

Parents at Welcome Day laud students' decision to select BC3

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Alexis Petro, 18, of Butler, fills her BC3 Pioneers bag with handouts during Welcome Day on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township on Friday, Aug. 23, 2019. Petro is among the 40 percent of BC3 students who are the first members of their family to attend college.

(Butler, PA) More than 850 new students this week began fall 2019 classes at Butler County Community College in pursuit of careers such as anesthesiology, computer programming, human resource management, law enforcement and registered nursing, with many citing BC3's affordability, accessibility and quality of education in a higher education selection applauded by their parents.

"You are way more successful when you can start out not having giant financial debt," said Tracey Nevel, of Butler, whose 18-year-old daughter, Jen, will take 12 credits this fall as a general studies major while envisioning a career in sports medicine.

"This world is a lot more competitive than it used to be, so I want her to be really successful and not have the stress of having huge debt."

Nearly 660 of the new students attended Welcome Days this month at BC3's additional locations in Brockway, Cranberry Township, Ford City, Hermitage and New Castle, and on BC3's main campus in Butler Township, according to Patty Colosimo, vice president for student affairs and enrollment management secretary.

BC3's tuition is among the most affordable of 43 regional colleges and universities, according to U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard data.

"I needed to save money when I went to BC3 because the classes were more affordable than other colleges," said Tom Lumley, of Butler, who graduated in 2012 with a degree in engineering from BC3.

His 18-year-old daughter, Ashleigh, a 2019 Butler High graduate, this fall will be a first-year pre-nursing student working toward her goal of becoming an anesthesiologist.

"With Ashleigh," Tom said, "we aren't spending a boatload of money in which she would be in debt for a long period of time."

"I don't have to pay out of pocket"

Education "is very expensive," said Michael Shaffer, of Sarver, whose 18-year-old son Ryan is among students from Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Elk, Jefferson, Lawrence and Mercer counties who received one of 126 scholarships awarded by the BC3 Education Foundation during the 2019-2020 academic year.

"It's important students start out in life with as little debt as possible," said Michael, whose son will major in computer science at BC3. "You don't want to have a huge student loan payment when you get out of school and then try to rent an apartment or buy a place of your own. It's just very challenging for young adults."



Clockwise, from back left, Tracey Nevel, and students Lydia Young, Jen Nevel and Kayla Greenawalt, all of Butler, are shown before Welcome Day on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township on Friday, Aug. 23, 2019.



Tom Lumley and his daughter, Ashleigh Lumley, are shown before Welcome Day on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township on Friday, Aug. 23, 2019.

The Pittsburgh Business Times in January reported that 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 among those 43 regional colleges and universities.

Nearly 40 percent of BC3 students received a federal Pell grant in 2018-2019, according to Juli Louttit, BC3's director of financial aid.

With financial aid, "I don't have to pay out of pocket," said Mekenzie Pflueger, a 2019 graduate of Slippery Rock High, adding that the 75 percent of BC3 graduates who are debt-free "is a big deal to me. You have people who are still paying off debt for a long time."

Online courses help "time management"

BC3's accessibility to students this fall includes 62 online courses, 19 hybrid courses and five iTV courses, according to Ann McCandless, BC3's dean of educational technology. iTV courses are taught in a classroom by one instructor but delivered to two separate locations simultaneously using video or web conferencing technology.

Blake Donaldson, a 2019 graduate of Mars High, is taking an intermediate algebra course online this fall as he pursues a degree in computer science and works up to 30 hours a week at a pizza shop.

"An online course gives me the option to be more available for my employer," Donaldson said.



Michael Shaffer, left, and his son, Ryan, both of Sarver, are shown before Welcome Day on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township on Friday, Aug. 23, 2019.



Blake Donaldson, of Mars, is shown during Welcome Day on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township on Friday, Aug. 23, 2019.

Added Logan Francis, a 2019 graduate of Butler High and Nursing, R.N., student who is taking a psychology course online: “It makes time management easier. It’s also cost-effective taking online classes here versus another college.”

More than 862 students are taking at least one online course and 254 are taking only online courses, according to Sharla Anke, BC3’s assistant dean of institutional research.

“BC3 was the smartest choice”

Like Caden Ochsenhirt, of Ellwood City; and Lydia Young, of Butler; Ryan Shaffer said he selected BC3 also because of its accessibility.

“I chose BC3 because I was familiar with Butler,” said Shaffer, a 2019 Freeport High graduate. “I live close by. BC3 was the smartest choice in order to save money and stay with my family. With commuting, you save a bunch of money with room and board. And I thought this is a choice that is going to benefit my future the most.”

Added Ochsenhirt, a 2019 graduate of Lincoln High pursuing a degree in emergency services-police services option: “You can stay connected with your family and get an education at the same time rather than being away from your family for years on end.”

And Young, a 2019 graduate of Butler High, who as a BC3 general studies major is interested in human resource management: “BC3 is close to home. I can see my family. I don’t have to move away. I am very family oriented. I like to see my family on a daily basis, so that really helps.”

BC3’s student-to-faculty ratio is 15:1, according to Anke. The college’s instructors, Ochsenhirt said, are “people who know what they are doing.”

“I heard they are amazing and work with you,” said Pearson Holsinger, 18, of Ellwood City, a 2019 Lincoln High graduate and an early childhood education major who plans to transfer to Penn State.



Pearson Holsinger, left, and Caden Ochsenhirt, of Ellwood City, are shown before Welcome Day on Butler County Community College’s main campus in Butler Township on Friday, Aug. 23, 2019.

500 outgoing transfer agreements

Sixty-seven percent of BC3 students this fall are enrolled in programs that can be transferred to a four-year institution, Anke said.

“You can start at BC3,” Pflueger said, “and save money.”

The transferability of BC3's credits, said Jen Nevel, a 2019 Butler High graduate, "helps me to move further in my education."

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.

"The impressive number of articulation agreements with local institutions demonstrates the value of a BC3 degree, and provides students who plan to transfer with the ease of mind that their coursework will carry with them as they pursue degrees beyond BC3," said Dr. Josh Novak, dean of student development.

"As a critical point of access to higher education in the many communities that we serve, these agreements give BC3 students a very clear and financially accessible pathway to a wide variety of degree options and to the careers that follow."

BC3's three most recent graduating classes have been its largest of the century. The college's Class of 2019 had 599 graduates; its class of 2017 had 585 graduates and of 2018, 578.

Monday marked the start of BC3's 14-week session, and the first of three five-week online Fast Track sessions, held consecutively throughout the semester. A 10-week session begins Sept. 23 and additional Fast Track sessions start Sept. 30 and Nov. 4.

BC3's main campus open house is Oct. 16.