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# Education

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## Accelerating college

### Local student opts to forego her senior year and enter college at ASCC

By Dee Ann Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

GILBERTOWN — "This is the best thing I've ever done for myself," says Hannah Loper. "I don't regret it at all."

For Hannah, the past year has not been typical for a girl her age. While others have been attending their senior year in high school — going to ballgames, planning for the prom, and counting the days until graduation — she has been completing her first year in college, getting a jump start on her future career in nursing.

Hannah is one of a growing number of students who are deciding to forego their senior year of high school in order to accelerate their college degrees.

Her decision was, she acknowledges, not one that she took lightly. It was a decision that came after much thought and planning on her part, and much consideration of what she would be giving up, and what she would be gaining.

"I've thought about this for years," says Hannah, who just celebrated her 18th birthday. "I really started thinking more about it when I got to the 10th grade. One of my cousins had done it, and she never regretted it."

And when Hannah discussed the plan with her mother, Joan Mosley, she got the support she needed.

"When I told my mom what I wanted to do, she said it was the most mature thing she had heard me say," Hannah says.

"I wanted to do it when I was a senior," says Joan. "But my mother wouldn't let me. She wanted me to have that senior year. But this has been the best thing that could have happen to Hannah."

After completing her junior year at Patrician Academy, Hannah took



Choctaw Sun photo and graphics by Dee Ann Campbell and Mickey Bryant  
Hannah Loper, seated, opted to forego her senior year in high school and is now in her 2nd semester at ASCC. She is pictured with ASCC director Angie Williams, right, and instructor Sheila Skelton, who also moved from her junior year in high school to college in the 1970's.

her GED exam and immediately signed up for classes at Alabama Southern Community College in Gilbertown. While she acknowledges that others have not understood her decision to leave high school, she says it was the best decision for her.

"I didn't mind giving up my senior year," she argues. "I wasn't interested in a lot of the things that the other kids were interested in, and I felt like I was ready to go on to college — so I did."

"People think you're dropping out," she adds. "But that's not it at all — I attend classes every day. My friends thought I was crazy for skipping my senior year. They said I'd miss all the fun. But I don't see it that way. I'm doing what I want to do."

According to Hannah, her decision to leave high school early was augmented by the fact that there were opportunities for her to pursue her degree while still living at home.

"I like being at home," says Hannah. "And here at Alabama Southern, I can start getting my college degree and stay at home for awhile until I'm

ready to leave."

"I wasn't ready for her to go off to school anywhere," her mother admits. "But Alabama Southern is a great school. I went there, and I loved it. It helps kids get ready to go on to universities."

"Hannah is still here at home," she adds. "I like that, and she is getting her education."

For students like Hannah who want to begin the quest for their college degrees early, ASCC offers several avenues for entry. The Dual Enrollment program, for example, offers students in grades 11 and 12 the opportunity to earn college and high school credit for taking college courses. The Early Entry program offers the opportunity for students to enter college early without their high school diplomas, provided they meet eligibility requirements.

"Students can come in as early as the summer after their 10th grade year," ASCC Director Angie Williams explains. "They must have at least an 80 average, and they must have principal, counselor, or superintendent's approval. We ask for that

approval because they are the ones who would know if the students are mature enough to handle the courses."

But Hannah opted to take a different route. Instead of Dual Enrollment or Early Entry, she chose to forego her senior year of high school altogether, take her GED exam, and accelerate her college education by enrolling at ASCC.

"We have an open door policy," explains Williams. "If they have their GED, they don't have to have a certain score on their ACT or SAT. If they are coming in early, they either have to have that GED, or they must have an ACT of 16 or higher."

"These are students who already know what they want to do," Williams adds. "They have the skills, and they are ready to enter college."

In addition to her mother and Williams, Hannah found another strong ally at ASCC who understood her decision to accelerate college. Instructor Sheila Skelton had also opted to leave high school and attend college prior to her senior year.

"I knew in the 9th grade what I wanted to do," says Skelton. "I wanted to be a teacher, and by the 10th or 11th grade I felt like I was prepared to go on to college."

Skelton, who grew up in Wayne County, Miss., left high school, took her ACT exam, and entered Jones County Community College in Ellisville in the fall of 1972. Although she admits that she had to study to make the grade when she entered college as a 17-year-old, the experience, she says, gave her the opportunity to get started with her teaching career much earlier than others her age.

"I was put on probation for the first quarter, and if I didn't make at least a 'C' average, I knew I would have to leave," she recalls. "I won't say I made straight A's, but I had average grades. It was hard and I devoted a lot of time to studying."

Despite the hard work, Skelton completed her courses at the community college, transferred to the University of Southern Mississippi, and earned her degree in August of 1975 — nearly two years earlier than any of her high school classmates.

Later, she went back to school to earn her master's degree and to gain the extra hours necessary to teach at the college level. She now teaches at ASCC, with Hannah as one of her students.

Having already completed her first semester, Hannah is now enrolled in her 2nd semester, taking History II, English II, and Biology. Both semesters, she has taken 12 hours of courses, with another 6 hours to her credit from courses she took last summer.

"Last semester I took English I, History I, and General Psychology," she says. "In the summer after the 11th grade, I took some other basic courses."

Like Skelton, Hannah admits that she has to study to maintain a good average. Thus far, her effort have paid off. She is maintaining A's and B's in all of her courses.

"I have to study more now," she admits. "But I'm used to that. I've always had to study to make good grades."

"I teach a really tough

history class, and Hannah is one of my students," Williams says. "She works hard and rises to the standard. She has a great attitude about learning."

In addition to Hannah, other students have opted to take advantage of ASCC's programs that offer early college courses to younger students. According to Williams, all have done well.

"I have never had a high school student who came in with early entry or dual enrollment who didn't do well," says Williams. "They want to do whatever is necessary to do well."

"I would like to see other students who are prepared — and many are — to at least be doing Dual Enrollment so that when they finished those 13 years of school they have almost got their associate degree behind them," Williams adds. "It's something that many students should be taking advantage of."

"It's not just a jump start in college," she adds. "It's a jump start in life."

For Hannah, that jump start has allowed her to take an early giant step toward her future career goals. She is planning to take summer courses at ASCC again this year in order to gain all the basic courses possible before transferring to Meridian Community College's nursing program in the fall.

Although she and her mother acknowledge that accelerating college enrollment might not be for everyone — and that there are those who still do not understand the decision to opt out of that senior year in high school — the results have proven that it was the right move for Hannah.

"She's happier now than when she was in high school," says Joan. "She's very focused, and she's got her head on her shoulders. I'm well pleased with her decision. It may not be the right one for some kids, but it has been the best thing for her."

"I've learned so much since I came here," Hannah adds. "I'm getting my education, and I love it. I'm getting prepared to go on from here. It was the right thing for me to do."

### Bond issue could mandate removal of portables at Southern Choc. Elementary

#### Capital Plan lists priorities for use of construction bond funds

By Dee Ann Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

GILBERTOWN — The removal of portable classrooms at Southern Choctaw Elementary could be a certainty when the upcoming school construction bond issue is passed by the state legislature. In fact, their removal could be mandated in the wording of the legislation.

The State Board of Education is urging the Legislature to approve a \$1 billion state bond issue for construction projects from kindergarten through universities. Gov. Bob Riley has recom-

mended \$850 million, but that figured will likely increase before the final draft of the legislation is approved.

If the bond issue is passed by the legislature, the Choctaw County public school system could gain just over \$2.1 million dollars for capital construction projects, based on the system's Average Daily Membership (ADM) — the population of students within the system.

And if the legislation includes requirements similar to those set down in the state's last construction bond issue approved in 1998, the removal of portables and the construction of new classrooms to replace them could be mandated as the first priority for the use of the funds by Choctaw County and other school systems who are using portables.

There are currently 1,328 portable classrooms being used by schools throughout the state,

including three units housing five classrooms at SCES. Nineteen of Alabama's 132 school systems have 10 or more portable classrooms being used for instruction.

At the time of the last bond issue, which was for \$550 million, Alabama had 3,472 portable classrooms. Then-Governor Don Siegelman required school systems to use their bond proceeds first to replace the portable classrooms with permanent facilities, cutting the state's portables to about 500.

The exact wording of this year's bond issue does not yet include provisions for the mandated removal of portables, and it may or may not be added to the measure. If a mandate is not added, Choctaw County will be allowed to set its own priorities for the use of the funds.

But with or without such a mandate, the bond issue should mean that

SCES will be seeing the removal of the portables.

The bond issue will be designated for construction projects only, and the use of the funds will fall according to the system's Capital Outlay Plan. First on the list for Choctaw County is the construction of 8 classrooms and a library for SCES, at a cost of \$1.2 million.

Other projects listed on the Plan include (in order of priority as listed on the current Capital Plan report):

- Five new classrooms for Choctaw County Elementary for an estimated cost of \$650,000.
- New shop for Transportation/Maintenance Department at a cost of \$450,000.
- New auditoriums for both high schools, at a cost of \$1,500,000.

Although these items are currently on the Plan, the priority list can be changed through a vote of the Board of Education.



Submitted photo  
Yvonne Hampton of the CCDC accepts a \$2,500 grant from BBCF.

### CCDC awarded grant from BBCF

LAVACA — The Choctaw Community Development Center (CCDC) was recently awarded a \$2,500 grant from the Black Belt Community Foundation (BBCF).

The purpose of the Choctaw Community Development Center is to promote excellence, develop leadership, and cultivate understanding in order to encourage healthy development of at-risk youth mentoring programs, service-oriented programs, and school-to-work programs. Funds from the grant will be used for after-school tutoring, supplies, and transportation.

"The Black Belt's motto is to take what you have and make what you need," said CCDC Director Yvonne Hampton about the grant. "So this grant will help the CCDC use what they have to get what they need."

Grants from the Black Belt Community Foundation are awarded twice yearly. Since the first round of grants in March 2005, the foundation has awarded 168 organizations for over \$300,000. The CCDC was part of 37 organizations to receive more than \$60,000 in funds from the 5th round of BBCF grants.

For more information about the CCDC, call 205-459-4236 or 205-654-2276.

What do local parents think about school uniforms?

Find out next week in a special feature story

'Addressing the dress code'

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