

Blind since birth, Brown University student helps others like him

by Christina Mayo



photo credit: Miami Lighthouse for the Blind

Brown University student Daniel Solomon, to the left of Billy the Marlin, co-teaches the new, full credit course “Blindness, Arts, and Media” at Brown to help bridge the gap between education and inclusivity for the blind.

When Daniel Solomon was born with ocular albinism, his parents turned to Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired for help and support.

Legally blind since birth, Solomon went on to graduate as a student leader from Miami Palmetto Senior High School. He is now a student at Brown University.

“As I transitioned to K-12 education in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the training and experience I received from Miami Lighthouse became the bedrock behind my ability to succeed in a traditional public school setting, graduate *summa cum laude*, get accepted to my first-choice school Brown University, and develop programs to bridge the gap

between education and inclusivity for the blind,” Solomon said.

When he arrived at Brown last fall, he decided to build bridges through the arts. “Upon learning that the university offered only one course on disability studies, I petitioned the College Curriculum Council to accept my proposal for a full credit course entitled Blindness, Arts, and Media. The public health course was approved as the largest-ever course at Brown not taught by a professor and critically examines blindness in the arts as the Actor, the Creator and the Audience. For the majority of students, this was the first time they were ever exposed to learning about blindness in their daily lives, urging them to think critically about how their actions impact the blind community,” he said.

He co-teaches the course with Sarah Skeels, a senior teaching associate at Brown’s School of Public Health. The course is a pedagogical initiative of Blind@Brown, Brown’s association of blind and visually impaired students. Solomon is the co-founder and president.

According to the National Federation of the Blind, of the more than seven million Americans with visual impairments, just around 15 percent have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

“At a young age, I realized that the extracurricular interests that most of my friends enjoyed – basketball, baseball, football – were not designed for blind children in their standard form. I began playing violin at age 7 in my elementary school orchestra and was immediately enamored, feeling a strong sense of community and belonging,” Solomon said.

“For all that orchestra had done for me, I felt compelled to support. I founded a nonprofit arts education organization called the Pinecrest City Music Project that operates, funds and instructs in-school arts education programs in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. It is through PCMP that I witnessed the significant impact that education – particularly arts education – has on students’ lives and personal development.”

Solomon said he believes that “great divisions in our society can achieve a state of mutual understanding through education that combats ignorance, while leveraging art as a powerful mechanism.”

“The Miami Lighthouse for the Blind has taught me the importance of advocacy, and shown me that my blindness can serve as a unique perspective on which to build this mutual understanding,” he said. “I plan to continue using the arts and education to enable opportunities across communities.” To learn more about the South Florida programs for all ages, and support, visit www.miamilighthouse.org