

Class of 2017 could be BC3's largest this century

63-year-old: "I'm off to a new career"

May 8, 2017

(Butler, PA) Nearly 600 students, the highest number of applicants since at least 2000, are soon to graduate from Butler County Community College according to Amy Pignatore, BC3's director of records and registration.

Among the 596 potential graduates are a Saxonburg resident seeking the most associate degrees BC3 has conferred in 10 years, a grandmother of three born 4½ decades before the school's youngest member of the Class of 2017, four students capitalizing on a new reverse-transfer agreement and the first two students from BC3's newest off-campus site.

BC3 will hold its 49th commencement on May 17 at 7 p.m. in the field house on BC3's main campus.

Nicholas Briggs, 22, a 2013 graduate of Knoch High School, plans to receive associate of applied science degrees in applied industrial technology, engineering technology with CADD, computer aided machining technology and in manufacturing with advanced technology.

Briggs' four associate degrees would be the most awarded to a student in a single year since a Freeport man earned five in 2007, Pignatore said. Twenty-three students will receive either two associate degrees, two certificates or one of each, Pignatore said.

Students pursuing 562 degrees and 64 certificates will have successfully finished their studies at BC3 in August or December 2016, as of May 17 or through mid-summer, Pignatore said.

Potential grads range from 63 to 18

The most senior student is Kathie Potemra, 63, of Ellwood City, who is seeking an associate of applied science degree in office administration-medical. She attended BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle, BC3's main campus and took courses online.

The youngest is Elizabeth Ann Dayton, 18, of Sharon, who is pursuing an associate of arts degree in general studies and who plans to transfer to Auburn University. She attended BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage.

Thirty-two student-veterans are expected to graduate May 17, as are four students from Slippery Rock, Edinboro and Clarion universities of Pennsylvania, who are seeking reverse-transfer degrees from BC3, according to Pignatore.

The 2016 reverse-transfer agreement among Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges and 14 Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education institutions allows university students who have earned at least 45 community college credits to apply for an associate degree from their alma mater.

A student must have enrolled at a PASSHE university within five years of leaving the community college and have earned at least 15 additional credits at a state system institution to be considered for the program.

Eight Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania students received 11 reverse-transfer associate degrees from BC3 in December, according to Pignatore. They are Jason Brannon, in homeland security; Selena Carr, Adam Gizienski and Corbin Seezox, in general studies; Savannah Coyne and Martin Zanicky, in general studies and in business administration; Deena DeFrank, in criminology; and Marissa Fenster, in general studies and in social work.

2 may make history for BC3's newest site

Eric Schall and Meagan Roush, students at BC3 @ Armstrong in Ford City, which opened in fall 2015, expect to receive associate degrees in business administration and psychology, respectively.

The most prevalent degree being pursued by 67 BC3 students in 2017 is an associate of arts degree in general studies. The number of BC3 students seeking associate degrees in other programs include 63 in business administration, 57 in business management, 54 in nursing, 34 in psychology, 33 in criminology, 24 in social work and 24 in early childhood education.

Twenty-six students are pursuing a certificate in medical coding specialist, 13 in massage therapy, 12 in medical assistant and six in human resource management specialist.

Jay M. Kifo, a business intelligence engineer with Highmark Blue Cross-Blue Shield in Pittsburgh who earned associate degrees in computer information systems and business administration from BC3 in 2010, will deliver the keynote address. Kifo also holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Slippery Rock and Robert Morris universities, respectively.

Kevin Boozel, a Butler County Commissioner who earned an associate degree in elementary education from BC3 in 1991, a bachelor's degree from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and a master's degree from Geneva College, is the distinguished alumni speaker.

Dylan Kersten, of Sarver, will be the student speaker and Tarah Schmidt, of Parker, will deliver the student alumni welcome address. Hailey Williams, of East Brady, will lead the presentation of the tassels.

“You make friendships along the way”

Briggs enrolled at BC3’s main campus in Butler Township in fall 2013.

“When I first decided to pursue four majors my schedule was nonstop,” says Briggs, who plans to pursue a bachelor’s degree in industrial and engineering administration at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and ultimately work as a manager in the manufacturing design industry. His first semesters were “definitely the hardest and most stressful times because I was working a part-time job and being a work study as well.”



Nicholas Briggs, 22, of Saxonburg, is shown in a science lab Friday, April 21, on BC3’s main campus. He expects to receive four associate of applied science degrees in May.

He has had more free time in the spring 2017 semester than in any previous term, he says.

“And I’m not going to lie,” he says. “I’m loving it.”

BC3, he says, is “a great place for anyone, whether you are coming out of high school, transferring classes or even thinking about going back to school. BC3 is more than just a community college. It’s a place where you meet people young and old. You learn from not only the teachers but from fellow classmates, and you make great friendships along the way.”

“Going to BC3 was a great option for me”

Dayton, a 2015 graduate of the Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School and BC3’s youngest 2017 graduate by 89 days, said she recalls applying to BC3 and “I actually had to call the admissions office because it wouldn’t let me apply until I was 17, which would have been after the fall semester started.

“Teachers and fellow students have always been surprised when they hear how old I am. Even then, it never occurred to me that when I graduated, I would probably be the youngest in my class.”

An employee of a big-box store, Dayton says she chose BC3 @ LindenPointe because of its tuition.

“It was the best school for the price,” she says.

BC3's tuition is less expensive than that of 24 regional colleges and universities, the Pittsburgh Business Times reported in January. It has also been named the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania by Schools.com and ranked No. 13 among 117 Pennsylvania schools in distance education by OnlineColleges.com.

"Going to a BC3 was a great option for me to begin my education," says Dayton, who will seek bachelor's and master's degrees in software engineering at Auburn and "dreams" of one day working in the video game industry.



Elizabeth Ann Dayton, 18, of Sharon, is expected to be BC3's youngest member of the Class of 2017. She attends classes at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage.

"The best part about BC3 is the size of the school," Dayton says of the college's 18:1 student-to-faculty ratio. "I've gotten to know my teachers and classmates more so than if I had gone to a larger school. I think that was especially important for me because the transition between high school and college was a bit stressful, and as a first generation student, I didn't really know exactly what I was getting into. Going to a smaller school with more intimate classroom settings made that transition much easier and continued to be very beneficial even as I became more comfortable with college life."

Grandmother: "I'm off to a new career"

Potemra, BC3's most senior graduate by 327 days, says "You can never get enough education."

The 1972 graduate of Shenango High School also earned an associate degree in information management from Youngstown State University in 1997.

With her degree from BC3, Potemra hopes to land a position in a medical facility.

"That field is booming right now," she says. "Many offices are still trying to transfer all their patient records into an electronic health system."



Kathie Potemra, 63, of Ellwood City, is expected to be BC3's most senior member of the Class of 2017. Potemra, shown Tuesday, April 25, on BC3's main campus, attends classes at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle, BC3's main campus and took courses online.

The highlight of her experience at BC3 was “finding out more about myself,” Potemra says. “When placed with students that are younger than your children, it can become a very humbling situation.”

She has three sons and one daughter and grandchildren ranging in age from 15 to 7.

“I have a very supportive family who thought it odd when I first announced my retirement-education-new career plan,” she says. “But I couldn’t have asked for a better cheering team. They have listened to me when I couldn’t go another day, pushing me back on track to finish.” Potemra says she feels all the wiser having attended BC3.

“Physically I feel 63 right now,” she says, “but that pressure will soon go away and I’m off to a new career.”