

One dog and 225 volunteers help blind man earn degree

Robbie Arrabito credits his guide dog, Ralph, and a number of volunteers for helping him complete his thesis M.Sc. in computer science.

By Lynn Marchildon
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Robbie Arrabito earned his master of science degree in computer science with a little help from his friends — at least 225 of them.

That's the number of volunteers who helped him with research on braille codes for computer typesetting. Without the assistance, including having copy read aloud to him, Arrabito says he couldn't have kept up with current research on computers.

The 27-year-old legally blind man was awarded his degree from the University of Western Ontario Thursday after completing a thesis on computerized braille typesetting.

EDITING IMPROVEMENTS: Arrabito's work dealt with editing improvements on his thesis. To read it, he either printed out a copy in braille codes or used a talking computer.

Arrabito said he chose Western because it was the only Ontario university with computer equipment for the blind when he enrolled in 1982.

"It was more or less a case of necessity than anything else. But it turned out for the best."

Back from a two-week vacation, Arrabito has started doing research for the department of national defence in Toronto. But he hints he may return to school to complete his PhD in a few years.

Arrabito, accompanied by his guide dog Ralph, was one of more than 700 students who graduated from Western Thursday.



Morris Lamont/*The London Free Press*

Hao Fang Wu, 6, looks distinguished as she tries on her mother's graduation robes. Rong Lan Yu received a degree in communicative disorders from Western Thursday afternoon. Yu, from China, has been in London three years while she and her husband pursued degrees.

He found the Western campus easy to navigate. "I have no problem. I get lost now and then, but then again, who doesn't?"

Western's campus is familiar territory for Ralph, who accompanied Arrabito throughout his last year of course work. "He's been to all the classes that I taught (as a teaching assistant) so officially you could say he was one of my students."