75 percent of BC3 graduates, Meghan Hyatt, of Butler, who attends BC3's main campus, expects to be debt-free when she earns her associate degree in mathematics from BC3 on May 15.

"Graduating debt-free," Hyatt said, "allows me to continue my education at a four-year institution without hindering my future financial decisions such as buying a house."

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

"Going to BC3 has been the best financial decision I have made for myself," said Jadon Carlson, of Dayton, Armstrong County, who attends BC3 @ Armstrong and BC3's main campus and will graduate in May with a degree in criminology. "Graduating debt-free means I can cut my tuition costs in half when I transfer. That makes me so excited."

"Get to know the professors"



Students at BC3 @ Cranberry, Cranberry Township, Butler County, are shown in this Nov. 28, 2018, file photo. Butler County Community College, with six locations serving eight counties, has been ranked the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania for a third consecutive time by Schools.com.

BC3's faculty have the unique ability to connect with students in ways that make them feel special, Dr. Belinda Richardson, BC3's vice president for academic affairs, said of the college's 18:1 student-to-faculty ratio.

"Inside the classrooms, students are able to forge relationships that impact them for a lifetime," Richardson said. "In addition to the small classroom size, I believe the environment we create within the classroom contributes to the success of our students and has had a strong impact on our being named the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania for three rankings in a row."

BC3's student-to-faculty ratio is advantageous, said Josie Canon, of West Middlesex, Mercer County, who is pursuing an associate degree in business administration at BC3 @ LindenPointe.

"I've benefited from BC3's small class sizes because my questions aren't overlooked," Canon said, "and help is always available."

The best thing about attending BC3, according to Molly Trodden, of New Castle, a general studies student at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing, is "the small class sizes and great faculty."

Small classes sizes and great faculty enable Brooke Moore, of Chicora, to "get to know the professors on a personal level and they really helped in guiding me to become the best version of myself."

"The instruction at BC3 is more individualized and this helps if you are struggling on a certain lesson or course," said Moore, who attends BC3's main campus and is pursuing a degree in early childhood education (Pre K-4).

"Transferrable credits at an affordable price"

Credits from BC3, which offers 56 two-year career and transfer programs, transfer to public, private and online institutions.

Approximately 70 percent of BC3's students are enrolled in programs that can be transferred to four-year schools, according to Anke.

Brooke Reitz, of Brockway, is an early childhood education (Pre K-4) major who expects to graduate from BC3 @ Brockway in May debt-free and transfer to Clarion University of Pennsylvania.



A student at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing, New Castle, Lawrence County, is shown in this Nov. 26, 2018, file photo. Butler County Community College, with six locations serving eight counties, has been ranked the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania for a third consecutive time by Schools.com.

“I saved a ton of money going to BC3,” Reitz said. “Since I am earning my associate degree, I should enter Clarion as a junior, meaning that my credits will transfer and for a much lower cost.”

BC3’s 500 outgoing transfer agreements are the third-most among the 14 institutions within the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges, according to the Pennsylvania Transfer and Articulation Center.

“BC3 gives me the opportunity to achieve a numerous amount of transferrable credits at an affordable price,” said Casey Cardone, of Saxonburg, a general studies major who attends BC3’s main campus and expects to graduate in May. “The classes I took throughout my education at BC3 were the same classes I would have taken at any other university. Fortunately, these classes were offered to me at a much less-expensive price and didn’t require any housing fees due to proximity from home.”

BC3’s spring open houses are scheduled for March 27 at BC3 @ LindenPointe; April 3 at BC3’s main campus; April 11 at BC3 @ Cranberry; April 17 at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing; April 22 at BC3 @ Brockway; and May 1 at BC3 @ Armstrong.

Following BC3 in Schools.com’s Top Five were Pennsylvania Highlands Community College, Johnstown; Delaware County Community College, Media; Lehigh Carbon Community College, Schnecksville; and the Community College of Philadelphia.

Other institutions within the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges are Bucks County Community College, Newtown; the Community College of Allegheny County, Pittsburgh; the Community College of Beaver County, Monaca; Harrisburg Area Community College; Luzerne County Community College, Nanticoke; Montgomery County Community College, Blue Bell; Northampton County Community College, Bethlehem; Reading Area Community College; and Westmoreland County Community College, Youngwood.



Students at BC3 @ LindenPointe, Hermitage, Mercer County, are shown in this Nov. 26, 2018, file photo. Butler County Community College, with six locations serving eight counties, has been ranked the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania for a third consecutive time by Schools.com.