



Student Profile - Zachary Mason

SDS Newsletter contributor Ashima Muttreja '12 sat down with Zachary Mason '12 to get his thoughts about life as a CU student as he starts his final semester as an undergraduate.

What's your major? Where are you from?

Animal Science. My home town is N. Stratford, New Hampshire.

What do you like about being at Cornell?

The thing I like most about being an undergraduate at Cornell is the unique opportunities that have been presented to me. I find that there's never a dull moment as long as you seek out opportunities.

Were you born with limited vision?

No, but I've been blind since the age of four and pretty much learned Braille as I started my education.

How did you adjust to getting around campus, especially as a freshman when you were new to the area?

I had already been trained on how to use a cane so Mr. Mike Dillon, a mobility and orientation instructor for New York State Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped,

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Requesting Faculty Notification Letters

Each semester students must give advance notice to instructors of accommodations needed for their courses. Upon request from you, SDS will prepare faculty notification letters with your accommodations listed for you to give to instructors. Using the on-line request form is the most efficient method for requesting letters. If you add courses after your letter request is submitted, you will need to submit an additional request.

To ensure that accommodations will be in place throughout the semester, you should meet with your professors within the first two weeks of classes. The following steps outline the process for requesting classroom accommodations.

1. If you are new to Cornell, call 607-254-4545 to schedule an appointment to meet with an SDS counselor.

2. Complete a "Request for Faculty Notification Letters." You can fill out a form in the SDS office or online at <http://sds.cornell.edu/sdsregistration.php>.
3. Pick up your letters from the SDS office two business days after submitting request form.
4. Meet privately with instructors (or their designated representatives), give them the Faculty Notification Letters and discuss the specific arrangements for your classroom accommodations. Instructors must have two weeks' notice of accommodation needs. Notice for final exam accommodations must be provided at least two weeks before the last day of class.

Please contact SDS immediately if you have concerns about the accommodation process or the administration of an exam.

Letter from the Director

Welcome to the Spring Semester, 2012

One of the responsibilities of the SDS office is to provide information to the Cornell community about the rights afforded to students with disabilities under federal laws and the procedures in place at Cornell to ensure compliance with these laws. When a student is requesting services from the SDS office it is important for you to understand the purpose and protections of disability laws.

Federal disability laws prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities and require that our services, programs and activities be accessible to everyone.

The disability process is an interactive one and begins when you, the student, has provided notice of the existence of a disability to the SDS office and demonstrated a need for access related to that disability by submitting disability documentation. The documentation must detail the manifestations of the disability, the degree of functional limitations caused by the disability and its impact on one or more major life activities. The SDS staff will assess the sufficiency of the disability documentation provided, and meet with you to discuss your access needs. Together we will explore ideas for auxiliary aids and accommodation that will be effective in addressing the impact of the disability.

Reasonable accommodations are modifications to a course, service, policy or procedure, activity or facility that will provide an individual with a disability with an equitable opportunity to obtain the same benefits and privileges as are available to an individual without a disability. At times, the interactive process will involve faculty and/or staff to gain a clear understanding of the essential components of a course, program, or activity and the individual needs of the student. You may be provided with your first choice of accommodation or an effective alternative may be determined by the University. The SDS staff will also address access concerns and difficulties.

Disability laws are clear that accommodations that would fundamentally alter the nature of a program or undercut essential degree requirements do not have to be provided by the university.

Cornell has a grievance procedure that can be used by any person who is concerned that s/he has been discriminated against on the basis of disability or that accommodations have not been effective.

An important aspect of working with your disability counselor in SDS is learning to use this process. For many students, requesting disability services is a new experience. The SDS staff looks forward to working with you on disability issues during your time at Cornell.

Best wishes for great classes, fun times with friends and sunny skies this semester.

Kappy Fahey

Important Calendar Dates

January 16, 2012

Residence Halls Open

January 16, 2012

Course Add/Drop begins

January 23, 2012

Classes Begin

February 10, 2012

Add Period Ends

February 26, 2012

Last day to sign up for housing lottery

March 9, 2012

Drop period Ends

March 17-25, 2012

Spring Break

May 5, 2012

Last day of classes

May 6-9, 2012

Study period

May 9-18, 2012

Final exam period

May 27, 2012

Commencement

** Student photo page 1
courtesy of Kappy Fahey
*Photos page 4 & 6
courtesy of Ladi Dell'aira*

Living with Dietary Restrictions at Cornell



Students with food allergies frequently come to Student Disability Services seeking accommodations, unaware that Cornell Dining Services has already implemented many useful measures to ensure safe and healthy meals for students with specific dietary needs. Michele Wilbur, Cornell's Dining Nutritionist, collaborates with all employees of Dining Services to achieve this goal.

One of the most important steps taken to protect students with allergies is the labeling of foods containing any of the eight major allergens –

milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, soy or wheat. Additionally, food labels alert diners to the presence of pork or alcohol, which are not eaten by Muslims; vegan and vegetarian options are also marked. There is no label for the protein gluten, because it is so common: instead, specific gluten-free options have been made available, and there are several entirely gluten-free stations at dining halls across campus. Ms. Wilbur hopes to have several dining units be certified gluten-free in the near future to accommodate the rising numbers of students with a gluten sensitivity. As the numbers of students with allergies and dietary restrictions rise, these types of measures become increasingly important for the dining halls to implement.

Additionally, all dining services staff, from cooks to student workers, are required to undergo food safety training to keep everyone educated about labeling allergens and other important tasks that must be completed in the dining halls.

Students with severe allergies fill out the "Food Allergy Notification Form," found on the SDS website, and after meeting with a counselor at SDS, discuss their dining options with Ms. Wilbur. With the help of the dining staff, she is then able to assist students in eating healthy, tasty meals despite dietary restrictions.

Cornell Dining: <http://www.campuslife.cornell.edu/campuslife/dining/diet.cfm>

-Maria Napolitano, '13

*Congratulations to Cornell Dining for placing
6th in the large school category of the
2011 Most Vegan-Friendly College Contest!*

FACES Members' Research Anti-Epilepsy Medication

FACES, Cornell's epilepsy advocacy group, offers more than just support and outreach programs to the Cornell community. During the summer of 2011, some members of Facts, Advocacy and Control of Epileptic Seizures began their own research project under the guidance of Professors Ronald Hoy and David Deitcher. They have been investigating how existing anti-epilepsy drugs function by testing them on mutant *Drosophila* flies that are susceptible to epilepsy-like seizures. Using the flies as model organisms, the dedicated members of FACES hope to gain a better understanding of how these medications function and how they affect those who take them.

The young researchers conduct their studies in Professor Deitcher's lab, located in Corson-Mudd Hall. They use mutant flies, known as the "bang-sensitive" strain due to their seizing, to gauge the effects of different anti-epilepsy drugs on the brain and different biological pathways. The drugs that are currently being marketed control epileptic seizures but often have serious side effects such as fatigue, memory loss, and nausea. These unwanted side effects are especially detrimental to college students with busy schedules and classes that require memorization and long hours of intense studying. The researchers of FACES hope to discover the mechanism through which these drugs affect the brain and identify genes that play a role in epileptic seizures. After establishing which neural pathways need to be

controlled, they hope to eliminate harmful side effects by altering the medication's structure to those pathways specifically, without interfering with other normal processes. Nobody has determined exactly how anti-epilepsy drugs function; hopefully, once their effectiveness and functional mechanisms have been related through research like this, the drugs can be redesigned so that they do not cause such serious side effects.

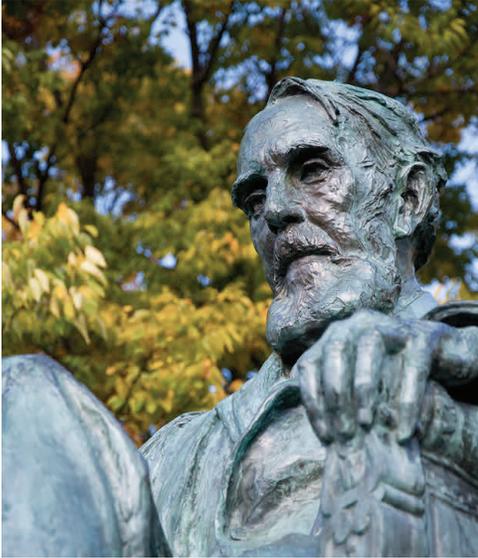
The members of FACES conducting research are not paid for their time; some who logged enough hours earned credit. All of them are working out of a desire to help improve anti-epilepsy medication. As each member becomes more comfortable in the lab, they are free to investigate different facets of this research project, to further the group's general objective. Other institutions, such as MIT, Lafayette College and the University of California at Berkeley, have also begun similar research using bang-sensitive *Drosophila*. According to FACES secretary Maura Greenwood, future collaboration between institutions is possible, given that they are all working towards the common goal of improving anti-epilepsy medications. FACES is now branching out to lead the way in epilepsy medication research, in addition to fulfilling its established role as a central part of the epilepsy community and support network at Cornell.

-Maria Napolitano, '13



Accessible Parking Eligibility *Change Postponed*

Transportation Services plans to eventually require students who use accessible parking for more than 2 months to also get a state accessible permit or municipal hangtag. Please note the implementation of this requirement has been postponed until after the end of the 2011-12 academic year.



Inclement Weather Plans

The winter weather is here. Planning ahead will make it easier to address the challenges of winter and get where you need to go. If snow and ice will be a significant barrier as you travel around campus, fill out the Voluntary Inclement Weather Form. SDS will report your path of travel to Facilities Management and Grounds and Building Care will make every effort to remove snow and ice in areas you travel on campus.

Download the form!

http://sds.cornell.edu/Forms/Voluntary_Inclement_Weather_Questionnaire.pdf

(Student Profile—Zachary Mason —Continued from page 1)

really only had to orient me to my class locations and the bus routes. Each semester before classes I would schedule an appointment with Mike for orientation. Freshman year was the year it took the longest for me to orient myself to classes and my dormitory. I paid greater attention to the mobility instructor's recommendations and memorized things like where the nearest restroom was as compared to junior and senior year when I would call Mike up three or four days before I would go back to campus and schedule time to help me find one class location, usually in a building I'd already taken a class in.

Do you feel like students/professors act differently around you because you have a vision disability?

Perhaps initially, but I never think about it anymore. My view is that I'm in class to learn, and I need extra help; and as long as I'm getting something out of class whether it be specific information, skills, a fulfillment of a prerequisite, or even building a good relationship with a future mentor or getting a recommendation; life is good. So I really don't let it bother me anymore if I'm being treated differently.

Has being visually impaired affected your extracurricular involvement?

I wish. I'm what one calls an over-committed student who can't even recount all the organizations I have connections with and participate in events with when asked. I actually tried cutting the total number of organizational commitments this fall and unconsciously ended up adding back just as many as I dropped out of initially.

What has been/is most difficult about being a legally blind college student?

I guess, for me, not having any particular innate love for technology and having to depend on computers and adaptive electronic devices to do virtually all my school work has proven to be the most stressful aspect of being a blind student.

What do you visual disability do when you graduate?

I'll be involved somewhere in the food production industry, but exactly where I do not know.

Has having a visual disability affected your career goals?

Yes. If I would have been able to drive I'm not even sure I would have made it to college.

What would you like people to know about living with a visual disability?

Some blind individuals, in my personal opinion, seem to identify and really grow into a "blind person" identity. They become part of the "blind community" and work for the betterment of life for the blind. Others view blindness as a life-altering event that shapes one's life just as education, a death in the family, or natural disaster would.

- Ashima Muttreja, '12

New Honor Society for Students with Disabilities

Delta Alpha Pi, a national honor society for students with disabilities, will be forming a chapter at Cornell and we want you!

Delta Alpha Pi was formed to recognize the academic accomplishments of college and university students with disabilities. Because of the negative stereotyping associated with disability, students have been reluctant frequently to identify themselves publicly. Delta Alpha Pi Honor Society presents an opportunity to change that perception by recognizing students with disabilities for their achievements. In addition, this honor society facilitates development of skills in leadership, advocacy and education for student participants. Being a charter member is an amazing opportunity and being part of a national organization is a great way to network with peers from other universities.

The national chapter of Delta Alpha Pi requires that students in the honor society are registered with Student Disability Services and have a minimum 3.2 GPA.

If you are interested in receiving more information, please contact Kaitlin Hardy at kph44@cornell.edu or Talia Shear at tcs67@cornell.edu.

Improving the Academic Experience for Students who are Deaf/ Hard of Hearing in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math

Student Disability Services has been awarded a sub-contract by the National Science Foundation as a partner with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), one of the eight colleges of the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), along with Camden County College in Blackwood, NJ, in the creation of the Deaf STEM Community Research in Disabilities Education Alliance. The goal of the Deaf STEM Community Alliance will be to establish a model for a Virtual Academic Community (VAC) that will increase graduation rates of deaf/hard of hearing (D/HH) STEM majors in postsecondary education in the long term. The goal will be supported by two objectives: (1) documenting and disseminating a description of the process of creating the VAC in order to create a scalable model that can be replicated to fit the needs of other SWD in STEM majors; and, 2) increasing the GPAs and retention rates of D/HH students in STEM majors.

The VAC prototype will be designed to allow academic support, communication access, and sense of community necessary for D/HH students to succeed in STEM fields of study through a web-based cyber infrastructure.

In developing the prototype VAC, the Deaf STEM Community Alliance will address the following challenges for students who are D/HH:

1. Reducing the loss of potential STEM students through attrition in formal education;
2. Overcoming barriers in STEM education; and,
3. Gathering together disparate cyber learning resources currently available for students and their service providers.

Cornell's primary role will be to recruit, train and track students, tutors and mentors who will participate in the project. Starting in year 2, we will train 4 students to use the VAC. As with many NSF grants these days, they have committed to funding the first two years of the five year grant. If the first two years are successful, and if funding is available, more students will be trained on how to use the VAC and provided with an enhanced remote captioning experience in their STEM courses. Cornell SDS captionists would also be involved in providing remote captioning to STEM students at the other two colleges.

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