

State gives green light to BC3 @ Brockway for registered nursing program

Jan. 25, 2018



Fifty-eight Butler County Community College registered nursing students are shown in a complex nursing-critical care class taught by Julia Carney on BC3's main campus in Butler Township, Butler County, on Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018. The Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing has authorized BC3 to expand its associate of applied science degree curriculum in registered nursing to BC3's additional location in Brockway.

(Harrisburg, PA) The Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing has authorized Butler County Community College to expand its associate of applied science degree curriculum in registered nursing to BC3's additional location in Brockway, an endorsement of a program that in 2017 had a 96 percent success rate among its graduates taking crucial post-commencement licensure exams, college President Dr. Nick Neupauer said.

The 12-member panel, a subdivision of the Pennsylvania Department of State's Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs, granted BC3's request Friday after reviewing the college's application. It acknowledged BC3's ability to provide coursework and arrange clinical experience for students who as graduates passing the National Council Licensure Examination

for Registered Nurses will help to satisfy what the six-county North Central Workforce Development area identifies as its highest priority occupational need, said Patty Annear, BC3's dean of nursing and allied health.

A registered nursing program at BC3 @ Brockway also saves pre-nursing students from an otherwise 160-mile round trip from the Jefferson County site to BC3's main campus in Butler Township, Butler County, in pursuit of the degree, Neupauer said.

"We are absolutely confident that the success we have had for the main campus program will extend to Brockway," Neupauer added. "The community is so eager for this initiative to get underway."

As is state Sen. Joe Scarnati, who as the featured speaker during the March 2013 announcement of the creation of BC3 @ Brockway emphasized the importance of having a community college in Brockway.

"His vision," Neupauer said of the Brockway Republican whose 25th senatorial district includes Cameron, Clinton, Elk, Jefferson, McKean, Potter and Tioga counties and a portion of Clearfield County, "has been a key driver in this process. He has been a champion not only for community colleges, but specifically for BC3."

BC3 dean: Emotionally, financially rewarding career awaits grads

The need for registered nurses in Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean and Potter counties will grow by 25 percent through 2022, according to North Central Workforce Development.

"This is going to give students the opportunity for a career that is rewarding, both emotionally and financially," Annear said, adding that it will provide a local pathway for licensed practical nurses to increase their education and earning potential by up to \$15 per hour.

Registered nurses' wages range from \$45,980 at entry level to \$62,080 in those six counties, according to North Central Workforce Development.



Erin Fulmer, 22, of Brookville, Jefferson County, is shown Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018, in a complex nursing-critical care class on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township, Butler County. Fulmer, a licensed practical nurse and a former pre-nursing student at BC3 @ Brockway, Jefferson County, has been driving 130 miles round trip to BC3's main campus four times a week for the past three semesters.

The Pittsburgh Business Times on Jan. 9 reported BC3 as having the highest ratio of graduate earnings 10 years after commencement when compared with what a student paid to attend, besting ratios of 41 other colleges and universities in Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia. BC3's annual net cost was also lowest among those institutions, which included Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education universities and 22 private schools, according to U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard data analyzed by the Pittsburgh Business Times.

A day before BC3's approval, a licensed practical nurse told Jill Martin Rend, director of BC3 @ Brockway, that she had intended to pursue a registered nursing degree at another college, "but it was just too much for her to drive with everything else she had to do," Martin Rend said. "She was incredibly excited about how nice it would be to have something here, locally, so she could continue her studies and take care of everything else she had going on too."

First-time college students who attend BC3 @ Brockway may also be eligible for the Frank Varischetti Freshman Scholarship, and returning students can qualify for the Varischetti Family Incentive Scholarship for four semesters, Martin Rend said. Prospective students can receive additional information on BC3 @ Brockway's registered nursing program by emailing admissions@bc3.edu or calling BC3's admissions office at (724) 284-8501. They can also learn more at BC3 @ Brockway's open house from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. April 24.

BC3's main campus and its additional locations in Brockway, Cranberry Township, Hermitage and New Castle offer pre-nursing coursework. BC3 @ Brockway joins BC3's main campus as the only sites at which the registered nursing program is available. BC3 also has an additional location in Ford City, Armstrong County.

When selecting RN school, licensing board stats count, Brookville RN student says

An estimated 16 students will be accepted into BC3 @ Brockway's registered nursing program this fall, allowing for more time to be spent studying for any of the two-year program's 18 courses and less time on traveling elsewhere in pursuit of the degree, Erin Fulmer said.

Fulmer, a 22-year-old licensed practical nurse from Brookville, Jefferson County, and former pre-nursing student at BC3 @ Brockway, has been driving 130 miles round trip to BC3's main campus four times a week for the past three semesters.

"As hard as the nursing curriculum is, in trying to prepare for her classes and her clinicals, she could use that driving time more effectively," Martin Rend said.



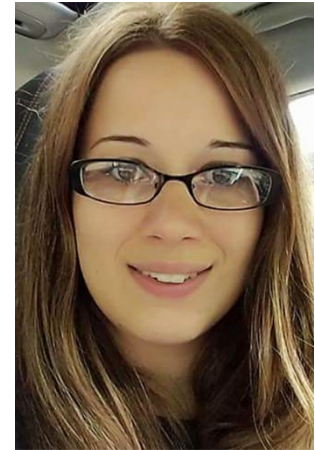
Cassandra Barr, 28, a personal care aide, drives 21 miles from her home in St. Marys to attend pre-nursing courses at BC3 @ Brockway.

The opportunity to have pursued her registered nursing degree at BC3 @ Brockway would have been “a huge convenience,” said Fulmer, who will graduate in May.

“I would be able to work throughout the week,” she said. “Right now I can only work on my weekends and Mondays.”

Fulmer said she chose BC3 – recognized in October as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania in back-to-back rankings by Schools.com – for her pre-nursing and registered nursing studies because of the college’s affordability, accessibility and quality of education.

“I have been able to attend BC3 without a loan,” Fulmer said, echoing the sentiments of the 75 percent of BC3 students who graduate debt-free. “Working while I am pursuing the degree is convenient. BC3 @ Brockway was local and it was very close. I talked to a few people who went through the registered nursing program or knew people who did. They said it was a really good program and their pass rates for the boards are really high, and that is always a good thing to look at when you are picking a nursing school, because that’s what counts.”



Beth Smouse, 27, a caregiver-medical technician, drives 24 miles from her home in Corsica, Jefferson County, twice a week to attend pre-nursing courses at BC3 @ Brockway.

“I just love it there,” Corsica pre-nursing student says of BC3 @ Brockway

BC3, which has offered a nursing curriculum since 1974 and whose registered nursing program in September received a \$1 million commitment from Janice Phillips Larrick, of Butler Township, has been consistent with its academic rigor and the quality of the students it accepts, Annear said.

Cassandra Barr and Beth Smouse hope to be among them.

The possibility of attending BC3 @ Brockway for its registered nursing program is exciting to the pre-nursing students.

“I was really hoping that Brockway would get the program,” said Barr, a 28-year-old personal care aide who has driven only 21 miles from her home in St. Marys to attend BC3 @ Brockway since fall. “I’m driving a half-hour now. That is definitely much more convenient. And Brockway is a smaller campus, and I would thrive more. Smaller classes mean you get more one-on-one with your professors. You can concentrate better because there aren’t as many people and it is not so overwhelming.”

BC3’s overall student-to-faculty ratio is 18:1, according to Sharla Anke, BC3’s assistant dean of institutional research. Nearly 420 students take BC3 @ Brockway classes from Clarion,

Clearfield, Elk and Jefferson counties. Among them, 16 pre-nursing students in the fall, Martin Rend said.

Barr would have faced a 204-mile round trip to BC3's main campus from her home in Elk County to pursue her registered nursing degree.

Smouse, 27, a caregiver-medical technician, drives 24 miles from her home in Corsica, Jefferson County, twice a week to attend BC3 @ Brockway.

"I go to school early every day, at least an hour, to review," Smouse said. "So that would actually help me a lot, to not have to drive so far. With a shorter driving distance, you can have more time to study. And when you drive that long, it makes me tired, to be honest. When I get home, I would not want to study."

The fourth-semester pre-nursing student says she chose BC3 @ Brockway because "It is smaller. Being out of (Brookville Area) high school since 2009, I didn't want to jump right in to a bigger college. I thought that might have been too much. So I chose something smaller, and they just welcomed me with open arms there. I have more time with the teachers. If I have more questions, I can actually talk to them. There is not a bunch of people surrounding them all the time. Since I started at Brockway, I just love it there. I would finish there. They all treat me very kindly, and I just appreciate everyone."

Hospital exec: BC3 @ Brockway program "a welcome community asset"

So academically challenging is BC3's registered nursing program that only 70 percent of its students graduate, Annear said. Moreover, BC3's 96 percent success rate of 2017 graduates taking the NCLEX-RN tests eclipses the state average of 84 percent, providing employers such as Penn Highlands Healthcare – with facilities in Brookville, Clearfield, DuBois, St. Marys and Ridgway – with highly qualified registered nurses whose skills were honed in what Neupauer calls BC3's hallmark program.

"Offering this program in Brockway is certainly a welcome community asset," said Rose M. Campbell, chief nursing officer for Penn Highlands Healthcare, adding that "There is a great need for registered nurses at our hospitals."

BC3 @ Brockway's registered nursing students will follow the identical program offered on BC3's main campus, which in 2015 was reaccredited through 2022 by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing, headquartered in Atlanta, Annear said.

BC3 @ Brockway – established in fall 2013 and the only community college location north of Interstate 80 in the 268 miles between BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage, Mercer County, and Luzerne County Community College in Nanticoke – occupies 14,500 of the 77,000 square feet within the Parkside Complex. The Wood Street building also houses physical therapy and physicians' offices, restaurants and the Brockway Center for Arts and Technology.

BC3 @ Brockway's registered nursing program will be sited elsewhere within the complex, in what was 2,000-square-foot senior living apartments, said Brian Opitz, BC3's executive director of operations.

The program's suite will include nursing offices, a conference room, a skills lab featuring six hospital beds and a simulation lab occupied by a computerized patient similar to that used on BC3's main campus, Opitz said.

The owner of the complex, Guardian Elder Care, will provide the architect and contractor to repurpose the senior living apartments, Opitz said.

"The relationship with the building owner has been fantastic," Opitz said.

Construction will begin Feb. 1 and be completed by mid-July, and BC3 will lease the space, Opitz said.

Up to two instructor positions, whose successful candidates must be approved by the Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing, will initially be added at BC3 @ Brockway, Annear said.