
Pacific VIP Scholar Awarded Blasch Scholarship

On behalf of the Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Division of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), the 2013 Blasch Scholarship committee is pleased to introduce this year's winners. Each year, two students enrolled in AER approved O&M programs are awarded \$1,000 scholarships in memory of Don Blasch. Mr. Blasch was for many years the chairperson of the Department of Blind Rehabilitation (now Blindness and Low Vision Studies) at Western Michigan University. He was a pioneer in the visual impairment profession and this scholarship is a reminder of his extraordinary accomplishments during O&M's formative years.

The recipients this year are Sigalu Epenesa, an O&M/Teacher for Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) student at the University of Massachusetts, Boston (UMASS-Boston), and Faye Miller, who attends Salus University. Sigalu graduated from Western Oregon University and now participates in the Pacific Vision Instruction Project (Pacific VIP) administered by Guam CEDDERS in partnership with faculty from UMASS-Boston for the delivery of the Master's level O&M/TVI training program. She expects to complete her program in 2014. Sigalu currently works as a resource specialist in an elementary school in American Samoa, and has almost 20 years of experience as a teacher. Currently she supervises nine teachers and has numerous administrative responsibilities at her school.

In her essay about her work in O&M, Sigalu notes that there are few university educated professionals who can work effectively with students with blindness and low vision in the Pacific Islands. She notes her own limitations as an effective teacher prior to enrolling in the UMASS-Boston training program. UMASS-Boston Professor Laura Bozeman notes that



Pacific VIP celebrates with Sigalu Epenesa (pictured) on her achievement as a recipient of one of two annual Blasch Scholarships awarded by the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Sigalu is a thoughtful student who excels in her coursework and her practice experiences. Her enthusiasm and dedication to the field are outstanding, and she will make an important contribution to the lives of children and youth on American Samoa through her work in O&M. Bob McCulley, another of Sigalu's professors at UMASS-Boston, celebrates Sigalu's leadership in special education in the Pacific Islands, and notes that she has become a leader among her cohort of students. He notes her willingness to work hard, her vibrant personality, and her kindness as traits that will serve her well as she works to meet the needs of students with visual impairments.

Article contributed by Laura Bozeman, Ph.D., UMASS-Boston Vision Studies Program Director/Faculty.

FSM Leadership Conference con't from p. 12



Participants commemorate the leadership conference by engaging in traditional welcoming ceremonies during the FSM Leadership Conference.



Parents of children with disabilities talk about their experiences navigating through systems to obtain services for their children.