Two Cal Poly Students Produce Interactive Book for Blind Children

Following a tradition of Cal Poly student community involvement and humanitarian service, two students have created an interactive book designed for blind children.

Written, designed and produced by graphic communication seniors Jefferson Dela Cruz and Lori Shimizu, "The Boy Who Shared His Toys" features Braille as well as traditional text. The cloth-bound, hard-cover book also includes a CD-ROM, which allows the book to be read electronically to a child, and it comes with various three-dimensional, removable figures that a child can touch and feel, thereby engaging other senses.

"Having worked in my mom's classroom, I noticed children with disabilities do not have the opportunities that other children do," Shimizu said in discussing her motivation to create the book. "I wanted to use the techniques obtained in our classes to create a book for children with sight disabilities that was not only tangible but also allows them to use their other senses and imagination."

"After researching ideas for our senior project, I came to realize that there were hardly any children's books designed in Braille," Dela Cruz said. "I enjoy working with children, and I wanted to help the blind community. After finishing my senior project, I would like to pursue a career in book publishing."

Dela Cruz and Shimizu plan to submit their book to the Book Builders West competition to be in spring 2003 in the Bay Area. They also hope to have the book published.

The students developed the idea in a research methods class taught by Harvey Levenson, head of Cal Poly's Graphic Communication Department. Levenson advised the students through completion of the project.

"Jefferson and Lori are examples of two students who used what they learned in a technical discipline to help others," Levenson said. "They epitomize the type of students we graduate who are well prepared to enter industry and commerce but also have developed a sense of compassion for humanity and the desire to give something back to society. I speak for the Graphic Communication Department's entire faculty in expressing how proud we are of such students and their work."

Each year, the department's students design and help coordinate the production of the San Luis Obispo County Special Olympics yearbook. Students have also assisted the Alzheimer's Association prepare printed material for its annual fund-raising walk-a-thon and picnic, and senior project students have worked with elementary school students to teach them about reading, writing, computer graphics and publishing.
Cal Poly's Graphic Communication Department is one of the largest in the nation and is the only program of its kind in the western United States. The department offers a Bachelor of Science degree in graphic communication with concentrations in printing and imaging management, electronic publishing and imaging, design reproduction technology, and individualized study.

All Cal Poly students must complete a senior project as a graduation requirement. The project is the culmination of their educational experience, bringing together various facets of their education that demonstrates intellectual development, research skills and knowledge of the printing, publishing and related graphic communication fields that the students have been prepared to enter.

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(NOTE TO EDITORS: For a photo of Jefferson Dela Cruz and Lori Shimizu with their book, please contact Jo Ann Lloyd at (805) 756-1511 or jilloyd@calpoly.edu.)