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June 7, 2001

**Jennison Asuncion's career starts with helping other disabled students****by Jane Shulman**

Jennison Asuncion spent most of his time at Concordia working on advancements for other people with disabilities through his extra-curricular volunteering and his studies in educational technology.

Asuncion has all but finished the course work for his degree. All that remains is a report about his internship experience. His MA in educational technology represents years of work on his own, but also within the Concordia community.

"I got involved because I have been given a lot of opportunities, and I have to give back. If you're in a position to, you really should," Asuncion said.

Asuncion was already involved in the National Education Association of Disabled Students, which is particularly focused on access to education, when he started his undergraduate degree in political science in 1994.

Working with Leo Bissonnette, coordinator of Services for Disabled Students at Concordia, he helped bring NEADS to Concordia and encourage students to speak out on the national level at NEADS conferences. Asuncion has served on the NEADS Board of Directors since 1996, and will be an advisor next year.

"Having been through the grind," he said, he enjoyed speaking to new students at orientation sessions, discussing strategies for dealing with professors, and ways of articulating their needs.

Bissonnette said, "Jennison helped make the Concordia community aware in a positive way of issues of disabled students. He has really been a credit to this institution, and certainly deserves recognition."

When he returned to Concordia to work on his Master's degree in education technology in 1997, Asuncion became a student representative for that unit and won a Concordia Council on Student Life Award for his outstanding contributions to student life.

He also worked on the Adaptech research project, looking into university and college technology for people with disabilities, collaborating with a professor at Dawson College and several others on the local part of this national project.

Through surveys of disabled students and service providers on campuses across the country, the team garnered valuable information about students' needs in terms of keeping up with technology, and whether or not they are being met. The team co-authored research papers on accessibility and technology.

Six months ago, Asuncion began an internship as the final requirement for his degree. He works at IBM in Toronto in the area of instruction design, which involves setting up e-learning programs.

Part of his job involves going through sample e-learning sites to detect accessibility problems in the programs, which would render them useless for people using adapted software or hardware. He also researches specialized software that reads text back to you as you type it, foot-controlled mice and systems that re-produce text in braille.

Asuncion said it's a coincidence that he's in this field. He was not setting out to



**Jennison Asuncion (right), with Leo Bissonnette, coordinator of Services for Disabled Students, at Concordia's CCSL Awards in April.**

work on projects that affect him personally, but he's thrilled to be doing the job.

"None of the stuff I am doing now is related to my disability," he explained.

"I was actually the first student from my program to do an internship with IBM in Toronto, and I am proud to have paved the way for future interns from Concordia."

The internship was set to end on May 31, by which time Asuncion hoped to have been hired full time.

"The internet is not going away," he said, "so we have to deal with these issues right now, and make sure that we deal with these problems before people are alienated."

He's proud of Concordia. "It's so open, and everyone is counted equally. The university encourages people to get involved, whether they have a disability or not.

"My only regret is that I wish I had gotten involved more in non-disabled activities as an undergrad because people probably would have been very open, but I was too shy," he said, "so I made up for it with all my activities as a grad student."