

# R.N. job offers reflect “hallmark program” of No. 1 community college

“I am just trying to decide which one to take,” 2017 BC3 graduate says

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(Butler, PA) The 46 pairs of silent white sneakers behind him spoke volumes about the “hallmark program” of Pennsylvania’s No. 1 community college, BC3 President Dr. Nick Neupauer said Thursday night as many of the school’s Class of 2017 Nursing, R.N. graduates being honored had already accepted positions in the growing and lucrative profession.

Elizabeth Francis, of Chicora, is weighing offers from hospitals in Tarentum and in Pittsburgh.

“I am just trying to decide which one to take,” she said before the ceremony in which graduates received BC3 pins marking the end of their two-year

academic program and beginning of a career choice expected to see a 16 percent increase in jobs in the next seven years, the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in March.

The average growth rate for other professions through 2024 is 7 percent.

Francis attended Thiel College for one year as a physical therapy major, then transferred to BC3, named the top community college in Pennsylvania by Schools.com.

“When I changed my major I picked BC3 because I heard really good things about its nursing program,” Francis said.

BC3’s Nursing, R.N. associate of applied science degree program accepts only 70 of its 200 applicants a year, said Patricia Annear, BC3’s dean of nursing and allied health. The program’s completion rate is 70 percent, she said.

“BC3 sets a high standard for you and that is a good thing,” said Nursing, R.N. graduate Hannah Kingston, of New Castle, one of 21 towns in six counties represented by BC3’s Class of 2017.



From left, Julia Azzarello, of Chicora; Vanna DeVincentis, of New Castle; Christine Leyland, of Butler; and Angela Longo, of Valencia; light candles on Thursday, May 11, during BC3’s pinning ceremony for 2017 graduates of its Nursing, R.N. program. The candles commemorate Florence Nightingale, the 19th-century social reformer who would use a lamp to navigate battlefields and help wounded soldiers.

“There is a high standard for nurses whenever you are in the field. The difficulty of the program really made a difference for us.”

## “I am so confident going into my new job”

Kingston accepted a position in the neuro-critical care unit at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh in early May.

When the 2014 Laurel High School graduate decided she wanted to study to become a registered nurse, BC3 was her sole choice.

“This was the only school I applied to,” she said. “And now I am so confident going into my new job. I feel like BC3 taught me as much as I could gather from a program.”

Added Diane Cockroft: “Out of every nursing school around, this is where I wanted to go. It is really hard to get in here.”

Cockroft and Daniel Weibel are Butler residents who previously earned bachelor’s degrees from Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, Cockroft in park and resource management in 1999 and Weibel in exercise science in 2014. Before applying to BC3, Samantha Osikowicz, of Punxsutawney, studied dance for two years at Slippery Rock University, and Lauren Sipe, of Mars, had received a bachelor’s degree in telecommunications from The Pennsylvania State University in 2013.

“I wanted to move more into the medical side of things instead of the rehabilitation,” said Weibel, who two weeks ago accepted a position in the cardiac telemetry unit at UPMC Jamison Health System in New Castle.

## “There are so many openings”

Osikowicz on May 1 also accepted a position with UPMC in a telemetry medical surgical unit. All of her graduates could have two or three job offers “right now, with the way the shortage is,” Annear said.

“There are so many openings,” said Cockroft, who this week has an interview as an operating room nurse in Pittsburgh.

Registered nurses record patients’ medical histories and symptoms; administer patients’ medicines and treatments; create plans for patients’ care or contribute to existing plans; observe patients and record observations; consult and collaborate with doctors and other healthcare professionals; operate and monitor medical equipment; help perform diagnostic tests and analyze the results; teach patients and their families how to manage illnesses or injuries; and explain what to do at home after treatment, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

“I am still trying to decide which way to go because there is so much you can do with nursing,” Cockcroft said. “I haven’t even decided which kind of nurse I want to be yet. That is what is so hard. You can go anyway you want.”

An increase of 440,000 jobs is expected through 2024, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Nursejournal.org attributes the projected spike in registered nursing position to Americans’ longer life spans.

Life expectancy at birth for women born in 1970 will average 72 years, the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2010. Those born in 2012 will live on average 79.5 years.

Life expectancy at birth for men born in 1970 will average 64 years and in 2012, 74.5, according to the CDC.

“Baby boomers,” Cockcroft said, “are aging.”

## “This was so hard”

Over the past three years, an average of 90 percent of BC3 nursing graduates have passed the post-commencement National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses boards, which is 6 percentage points above the state average, Annear said.

Christi Hibbard decided to drive 55 miles from Greenville in Mercer County to BC3 in Butler Township “because I think BC3 has the best program available,” she said.

She feels prepared for the registered nursing boards because “This was so hard. BC3 really expects a lot out of you. But it is worth it in the end because you learn so much.”

And will earn so much.

Registered nurses nationwide were paid on average \$68,450 in May 2016, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Registered nurses in Pennsylvania averaged higher salaries – \$68,770.

“I could not be more happy with the offer I was given” said 2017 BC3 Nursing, R.N. graduate Lindsay Walter, of Butler, who begins a position with Butler Memorial Hospital at the end of the month.

While Sipe, who sold radio advertisements after graduating with a bachelor’s degree in telecommunications from Penn State, is considering her options, she knows “I am going to double my salary.”

## Dean: Students offered “really nice signing bonuses”

It is not unusual for her to receive at least three calls a week from recruiters asking about her students, Annear said, “and offering them some really nice signing bonuses.”

Pennsylvania had the fifth-highest number of nurses in the U.S. as of May 2016, trailing No. 1 California, No. 2 Texas, No. 3 New York and No. 4 Florida, the U.S. Department of Labor reported. The 139,480 registered nurses in Pennsylvania earned \$4,140 more than those in Florida and only \$1,620 less than those in Texas.

Registered nursing remains among the top-paying careers requiring a two-year degree, forbes.com, businessinsider.com, collegequest.com and businessadvice.com reported earlier this year.

Walter – who received one of the 11 BC3 Nursing, R.N. program scholarships ranging from \$750 to \$5,000, according to Ruth Purcell, executive director of the BC3 Education Foundation Inc. – is among the 75 percent of BC3 students who will leave the college debt-free.

“In the clear,” she said.

BC3’s tuition is lower than 24 four-year schools in Western Pennsylvania, the Pittsburgh Business Times reported in January. BC3 also provides pre-nursing courses at BC3 @ Brockway in Brockway; BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township; BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle; and BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage.

BC3 also offers a bachelor’s degree completion program in partnership with Chatham University in Pittsburgh that can be completed at BC3 and online.

Neupauer expressed his gratitude to “individuals who generally don’t like to be in the spotlight, those who are behind the scenes, those who give philanthropically to BC3’s Education Foundation.”

## “This was a big boost”

Lou Heitlinger, Janice Phillips Larrick, and Dan and Kay Heineman are among those who have contributed to endowed scholarships and to high-cost, high-tech simulation equipment that benefit BC3 students, Neupauer said.

The gifts also enable future students to follow in the footsteps of those now wearing the silent white sneakers.

Heitlinger created the Shirley Callihan Nursing Scholarship in 2015 in memory of his wife, who received a registered nursing degree from Butler Memorial Hospital in 1957.

The Janice Phillips Larrick Scholarship, created in 2002, has helped 22 BC3 students. BC3 announced in March that she gifted \$50,000 to fund BC3's nursing lab.

The Heinemans fund the Mary Agnes Schneider Heineman Scholarship, created in 1978 in honor of Dan's mother. Dan's father established the scholarship with 100 shares of ARMCO stock, and family members have contributed to what has become one of the largest endowed nursing scholarships at BC3.

Elizabeth Francis, the Chicora woman weighing offers from hospitals in Tarentum and in Pittsburgh, was a recipient of the Shirley Callihan Nursing Scholarship.

In her silent white sneakers Thursday night, Francis stepped up and hugged Heitlinger as the crowd of 450 inside Succop Theater dispersed.

Witnessing Francis receiving the BC3 registered nursing pin "makes it very worthwhile," Heitlinger said. "This was a big boost for the students and a good way to finish off all of their efforts."

### Class of 2017 BC3 Nursing, R.N. graduates, by town:

- **Butler:** Anna Bauer, Diane Cockroft, Megan Crawford, Rebecca Deal, Sara Dietrich, Amanda Hensel, Halie Jackman, Matthew Johnny, Olivia Lauster, Christine Leyland, Raycine McCandless, Jeanette McIntosh, Baylee Verner, Thomas Vissari, Lindsay Walter and Daniel Weibel
- **Chicora:** Julia Azzarello and Elizabeth Francis
- **Cranberry Township:** Chelsea Carmella, Luke D'Amato and Tyler Tuite
- **Ellwood City:** Maegan Sloan
- **Emlenton:** Jennifer Gibson
- **Evans City:** Sarah Wenzel
- **Greenville:** Christi Hibbard
- **Harmony:** Alexis Good, Heather Remaley and Courtney Webster
- **Karns City:** Kayla Reckner
- **Kittanning:** Bethany Petras
- **Mars:** Lauren Sipe
- **Mercer:** Marlania Saylor
- **New Castle:** Taylor Biddle, Vanna DeVincentis, Hannah Kingston, Heather Morida and Lorraine Peterson
- **Portersville:** Crystal Lasko
- **Punxsutawney:** Samantha Osikowicz
- **Renfrew:** Alexandra Janoski and Amber Riesmeyer
- **Slippery Rock:** Lindsey Lesnett and Sarah Williams
- **Valencia:** Angela Longo
- **West Sunbury:** Brittany Boring
- **Worthington:** Tiffany Bowser
- **Zelienople:** Kayla Waugaman