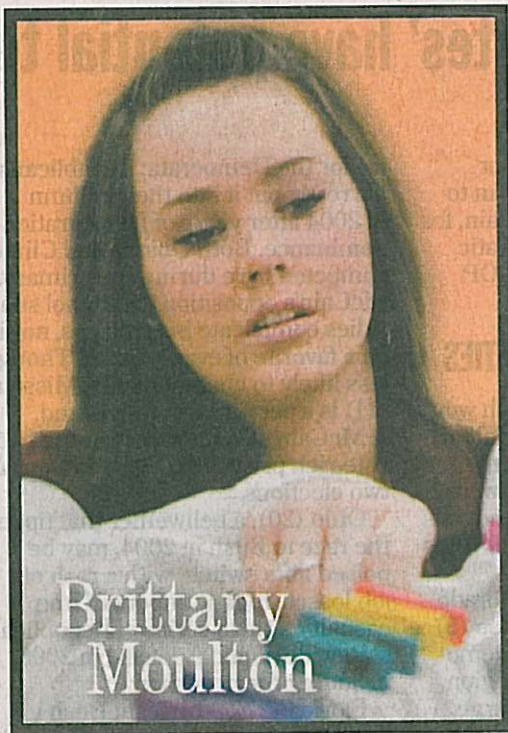


Amanda
JeanBlanc



Brittany
Moulton



Callie
Kimsey



Broc
Barnes

Columbian photo illustration

Senior survivors

These 4 have met challenges of school, life

By **HOWARD BUCK**
and **ISOLDE RAFTERY**
Columbian staff writers

It's crunch time for hundreds of local high school seniors.

Aside from homework, the prom, final exams and settling college or work plans while brushing off senior blahs, this spring brought new pressure.

The Class of 2008 was to be the first to earn diplomas only if members passed the reading, writing and math sections of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, or WASL.

Seniors were to complete new research and community service projects and map their future in great detail.

They were the promised

vanguard of world-competitive graduates, each ready to compete for 21st century jobs.

But not all went as planned. Statewide, thousands flunked their 10th-grade math WASL two

years ago and have yet to pass it. Nearly half of them never will, even with catch-up assistance: so many that state legislators

approved the alternate path of an extra year of math.

High schools are scrambling to administer the new courses and exams. They're busy going through portfolios of student work that also qualify a student for a diploma.

Students must keep their heads.

And four seniors The Columbian profiled in January have done just that.

Amanda JeanBlanc gave birth to a beautiful girl a month sooner than expected. She'll try to juggle homework and final exams with feeding schedules and doctor visits.

Callie Kimsey overcame dyslexia to tackle the WASL.

Broc Barnes and his family have jumped to face the WASL head-on.

Brittany Moulton chose Running Start college classes before she reaches for high-flying work.

As spring blossoms, senior students grow before our eyes. Here's a second look as this group accepts the challenge.



'I listen pretty well, and do all my work'

Brittany Moulton is thriving in her classes, but she's ready for a break

Top challenges for Brittany Moulton are finding a prom dress and picking a summer vacation destination.

That means she's on track: She's getting school work done, finished her senior project and saving money from a part-time job.

"The only pressure I have is finishing my courses with A's," the 18-year-old said with a smile. And she did notch straight A's last semester.

There's good incentive: She and her younger brother live with grandparents who offered to pay her car insurance premiums every month she earns B grades or better.

That's not bad for someone who failed the 10th-grade math WASL twice and must complete an extra math review course at Evergreen High School to pick up her diploma June 12.

Brittany has kept pace in that

class, where her teacher has turned up the heat on indifferent classmates, she said. "Now that it's second semester, people are really taking it more seriously," she said. "People are finally getting scared."

Still, it didn't motivate her to try to pass the math WASL when she took it this month for the third time. "Honestly, no," she said. "I went into it ... not really caring. It's very irritating, to have to go waste your time, basically."

Brittany is thriving in a floral shop class and a required social studies course at Evergreen, and in psychology 101 at Clark College, the third Running Start course she's taken there.

"I listen pretty well, and do all my work. It's been pretty easy for me (at Clark)," she said.

Brittany wishes all her class time came at college.

"I feel like I learn more there,

because I don't have the social distractions I have at Evergreen. The professors at Clark, they don't mess around. They get down to business and teach you, and let you go," she said.

With an Evergreen diploma in hand, Brittany will head straight for Horizon Airlines and apply for ticket counter or other work at Portland International Airport this summer.

She's determined to follow her grandmother, Janice Munson, and become a Horizon flight attendant. But she can't sign up before her 19th birthday in November. An associate's degree at Clark is her backup plan.

Until then, there's the promised family-paid graduation trip, probably in late summer.

"I just want a beach and sun," she said. "I just want a break from all the senior stuff."

—Howard Buck



N. SCOTT TRIMBLE/The Columbian

Earning nearly straight A's, Brittany Moulton works at the southeast Vancouver Target store to save money for a new car. The Evergreen High School student needs a diploma to qualify for her dream job at Horizon Airlines.

'I want to graduate for her'

Amanda JeanBlanc sees her daughter as an inspiration, not a distraction



JANET L. MATHEWS/The Columbian

Kristine JeanBlanc, left, hands her new granddaughter, KaeLynn Chaney, to her daughter, Amanda JeanBlanc. Strong family support should help new mom Amanda finish Evergreen High classes.

The toughest challenge of Amanda JeanBlanc's senior year in high school lay in her lap, dozing contentedly — all 5½ pounds of her.

KaeLynn Leone Chaney arrived four weeks early on April 19. Doctors induced labor after Amanda's blood pressure rose sharply and wouldn't drop.

The premature birth flipped Amanda's graduation checklist on its head. Now she'll need to complete school homework between feedings and diaper changes. She also must return to Evergreen High School classes by late May.

"It's going to be hard to balance it out. It's hard to not want to hold her all the time," said Amanda, 17.

But she sees KaeLynn as an inspiration and not a distraction. "She is my major motivation. I want to graduate for her.

Amanda wants to have a good

career so she, KaeLynn and father Quinton Chaney, 22, can thrive.

"Someday I'll tell her I graduated just for her, 'cause it was definitely hard to push through," she said.

She was able to knock off her senior project in March. But much more remains.

There will be several brief position papers to write for her Contemporary World Issues course. For senior English, she needs to read George Orwell's "1984."

"I'm not a huge reader," Amanda said. But friends say it's a good book, so she's ready to take it on.

There's homework for a pair of electives where she's a teaching assistant. She's also close to taking the final exam for an online character-values course offered by Brigham Young University.

She was waived from one more try at the WASL math test this month, thanks to her abruptly ordered bed

rest and KaeLynn's birth. Instead, she has sailed through her state-required math review course and is prepared to knock off the last of three exit exams next month, she said.

Her other Evergreen High course? A tailored GRADS magnet class for about 30 pregnant or parenting students from the Evergreen district, designed to impart parenting and life skills.

Amanda said she's already drawn on GRADS lessons.

"It's opened my eyes a lot to how difficult it can be — especially losing sleep," she said. But with eager support from Quinton and both families, the future looks bright.

"Get school done, and take care of her, and we will be just fantastic," Amanda said. "I can't wait to see her little personality develop, to see her first, genuine smile."

—Howard Buck

'I'm just feeling the stress of everything at once'

Dyslexia has made standardized testing difficult for Callie Kimsey, but it hasn't stopped her

Callie Kimsey sneaks in "senioritis" where she can.

After spending the early morning taking the math WASL two weeks back, she left school.

"You could just see all the seniors who took the WASL because we all walked off to the parking lot when we were done," said Callie, a senior at Columbia River High School.

Her sister, a sophomore, told on her, but their mother let it slide.

After all, Callie's not exactly slacking off.

"Right now, I'm just feeling the stress of everything at once," she said.

Gone are the days when seniors could graduate just by earning credits. Callie and her classmates in the class of 2008 must complete senior projects, present them to a panel of community judges and write what is called a "high school and beyond" plan.

Callie isn't worried about gradu-

ating, but she's frustrated that the math WASL will no longer be a requirement.

"They're still fighting on it," she said. "I think it's stupid. It's ridiculous. They're trying to make all these things different for us, but next year it doesn't matter."

Callie has had difficulty with standardized testing because she's dyslexic, which affects how she processes written information. Math has been a strong suit for her, but the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) math test didn't come easily — in large part because the open-ended test requires written responses.

State law once required members of the Class of 2008 to pass the reading, writing and math portions of the WASL.

But the Legislature changed that last year when half of the state's sophomores continued to fail the math portion.

Those who haven't passed the math exam must pass an additional math class and attempt the test again.

"Some kids came the first day but not the second day (of testing)," Callie said. "But you can't graduate with that."

Next fall, Callie will attend Clark College, where she hopes to take child development classes.

"I want to work with kids eventually, not be a teacher, but work with little kids," she said.

She's torn between keeping her current job as a soccer coach for toddlers at the Salmon Creek Indoor Sports Arena and applying for a better-paying job.

More money would allow her to get her own place.

"My mom doesn't want me to move out," she said. "My brother already moved out, and she doesn't want any more kids moving out."

— Isolde Raftery



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Callie Kimsey, center, a Columbia River High School senior, fell short of passing the math WASL by two points last year; she took the test two weeks ago for the last time. Next year, she heads to Clark College.

'I was still worried and wanted to pass it'

Broc Barnes was determined not to fail the WASL again



STEVEN LANE/Columbian files

Broc Barnes, right, is an amateur motocross rider and has spent hundreds of weekends on the road with his father, Brian Barnes. Brian Barnes scaled back those weekends this semester, and Broc is carrying A's and B's.

Getting Broc Barnes to pass the math WASL became a family affair.

His father, Brian, a union electrician, pushed his son to study harder. His sister Brianna, who Broc says got all the "smart genes," pestered him to complete his homework. Grandpa became a little agitated about the whole affair, and Grandma made Broc a big breakfast of French toast and scrambled eggs every morning before the test.

Taking the math test was the last thing the Fort Vancouver High School senior had to do to graduate. State law no longer requires students to pass the exam, but he still had to make a reasonable effort.

Broc, who had failed it twice, wanted to pass for his own peace of mind. He ignored the legislative drama that has unfolded about graduation requirements over the past year

and focused on his situation.

"At first, we had to pass it," Broc said of the math WASL. "They kept going back and forth, but after a while, I was still worried and wanted to pass it."

Broc's father feels some responsibility for his son's rocky academic path. Broc took up motocross racing at age 4 and the sport has consumed him since. The Barneses spent nearly every weekend on the road, leaving on Friday, returning home in the wee hours of Monday morning.

But this semester, Brian Barnes limited their motocross trips, and Broc carried A's and B's.

"Normally there are two or three trips that take him out of school, but we wanted to keep him here and focused," Brian Barnes said. "He can ride motorcycles the rest of his life."

The past few months have also been a time for father-son talks,

Brian Barnes said, contending that many of those conversations consist of Dad talking and Broc listening.

"I've tried to be stern but less demanding," he said. He used to raise his voice at Broc, "but putting on undue pressure isn't good. I didn't want to put so much pressure on him that he would get worried and messed up."

The last time The Columbian spoke with Broc, he wasn't sure what he wanted to do after high school. Now he's firmed up his plans and intends to attend Clark College for automotive technology.

Broc graduates in June, and he'll find out if he passed the exam just before.

"It would make me feel good, knowing that I passed the math WASL," he said, smiling shyly. "That's the hardest test."

— Isolde Raftery