

Love of law leads to degree at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing

Students at BC3 site are like family, 2017 grad says

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(New Castle, PA) The popularity of television dramas depicting cops and courts may be among the reasons why Butler County Community College's criminology program ranks sixth in enrollment, according to Bill Miller, BC3's interim associate vice president for academic affairs and dean of humanities and social sciences.

That's Christopher Wrona's story, and he's sticking to it.

Wrona, who attained the rank Eagle Scout and volunteers as an assistant scoutmaster in Mount Jackson, admits to "binge-watching" shows such as "Law & Order: SVU" on Wednesday evenings. That's his night off from working full time in an overnight shift at a convenience store. During the day he attends criminology classes at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle.

"I've been doing this for eight months," Wrona said. "It is very exhausting. I am sleeping two or three hours, then going to school. Sometimes I go back to sleep in the afternoon for two or three hours."

The 21-year-old from New Castle was suspiciously missing from in front of his television set Wednesday night, but he had an alibi. That's when he was receiving his associate of arts degree in criminology from BC3 during the school's 49th commencement exercises.

Wrona was among 113 students studying criminology at BC3 this spring, and Wednesday night became the first member of his family to graduate from college.

Over the past five years, Wrona said he's seen all 18 seasons, all of the 400-plus episodes of "Law & Order: SVU."

"It is just interesting," Wrona said. "I used to watch 'Cops' too. 'SVU' appeals to everyday life. Elliot (Stabler) and Olivia (Benson) are two of my favorite characters. They have a great relationship. Occasionally I see myself trying to solve the show as the mystery unfolds."



Christopher Wrona, 21, of New Castle, earned an associate of arts degree in criminology from BC3 during the school's 49th commencement exercises on Wednesday, May 17. The Eagle Scout attended classes at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle.

When he can't watch an episode live, "I record it on my DVR," Wrona said.

His identical twin, Brandon, corroborates his brother's story.

"Law & Order," "NCIS," "Prison Break" – anything like that," said Brandon, who also attends BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing and hopes to earn an associate of arts degree in early childhood education in December.

"He's always been like that since we've grown up. He's always had an interest in that." Wrona's interest led him to BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing, and its 62-credit degree program in criminology.

"I like to help others," Wrona said, "and criminology would allow me to do that."

The program, also offered at BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township, BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage and on BC3's main campus, enables students to identify the principles of criminal procedures with a particular emphasis on federal constitutional limitations; classify crime terminology aligned to the Pennsylvania Crimes Code and apply crime and justice system methodology by using appropriate field-related terminology.

"It is one of our more popular programs," Miller said. "I think students are drawn to it partly because of some of the TV shows in the past five, 10 years, like 'CSI' and other law-enforcement programs. Some of our students are looking at careers such as juvenile probation, or getting involved with investigations or in the computer cyber-security area."

Wrona, 2014 graduate of Wilmington Area High, is interested in the court system, specifically in becoming a probation officer.

"People need help and I would be able to provide them that assistance," he said. "Some of my professors were probation officers. I liked their stories, the encounters they had."

The twins' mother, Ann, was a military police officer in the Army.

Through his courses covering crime and justice systems, juvenile justice and juvenile delinquency, criminal law or criminal procedure, Wrona said he has learned about "the way the law changes, and the process it takes to change the law."

BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing enabled him to become a better student, Wrona said.

"It's a smaller school and the students are like family," Wrona said of BC3, which this spring had a student-to-teacher ratio of 18:1. "They go out of their way to help you. Forming friendships with students lets you create study groups, and they help you prepare for a four-year school."

Wrona, who volunteers with Boy Scout Troop 721, plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in criminology and also study psychology at Youngstown State University.

It was important for him to earn a college degree because of his grandmothers, one of whom passed away in February. His father, Brian, had passed away during his senior year of high school.

“My grandmother always made sure I had everything I needed for school,” he said. “I feel like she is part of my motivation, and it gives me the extra push to finish.”

BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing’s credits in business administration, criminology, early childhood education, general studies, history, physical education-sports management option, psychology, secondary education and social work can be transferred toward bachelor’s degrees at public, private and online four-year colleges and universities.

Additionally, students who complete a BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing degree in business administration, criminology, early childhood education, history, psychology and social work can transfer with junior standing to any Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education institution, such as Clarion, Edinboro, Slippery Rock and Edinboro universities of Pennsylvania.

Susan Davis is a student services and technology support specialist at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing.

Wrona, she says, is always positive.

“If the world had more people like him, it would be a better place,” she said.

Wrona might make an ideal probation officer because “He is kind and he doesn’t judge others,” Davis said. “Chris sees the positive qualities in people. He doesn’t look at the negative or dwell on that. He can pick out those positive qualities and befriend anyone. He treats everyone with respect.”