

New students: BC3's top ranking, affordability sealed deal

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Mary Beth Galante, center, an assistant professor in Butler County Community College's Humanities and Social Science division, leads new students on a tour of BC3's main campus in Butler Township during Welcome Day on Friday, Aug. 24, 2018.

(Butler, PA) While Mike Lucas and his son, Nathan, searched for seats in a packed Field House on Friday before Butler County Community College's new student Welcome Day, the Butler area residents did not have to look far to find the college that the U.S. Department of Education reports as having the most affordable tuition among 42 institutions in western Pennsylvania, or what Schools.com has twice ranked as the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania.

"That," Mike Lucas said, "is why we are here. BC3 is a good place for Nathan to start his post-secondary education."

Welcome Day, held Friday for those who will attend BC3's main campus or BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township, drew 491 new students, according to Dr. Case Willoughby, BC3's vice

president for student affairs and enrollment management. The daylong orientation also attracted 125 parents or family members, said Morgan Rizzardi, BC3's associate director of admissions.

Welcome Days at BC3's four additional locations, in Brockway, Ford City, Hermitage and New Castle, were held between Aug. 15 and Aug. 22.

New students such as Nathan Lucas, siblings Mercedes and Christian Wachter, and William Briscoe had the opportunity Friday to tour BC3's main campus, meet with faculty and receive library cards for use in the 2-year-old \$6.4 million Heaton Family Learning Commons.



Mike Lucas, left, and his son, Nathan, of Butler, are shown in Butler County Community College's Field House during new student Welcome Day on Friday, Aug. 24, 2018. Nathan Lucas will study graphic design at BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township.

BC3's 14-week fall session and the first of three consecutive five-week online Fast Track sessions began Monday. A 10-week session starts Sept. 24 and additional Fast Tracks begin on Oct. 1 and Nov. 5.

“This is a good starting point for me”

Being on BC3's 330-acre main campus, Mercedes Wachter said, is exciting.

“This is college,” she said. “You walk to your classes. It's a huge campus. There are sports.”

BC3 offers intercollegiate golf, volleyball, men's and women's basketball, baseball and softball. The college this fall also has 34 clubs and organizations – the most in her 21 years at BC3, according to Sherri Osborne, assistant director of student activities – including all-new archery, computer programming and eSports clubs.

Nathan Lucas, whose sister, Emilee, studied biology at BC3, will pursue at BC3 @ Cranberry an associate of applied science degree in graphic design, one of BC3's 36 career programs that allow students to develop skills needed to enter the workforce immediately after graduation.

“This is a good starting point for me,” Nathan Lucas said. “It's affordable, and I have been hearing a lot of good things about BC3.”

Those good things, Mike Lucas said, might include his son trying to avoid an average of \$36,193 in student-loan debt faced by Pennsylvania college students, the highest in the nation, according to LendEdu on Aug. 8.

“We want Nathan to graduate with the least amount of baggage and debt,” Mike Lucas said. “It is hard to get started in this society, especially for a young person, so we want to have him start out in the job field with the least amount of debt possible or without having to pay that money ourselves.”

Forty-two percent of BC3 students received a Pell grant in 2017-18, said Juli Louttit, BC3’s director of financial aid, and 75 percent of BC3 graduates are debt-free.

His son, Mike Lucas said, “had other options, but they cost three times as much, and you are going to graduate from BC3 with the same skills.”

“BC3 is obviously good if it is ranked No. 1.”

BC3’s top ranking also convinced Evaline Fox to become the fifth member of her immediate family to select BC3.

“You look for a quality school,” said Fox, whose father, David, earned a degree in general studies in 1984; whose mother, Rebecca, and brother, Nolan, earned registered nursing degrees in 1986 and 2016, respectively; and whose sister, Allison, plans to graduate with a degree in social work in May 2019.

“BC3,” Fox said, “is obviously good if it is ranked No. 1.”

Fox took college writing and psychology courses while at Butler Area Senior High School through BC3’s College Within the High School program and is among students who will receive one of 110 named scholarships totaling \$200,000 this academic year from the Butler County



William Briscoe, left, Mercedes Wachter and Christian Wachter are shown in Butler County Community College’s Field House during new student Welcome Day on Friday, Aug. 24, 2018. Briscoe, of Cranberry Township, will study chemistry at BC3, and Mercedes Wachter and her brother, of Mars, are enrolled in BC3’s general studies program.

Community College Education Foundation Inc., according to Ruth Purcell, the foundation's executive director.

The 18-year-old will enter a main campus physical therapist assistant program that in 2016 and 2017 – the most recent years in which results are available – had a 100 percent passing rate of graduates taking the National Physical Therapy Exam.

“There are so many options with that degree, like working with children or the elderly,” Fox said. “I also like caring for people too. That is how I knew I was interested in that. I have always wanted to help other people.”



Evaline Fox, of Butler, is the fifth member of her immediate family to select Butler County Community College.

BC3 “is just a lot more affordable”

The Wachters, graduates of Mars Area High School, will attend BC3 @ Cranberry, in the midst of a \$1.2 million renovation that will bring an ultramodern learning environment to BC3's oldest additional location, one that opened on Executive Drive in January 1990.

Mercedes and Christian are students in BC3's general studies program, among the college's 19 transfer programs and the most popular among students, according to Sharla Anke, BC3's assistant dean of institutional research. Business administration, registered nursing, business management and psychology follow general studies in popularity, Anke said.

BC3's credits transfer to public, private and online institutions.

“I want to work with kids,” said Mercedes, 18. “I think I want to be a social worker. So I am pursuing my associate degree so I have something under my belt.”

BC3, said Christian, 19, who chose against other institutions that cost \$35,000 to \$50,000 a year in tuition and room and board, “has the same educational level that universities have. BC3 is just a lot more affordable.”

The affordability of BC3's tuition, said Mercedes, who did not seek a student loan, “means a lot. I don't want to get myself into debt with student loans. That is what most people stress about, and I don't want to feel that stress later on in life. It impacts your family, and your future family. It's a big deal.”

Instructors “want nothing but the best for you”

William Briscoe – like the Wachters and Fox – plans to hold a part-time job as he seeks a degree in chemistry on BC3's main campus and benefits from BC3's student-to-faculty ratio of 18:1.

“The class sizes aren’t really as big as at most universities,” said Briscoe, 19, of Cranberry Township and a 2017 graduate of Seneca Valley Senior High School.

“The teachers really take their time to go over things with you and help you succeed because they want nothing but the best for you.”

A Welcome Day for new students was also held Aug. 15 at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage; Aug. 20 at BC3 @ Brockway in Brockway, which this autumn becomes the second BC3 location to offer an associate of applied science degree in registered nursing; Aug. 21 at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle, which became the first of BC3’s additional sites to offer associate of applied science degrees in accounting and in office administration-medical, and the second in office administration-executive; and Aug. 22 at BC3 @ Armstrong in Ford City, whose 10 percent increase in enrollment since fall 2017 trails only BC3 @ Brockway’s 52 percent.