

Legally blind student not

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Jeremy Johansen was 10 when he lost most of his eyesight to a brain tumor on his optic nerve.

He was declared legally blind, but that didn't stop him from attending regular schools and going on to earn a 3.5 grade-point average as an undergraduate at UCSB. He's pursuing his doctorate degree there in mechanical engineering — impressive considering he can't read his textbooks or see

the long formulas his professors write on the blackboard.

His academic record and his leadership earned him a visit to the White House earlier this month, where he and other scholars spent about 45

minutes with first lady Laura Bush.

Mrs. Bush presented him with the National Achievement Award from the nonprofit organization Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic. He was one of three top winners who each

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Jeremy Johansen, on becoming legally blind

hindered by limits

received \$6,000 from the organization for their academic work, "leadership, enterprise and service to others."

Mr. Johansen, 24, who uses recordings from the organization to listen to his textbooks, wants to be an inventor and design devices that help the blind.

"When you talk to him you realize he's so enthused with everything," said UCSB Chancellor Henry Yang, who is his thesis adviser and taught one of his undergraduate classes. He calls Mr. Johansen "bright and diligent... with an optimistic attitude."

Mr. Johansen has held leadership positions in the Golden Key International Honors Society, Pi Tau Sigma, American Society of Mechanical Engineers and the National Alliance of Blind Students.

He isn't completely blind, he explained. Imagine seeing through a grid of thousands of holes, like the dots on a TV screen. Then imagine that 75 percent of the holes are covered. He sees, but only small areas.

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His poor vision has forced him to listen to lectures more intently because he can't refer back to the blackboard if he misses anything.

He can still remember being 10, when his vision was failing and glasses weren't helping.

He was watching TV one night, when he looked down and realized that he couldn't see his hand in his lap, even though he could see some things ahead of him.

It was just two weeks from the time he was diagnosed with a tumor to his first brain surgery.

But he isn't bitter, and even says he's learned from the experience.

"It gave me a whole new perspective on who people were," Mr. Johansen said.

"I think people judge too quickly just based on appearance. When you listen to things, you understand far better who people are."



First lady Laura Bush presented Jeremy Johansen with the National Achievement Award from the Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic. Mr. Johansen was one of three winners nationwide.

RECORDING FOR THE BLIND AND DYSLXIC