

5 BC3 students to lobby for increased community college funding

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Butler County Community College students who will advocate for increased community college funding Tuesday in the state Capitol Rotunda are, from left, Lucas Carroll, of Beaver; Jocelyn Guy, of Prospect; Madison Morella, of Ellwood City; Alyssa Nusser, of Cranberry Township; and Chris Slay, of Butler.

(Butler, PA) Five Butler County Community College students will advocate for increased community college funding Tuesday in the state Capitol Rotunda in response to a 2018-19 budget proposal from Gov. Tom Wolf that freezes operational disbursements at 2017-18 levels.

While Wolf's \$32.9 billion fiscal plan includes an additional \$1.8 million in reimbursements for approved capital projects, it holds the line on operational spending for Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges at the current \$232.1 million level.

Representatives of Pennsylvania's community colleges are urging lawmakers to increase operating appropriations by \$10.6 million "to ensure community colleges remain an affordable option" in the state, according to the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges.

With more than 317,000 students, Pennsylvania's community colleges are the largest provider of education and workforce training in the commonwealth, according to the commission.

Jocelyn Guy, a BC3 sophomore from Prospect, is one of those students.

"Community colleges are important," Guy said, "because they give students the opportunity to attend at an affordable price."



BC3 student MaryAnn T. Steinmiller, 20, of Butler, will be honored Monday night in Harrisburg as a selection to the 2018 All-Pennsylvania Academic Team, along with BC3 students Chris Slay, of Butler; and Alyssa Nusser, of Cranberry Township.

“A good start to my college career”

Guy, 20, a business administration major at BC3, will be joined at Lobby Day in Harrisburg by fellow BC3 students Madison Morella, of Ellwood City; Alyssa Nusser, of Cranberry Township; Chris Slay, of Butler; and Lucas Carroll, of Beaver.

Morella, an 18-year-old undeclared freshman, said BC3 provided her with an affordable, last-minute option when she decided against attending a private university in Pittsburgh.

“Two weeks before move-in day, I decided that I wasn’t ready to go (to the Pittsburgh school) because I was unsure about my major, and I would have had a lot of debt,” Morella said. “My father told me about BC3, and I instantly felt like it was a good start to my college career with the affordable prices.

BC3’s tuition is the least expensive among 42 regional colleges and universities, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard. Guy, Nusser and Carroll expect to be among the 75 percent of BC3 graduates who are debt-free when they receive their degrees in May.

“Community colleges are very important for people who like me may be undecided on a major,” Morella said, “and are looking to save money.”

BC3 receives one-third of its funding from the state.

“Funding is always an issue in education,” said Kimberly D. Geyer, a BC3 graduate, a BC3 trustee, a Butler County commissioner and secretary of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges’ board of directors.

“There are more demands and expectations being placed on community colleges because people are beginning to realize that community colleges are a viable source of providing quality education that is accessible and affordable to most people without incurring large amounts of debt.”

BC3 president: Community colleges agile, provide high quality

The average annual tuition for a full-time student at a Pennsylvania community college is \$3,900, said Matthew Kemeny, director of public affairs for the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges. The average annual tuition for a full-time student at a Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education institution is \$7,492.

Nusser, 20, plans to receive an associate of applied science degree from BC3 in technical trades-cosmetology management option and become a hair stylist.

Pennsylvania’s community colleges, she said, “offer lower tuition with smaller class sizes because BC3 has an articulation agreement with the Butler County Area Vocational-Technical School, my degree took one-and-a-half years instead of two.”

An investment in community colleges benefits Pennsylvania's future, said Dr. Nick Neupauer, BC3 president.

"Low cost, responsive to community needs, agile and high quality – that's what an investment into the commonwealth's 14 community colleges yields," Neupauer said. "The students who are joining me for Lobby Day represent our terrific collegians."

Guy, Morella, Nusser, Slay, 36, a social work major, and Carroll, 20, a communications major, plan to discuss the importance of community colleges with regional lawmakers in Harrisburg before attending the Lobby Day rally in the Rotunda.

Lobby Day, Geyer said, provides state legislators an opportunity to learn about issues affecting community college students.

"When lawmakers hear the stories of the students and of what they are able to achieve, or about the setbacks due to lack of funding, it makes them realize just how important our community colleges are in education throughout Pennsylvania," Geyer said.

Slay said he will impress upon lawmakers the importance of funding "in order to keep college affordable for those who might not otherwise have a chance to pursue their education."

With the emphasis on higher education in the workforce becoming more crucial, Carroll said, "a community college is the only opportunity available for a lot of people. This opportunity can shape the rest of someone's life – if they take advantage of it."

Nusser, Slay and BC3 student MaryAnn T. Steinmiller, 20, of Butler, will be honored Monday night as selections to the 2018 All-Pennsylvania Academic Team at a ceremony in Harrisburg. Steinmiller expects to graduate debt-free from BC3 when she receives a degree in history in May.

The deadline for the state Legislature and Wolf to pass a spending plan is June 30.