

# BC3 No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania for fifth time since 2015

Jan. 15, 2020



Students leave the Heaton Family Learning Commons on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township in this fall 2019 file photo. BC3 has been named the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania for 2020 by BestColleges.com.

(Butler, PA) For the fifth time since 2015, Butler County Community College, serving 24,000 credit and noncredit students in eight western Pennsylvania counties and online, has been ranked as the No. 1 community college in the state.

BestColleges.com analyzed the most recent U.S. Department of Education statistics in assessing academic quality, affordability and online competency and rated BC3 atop all Pennsylvania two-

year colleges for 2020, as it did in 2017. Schools.com also used U.S. Department of Education data in ranking BC3 as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania in 2015, 2017 and in 2019.

Each institution in BestColleges.com's Top 15 is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

"This speaks to our quality," said Dr. Nick Neupauer, president of BC3. "Competition for students now is as fierce as it has ever been. And there's really not much in terms of blurring the lines between all of the different sectors of higher education.

"As the parents and the students, the consumers of higher education, are looking to make decisions, this really validates not only how special we are, but the quality that we have at BC3. The fact that this is our fifth No. 1 ranking in five years is extra special. It's a real tribute to our faculty, to our terrific students, board of trustees and (the BC3 Education) foundation that we have achieved such great success."

It is a "high honor" to again be recognized as Pennsylvania's No. 1 community college, said Joseph E. Kubit, chairman of BC3's board of trustees, a BC3 graduate and BC3 distinguished alumnus.

"We are blessed to have a faculty, administration and staff who focus upon and are committed to providing our students with the highest quality and most affordable education and training possible," Kubit said.

## "I like it here," returning student says

BestColleges.com used 2018 U.S. Department of Education information to measure academic quality by factors that include the retention rate of first-time students returning after their initial semester, and the graduation rate of full-time, first-time students within three years.

Affordability was measured by an institution's average net price with the amount borrowed and owed after graduation; and online competency, by the percentage of students enrolled in distance education.

BestColleges.com reviewed the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and the department's College Navigator.

According to the College Navigator, 60 percent of BC3's first-time, full-time and 44 percent of BC3's first-time, part-time students in fall 2017 returned for the spring 2018 semester. The averages among the Top 15 schools listed in BestColleges.com's ranking was 57 percent and 48 percent.

Michaela Buday, of Freeport, enrolled at BC3 in fall 2019 and returned for the spring semester in pursuit of an associate degree in accounting. She is joined on BC3's main campus this spring by

her twin sister, Mackenzie, who transferred to BC3 after attending a public four-year institution in eastern Ohio.

“I like it here,” Michaela said, “and I like how convenient it is being close to my home and to be able to commute. And I want to be with my sister.”

Twenty-five percent of first-time, full-time students who began at BC3 in fall 2014 earned an associate degree within the three years considered to be 150 percent of “normal time,” the College Navigator reported. The average among the Top 15 schools listed in BestColleges.com’s ranking was 21 percent.



Twin sisters Michaela, left, and Mackenzie Buday, 19, of Freeport, are shown Friday, Jan. 10, 2020, on Butler County Community College’s main campus in Butler Township during Welcome Day. Michaela enrolled at BC3 in fall 2019 and returned for the spring semester in pursuit of an associate degree in accounting. Mackenzie, who is seeking an associate degree in social work, attended Welcome Day after transferring to BC3 this spring from a public four-year institution in eastern Ohio. Classes began Monday at BC3, named the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania for 2020 by BestColleges.com.

## “The grants covered it completely”

The U.S. Department of Education’s College Navigator determines average net price by subtracting the average amount of federal, state and local government or institutional grants, or scholarship aid, from the total cost of attendance.

According to the College Navigator, BC3’s average net price for first-time, full-time students in 2017-2018 was \$3,938 and the lowest among BestColleges.com’s Top 15 Pennsylvania two-year public and private schools, whose average was \$10,792.

The College Navigator also reported that 26 percent of BC3’s first-time, full-time students in 2017-18 received a federal or other student loan that averaged \$4,527. BC3’s percentage of first-time, full-time students borrowing was the second-lowest among the Top 15 two-year schools, as was the amount borrowed.

The average student loan debt for the Class of 2018 is \$35,510 in Pennsylvania, according to an Aug. 8 report from LendEDU, a website that provides comparisons for loans, credit cards and

other financial products. Two-thirds of graduates from Pennsylvania institutions have student-loan debt, LendEDU reported.

The BC3 Education Foundation awards more than \$200,000 in scholarships annually.

Seventy percent of BC3 graduates are debt-free.

The 19-year-old Buday sisters plan to be among them.

“I don’t want to be in debt for the rest of my life so I can get my life going right after graduation,” Michaela said. “I know I am getting a good education for such an affordable price.”

“I didn’t have to take out any student loans,” said Mackenzie, who said she owes \$9,000 from a fall 2019 semester at the eastern Ohio institution that she found she “didn’t like.

“So I decided to come closer to home,” the social work major said, “and Michaela told me how nice BC3 was.”

BC3’s affordability was important for Damian Gurner, 36, of Butler, who enrolled this spring with hopes of earning an associate degree in social work, transferring to a four-year institution and one day becoming a drug and alcohol counselor.

“If I can’t afford to go, I can’t make it,” said Gurner, a 2002 Butler High School graduate who said his mother and step-father graduated from BC3 in 1993. “The grants covered it completely. The only thing I have to do is show up and do my best.”

**“I wish I would have attended here before”**

Tuition and fees for Butler County BC3 students pursuing 15 credits per semester for one year in the 2019-2020 academic year are \$5,100, with annual savings that range from \$6,194 compared to Pennsylvania’s public four-year institutions to \$31,701 compared to Pennsylvania’s private institutions.

Single mother Hailey Alwine, 19, of Butler, incurred \$14,000 in student loan debt while attending a Pennsylvania public four-year institution for three semesters. She transferred this spring to BC3, where she did not need a student loan and hopes to enter the college’s Nursing, R.N. program.

“I wish I would have applied here,” Alwine said, “and I wish I would have attended here before.”



Damian Gurner, 36, of Butler, is shown Friday, Jan. 10, 2020, on Butler County Community College’s main campus in Butler Township for Welcome Day. Gurner enrolled at BC3 this spring with hopes of earning an associate degree in social work, transferring to a four-year institution and one day becoming a drug and alcohol counselor.

Her daughter doesn't have as far as a commute, Amanda Alwine said, and "it's less expensive at BC3 and the quality of education is comparable to or better than the universities."

According to the U.S. Department of Education's 2018 College Scorecard, BC3's salary-to-cost ratio, a measurement of graduates' salaries 10 years after commencement for every dollar a student pays to attend the institution, was 7.45 and the highest among 43 colleges and universities in western Pennsylvania.

"Students in most cases are able to complete a two-year degree and leave with little to zero debt," said Lauren Buchanan, director of BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township. "Students don't want to start their first job having a larger debt-to-salary ratio."

BC3's top 7.45 salary-to-cost ratio was most closely followed by West Virginia University at 4.79. The highest salary-to-cost ratio among five regional Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education universities was 2.61; and among the 21 private institutions, 2.81.

## Full-time worker: Online classes "convenient"

BestColleges.com considered the percentage of students enrolled in online classes as an indicator of a college's investment in distance education.

Twenty-four percent of BC3 students in fall 2018 took at least one online course, and 4 percent took only an online course or only online courses, according to the College Navigator. The averages among the Top 15 schools listed in BestColleges.com's ranking was 20 percent and 9 percent.

Nearly 40 percent of BC3 students are registered to take at least one online BC3 course this spring as of Jan. 13, according to Sharla Anke, BC3's assistant dean of institutional research, and 10 percent are taking only an online course or only online courses.



Hailey Alwine, 19, of Butler, left, is shown Friday, Jan. 10, 2020, on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township for Welcome Day. Alwine transferred to BC3 after attending a Pennsylvania public four-year institution for three semesters and hopes to enroll in BC3's Nursing, R.N., program. She is shown with her son, Weston, and mother, Amanda Alwine.

BC3 will offer in a spring 2020 semester that began Monday 66 online, 15 hybrid and four iTV courses, according to Ann McCandless, BC3's dean of educational technology. Hybrid course are online classes that require at least four campus meetings. iTV courses are those in which an instructor's in-class lesson is delivered to separate classrooms simultaneously through various technology.

The first of BC3's three spring semester five-week online Fast Track sessions, which debuted in 2016, also began Monday.

"It's convenient that I can take a majority of the classes online that I need to earn my degree," said Shawn Ferrer, 44, of Butler, who works 40 hours per week from October through March and more than 50 from April to September for a Gibsonia company that manufactures and places temporary road-construction signs.

The BC3 student has taken only online courses since spring 2018 and studies during evenings and on weekends toward earning the associate degree in business management that he hopes could lead to a promotion as a yard or road foreman, or as a district manager.

"If you are a full-time worker, for you to try to make or create the time, or to take time off from work to go to in-class classes, it doesn't really work out that great," Ferrer said.

Following BC3 in the BestColleges.com ranking were, No. 2, Bucks County Community College, Newtown; No. 3, Montgomery County Community College, Blue Bell; No. 4, Northampton County Area Community College, Bethlehem; No. 5, Pennsylvania Highlands Community College, Johnstown; No. 6, Lehigh Carbon Community College, Schnecksville; No. 7; Mercyhurst University North East; No. 8, Community College of Beaver County, Monaca; No. 9, Luzerne County Community College, Nanticoke; No. 10, Delaware County Community College, Media; No. 11, Community College of Allegheny County, Pittsburgh; No. 12, Manor College, Jenkintown; No. 13, the University of Pittsburgh at Titusville; No. 14, Harcum College, Bryn Mawr; and No. 15, Reading Area Community College, Reading.



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