

High Flight's FAA clearance allows CCBC-BC3 aviation academy to take off

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Fabio Ruberto, director of operations at High Flight Academy, located at the Pittsburgh-Butler Regional Airport in Butler, is shown inside a Cessna on April 24, 2019. The Community College of Beaver County, Butler County Community College and flight trainer High Flight Academy have created the CCBC Aviation Academy at High Flight in partnership with BC3, which debuts this fall at the Pittsburgh-Butler Regional Airport for Butler County high school juniors and seniors.

(Butler, PA) The Community College of Beaver County and Butler County Community College will establish this fall for Butler County high school juniors and seniors an aviation academy intended to provide a pathway into professional pilot, air traffic control and unmanned aerial vehicle careers.

CCBC and BC3 will join as partners with flight trainer High Flight Academy, which operates from the Pittsburgh-Butler Regional Airport in Butler and in March received its Federal Aviation Administration certification as a Part 141 Flight School. The certification enables High Flight to instruct and prepare aviation academy students for their private pilot certificate and instrument flight rating.

“Without the 141,” said Fabio Ruberto, High Flight’s director of operations, “we could not become a partner with CCBC or BC3.”

The CCBC Aviation Academy is the only program in the United States to offer to high school students the opportunity to explore careers in professional pilot, air traffic control and unmanned aerial vehicles such as drones, according to CCBC.

CCBC instructors will teach ground-school subjects such as introduction to aviation, flight theory and aircraft systems in the four-semester, 28-credit program to be held at High Flight and available to students who have a minimum grade-point average of 2.5.

BC3 instructors will teach English composition and statistics in the aviation academy, which students will attend for 1 hour and 40 minutes five days per week.

Airlines: Pilot shortage expected

Students who complete the program can apply the 28 credits toward CCBC’s School of Aviation Sciences, which offers associate degrees in air traffic control, aerospace management, unmanned aerial vehicle and in professional pilot – a career that may experience a shortage in the next two decades.

“Right now there is a tremendous worldwide shortage of commercial pilots,” Ruberto said.

Boeing’s 2018 Pilot & Technician Outlook forecasts that 790,000 new commercial and business pilots will be needed in the next 20 years, according to Boeing.com.

Airbus predicted the need to be 450,000 pilots, according to a Forbes.com report in July.

The aviation academy may help to address that need, said Dr. Roger W. Davis, president of CCBC.

“CCBC has a goal to continue to expand and grow its nationally recognized School of Aviation Sciences and partnering with our colleagues in Butler County will only help us accomplish that goal,” Davis said. “The CCBC Aviation Academy at High Flight in partnership with BC3 will provide Western Pennsylvania’s high school students with high-impact educational experiences that prepare them for successful careers in aviation.

“We believe together we are making the aviation professions more visible, accessible and obtainable to a broader range of young people than ever before.”

Dr. Nick Neupauer, president of BC3, calls the alliance a “win-win, in so many ways.

“First, it brings together two of Pennsylvania’s top community colleges,” Neupauer said. “Second, this combined effort addresses a high-priority occupational need in our region, state

and country as a whole – aviation. Finally, the collaboration builds on a larger Butler County strategy – to enhance the Pittsburgh-Butler Regional Airport. We are excited about the future of this program.”

“An opportunity in aviation”

High Flight’s certification, and collaboration between Davis and Neupauer, and commissioners from Beaver and Butler counties, were crucial to the development of the academy, said Joyce Cirelli, CCBC’s dean of high school academies and dual enrollment.

“Without the forward thinking of the community college presidents and county commissioners, it would be difficult to provide aviation pathways and remove distance barriers for Butler County students,” Cirelli said. “This is a very unique partnership with two colleges collaborating with a flight school for delivery of high school programing.”

The CCBC Aviation Academy, which launched in 2015, was intended to expand the availability of aviation talent and help diversify the pilot population, Beaver County Commissioner Sandie Egley said.

“In concert with our neighboring Butler County,” Egley said, “I am proud to have played a role in erasing borders, partnering our two counties, and collaborating to create a place for even more students to capitalize on CCBC’s nationally distinctive School of Aviation Sciences.”

As is Butler County Commissioner Kimberly Geyer, who said that for years, Butler County students who wanted to study or attend aviation courses had to travel to CCBC’s Aviation Science Center at the Beaver County Airport in Chippewa.

“Years later, we have many young people in our county’s local high schools who are taking an active interest in aviation,” Geyer said. “High Flight Academy recognized that interest and capitalized on the opportunity to offer the highest level of aviation, similar to what was being offered in Beaver County. This enables Butler County students to take advantage of a high-quality aviation program in Butler County without having to travel weekly back and forth into Beaver County.”

Which Butler County students have done as recently as within the past year, said Dr. Belinda Richardson, BC3’s vice president for academic affairs.

“To complete their studies, students had to commute back and forth,” Richardson said. “By working together, we are maximizing regional resources. CCBC has one of the best aviation programs in the country. Given the proximity of CCBC to Butler County, through collaboration, we are providing Butler County students an opportunity in aviation without going outside our county.

“Collaborating with CCBC to bring aviation programs to Butler County has been one of many exciting projects our team has worked on to open doors for students and serve our community.”

“Creating a pipeline” for careers

The foresight of CCBC and BC3 to identify community and workforce needs and respond to them with a “spirit of collaboration versus competition” will only enhance the student learning experience and strengthen industry partnerships far into the future, said Dr. Shelly Moore, CCBC’s acting provost.

“Our nationally recognized and respected aviation programs have been a source of industry talent for over 50 years,” Moore said. “By collaborating with BC3 and High Flight Academy to bring our aviation academy to Butler County, we are now all working together to break down geographical and financial barriers for students while at the same time creating a pipeline of future pilots and air traffic controllers to meet local, regional and national job demands.”

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