

Students left in limbo by business school closing praise BC3 teach-out

“BC3 didn’t have to do it – and it would have been a whole lot less work for them,” grad says

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Dr. Stacy Boyer-Davis, left, an adjunct instructor with Butler County Community College, is shown Dec. 3, 2016, with students Alyssa Whitehead, center, and Nancy O’Donnell. BC3 @ Brockway created a teach-out to enable the DuBois Business College students to graduate on time after their school suddenly closed in September.

(Brockway, PA) The announcement Sept. 6 blindsided Nancy O’Donnell and Alyssa Whitehead, its ramifications leaving them in “disbelief” and “fearful.”

Four months before they expected to complete courses that would merit associate in specialized business degrees from DuBois Business College, the 131-year-old for-profit school unexpectedly said it would cease operations – jeopardizing students like O’Donnell and Whitehead and their 18-month career-track programs.

“We were told of the closing just two weeks prior to the end of the (summer) term,” said O’Donnell, 51, of St. Marys in Elk County. “We were very confused and had many questions.”

“My thoughts and fears were, ‘How was I going to finish school?’ and what was going to happen to the amazing teachers and staff at DuBois Business College?” said Whitehead, 19, of Emporium in Cameron County.

Equally concerned was the woman upon whom they would come to rely – Dr. Stacy Boyer-Davis.

“I was significantly troubled to learn that a number of students were one semester, a heartbeat away, from graduation,” Boyer-Davis said. “To be so close to earning a degree or completing a certificate program and walking across the proverbial stage to achieve that milestone moment visualized daily for nearly two years, and only to have that reality ripped away because the school closed, was alarming.”

Within two weeks, O’Donnell and Whitehead discovered that an equally amazing effort by Boyer-Davis and Butler County Community College would enable them to pursue their accounting and business administration degrees.

“I was relieved”

BC3 @ Brockway, an off-campus site 20 miles from DuBois, tailored for O’Donnell and Whitehead a teach-out, which provides for equitable treatment of students whose college or university closes.

“I was relieved,” Whitehead said, “that someone was going to be caring enough to help me in my time of need.”

Those would be BC3’s Dr. Case Willoughby, vice president for student affairs and enrollment management; Dr. Bruce Russell, interim vice president for academic affairs; Bill O’Brien, vice president for continuing education and off-campus sites; Jill Martin Rend, director of BC3 @ Brockway; Dr. Christian Ola, BC3 dean of business; Julianne Louttit, director of financial aid; Jake Friel, controller; Amy Pignatore, director of records and registration; Stella Smith, associate director of financial aid; Paula Crider, business division secretary; Renee Piovesan, vice president for academic affairs secretary; and Boyer-Davis, an adjunct instructor and director of accounting services at Clarion University of Pennsylvania.

While DBC halted classes as of Sept. 22, it could still confer degrees in December to students who completed the required coursework.

To provide O’Donnell and Whitehead the classes they needed to graduate from DBC, BC3 “resurrected from the dead” intermediate accounting I and intermediate accounting II – courses that had not been on BC3’s books since 2002-2003, according to Ola and O’Brien. BC3 also offered to O’Donnell and Whitehead courses in corporate taxation and managerial accounting to fulfill their DBC requirements.

To do that, BC3 purchased an online corporate taxation course from a vendor that addressed the creation of a limited liability corporation, Ola said, and substituted its managerial accounting class for DBC's cost accounting course.

Instructor “determined” to help students finish degree

“I'm sure that the task of taking on suddenly dislocated students must have been very cumbersome and time-consuming,” O'Donnell said.

The teach-out, Whitehead said, “was made to fit my schedule and Nancy's schedule. BC3 helped us in any way possible. I was very thankful BC3 made the classes that Nancy and I needed to finish our last semester.”

Her schedule at Clarion University was already full, Davis said, adding that she was already teaching two evening courses at BC3 @ Brockway in the fall.

“However,” she said, “I was determined to help these students finish what they started, despite my commitments.”

O'Donnell and Whitehead met for four hours on eight Saturdays with Boyer-Davis, an adjunct BC3 instructor.

Course-by-appointment instructors must meet with each student at least one hour eight times per course. Boyer-Davis spent one hour each Saturday on intermediate accounting I; one hour on intermediate accounting II; one hour on corporate tax; and one hour on managerial accounting.

“Such an amazing teacher”

“Stacy is an amazing teacher and person,” Whitehead said. “Every Saturday we met and she would bring us all the work we would need and even brought us breakfast every single time. I am so thankful I got to meet and work with such an amazing teacher, such a powerful woman and such a caring person.”

O'Donnell said she was impressed with Boyer-Davis' degree of organization and “how much she wanted to help us. We could see that Dr. Stacy had taken a great amount of time to put together the four classes that we had each week. She explained the material to us in a way that made it easy to learn. And she spent this time with us taking time from her own busy, already jam-packed schedule. Amazing.”

O'Donnell and Whitehead also took courses-by-appointment in English II and career planning with P.J. Piccirillo and Gene Samanka.

Nancy O'Donnell and Alyssa Whitehead, students who were in "disbelief" and "fearful" when issues with the Accrediting Council of Independent Colleges and Schools forced DBC's closure, were among the last to graduate from the institution that was founded in 1885.

"To know that I was instrumental in facilitating most of the final coursework for Nancy and Alyssa in order to earn their degrees is the pinnacle of my career," Boyer-Davis said.

Today O'Donnell works as an office assistant, spending most of her day, she says, in QuickBooks, invoicing and keeping tabs on inventory for a plumbing and heating business. She accepted the position in mid-March.

"Above and beyond the call of duty"

"I am truly grateful to BC3 for stepping up and taking us in so that we could finish what we had set out to do," O'Donnell said. "BC3 didn't have to do it – and it would have been a whole lot less work for them. The actions of BC3 on the day that we really needed someone shows how much they care about the education of not only their own students, but the students of their fellow institutions."

Added Boyer-Davis: "I believe that through this experience, Nancy and Alyssa have discovered how deeply devoted the BC3 team is, from the faculty to the administration and staff, to the current and future success of each and every student. At BC3, every student is the priority, whether online or on-the-ground, a traditional, nontraditional, or transfer student, part-time or full-time. Nancy and Alyssa are proof of this commitment."

Boyer-Davis, Martin Rend said, "went above and beyond the call of duty. She is to be commended for her dedication, commitment and caring about students. She is truly a devoted instructor."

BC3 @ Brockway, which attracts students from Clarion, Clearfield, Elk and Jefferson counties, offers degree programs in business administration, business management, early childhood education, general studies, office administration-executive, psychology and social work.

Its credits in business administration, early childhood education, general studies, psychology and social work can be transferred toward bachelor's degrees at public, private and online four-year colleges and universities. Additionally, students who complete a BC3 @ Brockway degree in business administration, early childhood education, psychology and social work can transfer with junior standing to any Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education institution, such as Clarion, Edinboro, Slippery Rock and Edinboro universities of Pennsylvania.

BC3's other off-campus sites are located in Cranberry Township, Ford City, Hermitage and New Castle.