

Benjamin Snow: Dragon helps achieve academic success.

Like many members of his generation, Arizona State University senior Benjamin Snow began using a computer at an early age. Unlike many of his peers, though, Snow has cerebral palsy, which caused him to hunt and peck on the keyboard until 2003, when a summer class at a local community college introduced him to Dragon NaturallySpeaking and dramatically changed his life.

"I can't hold a pen or pencil in my hand very well, which is why I've used a computer since I was four years old," Snow explains. "Dragon helps me dictate more concrete thoughts, and I'm able to get my work done faster and more efficiently. Dragon also lets me focus on the content of my writing instead of constantly looking at the keyboard to see how to spell the words I'm thinking of. Finger typing makes me stop and start again, and I lose my train of thought."

Dragon helped Snow earn a 3.75 GPA and admission into the Phi Theta Kappa international academic honor society while attending community college. His GPA at Arizona State is 3.65 as he heads toward graduation.

A Political Science/Communications major, Snow plans to attend graduate school and eventually be a writer, likely focusing on history and/or travel writing. He names Teddy Roosevelt and Martin Luther King, Jr. among his heroes and already has quite a bit of writing experience under his belt, outside of his classwork: he published a piece about scoliosis surgery in San Diego Family Magazine and he won a scholarship award for an essay about healthcare reform. He was also a national winner of a U.S. Department of Labor essay contest when he was 13 and won a C-SPAN essay contest when he was 18.

Beyond school

Snow is even currently dictating the script for a film he plans to make about assistive technology; it will include a Dragon demonstration. He's no stranger to filmmaking: several years ago he wrote and directed "Thumbs Down to Pity," in which he takes Hollywood to task for its pity-filled depictions of people with disabilities. The short film won many awards, including first place in the United Nations' 2006 Film Your Issue contest, for which he received a personal letter from the UN headquarters in New York City.

"Thumbs Down to Pity" is just one of the many ways he has been an advocate for people with disabilities over the years. In 2001, he was one of 14 people who served on the Youth Advisory Committee of the President's Task Force on the Employment of Adults

with Disabilities, earning himself a letter from Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao, who wrote: "You are a strong example of how youth with disabilities can make a difference."

Snow is also currently involved in giving demonstrations of Dragon NaturallySpeaking and other assistive technologies to audiences consisting of professors, teachers, parents, youth groups, and school administrators.

His father, Mark Snow, comments: "When Benjamin gives demonstrations to teachers and parents to explain assistive technology, they are speechless. Using this software has been life-changing for him."

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