

# BC3 No. 1 again among state's 14 community colleges

Schools.com ranking reflects college's commitment to higher education across region, president says

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Butler County Community College students are shown outside the Student Success Center on the college's main campus in Butler Township. BC3 has been ranked the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania for the second time in a second consecutive survey conducted by Schools.com.

College, Blue Bell, third; Northampton County Area Community College, fourth; and the Community College of Beaver County fifth.

The Foster City, Calif., organization used a five-point scale in rating 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 number of transfer agreements with other institutions in Pennsylvania.

"We are so happy to have that No. 1 ranking again in the community college space," said Neupauer, whose 10-year presidency at a single institution exceeds that of any current leader 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.

"But I think it speaks as well to our strength as an institution of higher education, not only in Butler County, but the region and the commonwealth."

(Butler, PA) Butler County Community College's back-to-back rankings as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania in consecutive Schools.com surveys are a testament to BC3's consistency in excellence and its importance to higher education in eight counties, BC3 President Dr. Nick Neupauer said.

"This also speaks to the commitment from the entire BC3 team to provide affordable, accessible and above all, quality education to the students we serve," Neupauer said.

Schools.com on Tuesday published only its Top Five rankings in its second survey since late 2015. Bucks County Community College was second; Montgomery County Community

Nearly 34 percent of BC3's credit students this fall are studying at off-campus locations in Brockway, Cranberry Township, Ford City, New Castle and Hermitage.



BC3 @ Armstrong students are shown at the Butler County Community College off-campus site in Ford City.

## Trustee: “Students above everything else”

BC3's continued recognition by Schools.com “really validates the fact that we are making such a tremendous impact on our main campus and in each of our off-campus locations,” Neupauer said. “With our regional approach to higher education, not only are we excelling on our main campus in Butler Township, but also at our off-campus locations and in the counties we serve.”

The college's mission is to provide regional students with an affordable higher education and the ability to transfer to a senior institution, said Ray D. Steffler, a 1986 BC3 graduate and the college's longest-serving trustee and chairman. “The ranking reinforces that we have been able reach that goal.”

Kim Geyer, a 1984 BC3 graduate, has served as an ex officio BC3 trustee in her capacity as a Butler County commissioner since 2011.

“It is an honor to be part of a county that has a community college honored twice and consecutively recognizing our professionals and institution, each of whom has demonstrated time and again the power of hard work, innovation and perseverance,” Geyer said.

Fellow Commissioner Kevin Boozel, a 1991 graduate of BC3, said his alma mater is a “diamond among jewels” and is “being recognized for its innovation, cooperative spirit and most importantly, its delivery of well-educated students to both the work force and four-year institutions.”

“This accomplishment rings the bell of success loud and clear that,” Boozel said, “can be heard across the state.”

Steffler, a BC3 trustee since 1985 and its board chairman since 1999, said, “We have always put our students above everything else. The investments in BC3 by our local sponsors are returning huge dividends in making the lives of the citizens in our region better by having a community college available.”



BC3 @ Brockway students are shown at the Butler County Community College off-campus site in Brockway.

## 863 sign on to distance education courses

BC3's off-campus site in Jefferson County opened in fall 2013.

"Without BC3 @ Brockway," the site's director, Jill Martin Rend, said of her students' sentiments, "they wouldn't have been able to attend college."

BC3 is a great asset to the region, said Sean Carroll, director of BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle, "whether it is for the student who takes classes then goes right into

the work force, the student who transfers on to receive his or her bachelor's degree or someone taking advantage of the many Lifelong Learning classes that are offered.

"I truly believe that BC3 has earned the designation of No. 1 community college in the state by both its affordable and accessible education that it provides at its main campus in Butler, its off-campus sites and through online learning."

Three-hundred BC3 students this fall are taking only distance education courses and are included in the 863 enrolled in at least one online class, according to Sharla Anke, assistant dean of institutional research. More than 11 percent of credit hours pursued by BC3 students are from online classes, Anke added.

BC3 offers 102 Internet classes, a 100 percent-online associate of applied science degree in business management, and four certificates, said Ann McCandless, BC3's dean of educational technology. McCandless announced in February BC3's acceptance into the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements, which authorized the college to offer online courses to students in the organization's 48 member states and Washington, D.C.

The college in 2016 launched its online Fast Track courses, held consecutively throughout traditional semesters and in which students can earn at least three credits in five weeks. A No. 13 ranking among 117 Pennsylvania schools in distance education by OnlineColleges.com followed.

## No fear of drowning in debt, BC3 @ Armstrong student says



BC3 @ Cranberry students are shown at the Butler County Community College off-campus site in Cranberry Township.

Current annual tuition and fees for Butler County students pursuing 30 credits is \$4,800, according to Julianne Louttit, director of financial aid. Forty-four percent of BC3 students received a Pell grant in the 2016-17 academic year, according to Becky Smith, BC3's assistant director of financial aid, and 75 percent of BC3 students graduate debt-free.

That may include Amal Khoury, a sophomore studying psychology at BC3 @ Cranberry.

“The affordability of BC3 influenced my decision of attending BC3,” Khoury said. “After graduating from high school, I did not know what I wanted to major in, so attending a four-year college would not have been ideal for me. Worrying about deciding what to study and being able to afford an education is very stressful. BC3 gave me the opportunity to explore my options and not worry about graduating with so much debt. In fact, I expect to graduate from BC3 debt-free.”

Tuition at BC3 is the lowest among 24 colleges and universities in Western Pennsylvania, the Pittsburgh Business Times reported in January. Additionally, the BC3 Education Foundation will award more than \$200,000 in scholarships this year.

“A lot of my friends now are \$30,000 in debt,” said Janelle Fox, a sophomore early childhood education and special education major at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing who said she too plans to graduate from BC3 debt-free. “I could not imagine trying to start my career with all of that debt in front of me.”

## Off-campus director: Students value numerous transfer options

Its affordable tuition and its second-place rating for Pennsylvania Transfer and Articulation Center rates combined to put BC3 “at the head of our list,” Schools.com reported.

BC3's 324 outgoing transfer agreements with Pennsylvania institutions are the second-most among the state's 14 community colleges, trailing only Harrisburg Area Community College with its 339, said Dr. Joshua Novak, BC3's dean of student development.

“Our students,” said Karen Zapp, director of BC3 @ Armstrong in Ford City, “value the many transfer and degree-completion options that are available.”



BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing students are shown at the Butler County Community College off-campus site in New Castle.

## Small classes have huge advantage, BC3 vice president says

Schools.com also cited “comfortable classes” at BC3, where the student-to-faculty ratio fluctuates between 18:1 and 17:1, Anke said.

“Average class size is often linked to increased student engagement — smaller can be more conducive to retention and graduation,” Schools.com reported. “Small class sizes can allow faculty to provide students with increased individual and small group attention.”

Small class sizes contribute to the quality of teaching and overall learning experience for BC3 students, said Dr. Belinda Richardson, BC3’s vice president for academic affairs, and provide increased opportunities for students to interact with their professors and with one another.

“Students are encouraged to ask questions and participate in discussions,” Richardson said. “Professors are more accessible to students and able to connect with them in an environment that cultivates academic success.”

Teresa Hall agreed.

“The class sizes are large enough to offer diverse opinions,” the nontraditional student studying social work and criminal justice at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage said. “Yet (the classes are) small enough to receive the academic support that is necessary for success.”

## 2017 a year of achievement, honors

BC3’s back-to-back rankings as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania come during in a year in which its chapter of Phi Theta Kappa achieved a five-star status, the highest possible rating in the prestigious international academic honor society; and in which it graduated its largest class of the century with 596 students.

The college in 2017 was also selected for the fifth consecutive year as a Military Friendly institution by Victory Media, and in September received its third \$1 million commitment in 38 months, one that will benefit a registered nursing program whose 2017 graduates’ success rate in passing the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses was 96 percent. That exceeds the state average of 84 percent, according to Patricia Annear, BC3’s dean of nursing and allied health.



BC3 @ LindenPointe students are shown at the Butler County Community College off-campus site in Hermitage.

Community College, Pennsylvania Highlands Community College, the Community College of Philadelphia, Reading Area Community College and Westmoreland County Community College.

BC3's women's basketball, softball, golf and volleyball squads in 2017 were No. 1 in Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference post-season tournaments.

## Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges members

The other nine members of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges are the Community College of Allegheny County, Delaware County Community College, Harrisburg Area Community College, Lehigh-Carbon Community College, Luzerne County