**Julián Ospina**

Beneath his soft-spoken exterior lies a quiet strength and resolve that speak volumes. Born in Cali, Colombia, Julián Ospina was the second of six children. Growing up he was extremely close to his oldest brother, Jorge, and together they shared a passion for sports and education. At the age of 13, Julián won the Colombian national judo champion for his weight category, while his brother was number one in a different weight category. In high school both Julián and Jorge played on a very successful water polo team that twice won the silver medal in the national championships. It was during this time, as he traveled throughout Colombia with his water polo team, that Julián developed an adventurous spirit that would one day lead him to the United States.

Academically Julián was so strong that he caught up with his older brother in high school, allowing both young men to graduate in the same year. Jorge was first in their class, and Julián was second. Although the brothers parted ways after graduation due to differing career paths, this was not the end of Julián’s success story. Because of his outstanding academic performance, he earned a scholarship and graduated fourth in his class from the Universidad Autonoma de Occidente in 2002 with a bachelor’s degree in industrial engineering. In 2006, after working for an insurance company in Colombia for four years, Julián decided he would have more opportunities for advancement in North America. Originally he had hoped to immigrate to Quebec and land an engineering job; however, he stopped in Houston first because his father was already living here. His strong connection to family kept him here in Houston, and now Julián, his wife, and his father are all taking classes at Lone Star College-CyFair (LSC-CF).

Julián began taking English classes at LSC-CF in 2007 and found them to be more difficult than he had first imagined because he had studied English in Colombia. Nevertheless, he enjoyed meeting friends from around the world in his classes, and he appreciated the communicative approach that is favored by the department of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Julián was a member of the first service-learning course for ESOL students that was offered at LSC-CF. Service-learning, which combines community service with academic coursework, allows students to leave the four walls of the classroom and apply their skills in a real world environment. For this particular course, Julián and his classmates visited a retirement community where each student was paired with an elderly resident. The students were responsible for interviewing their partners on a weekly basis, and at the end of the semester had to present their partners with written biographies that could be handed down to children and grandchildren. Julián enjoyed this oral history project because it offered him a measure of autonomy. He was able to apply his English skills in a meaningful way while making his own decisions about how to write and design the biography. Julián stated, “It was my project. I felt proud, and I thought ‘Wow! I wrote that much!”

Another class that had an impact was Adjunct Professor Jerry White’s Oral Communication class. Julián appreciated the relaxed environment in the classroom and the emphasis on non-traditional projects such as making videos and producing a talk show. In addition, White would use clips from the popular TV sitcom “Everybody Loves Raymond” in order to learn about American culture and the English language. These communicative approaches motivated Julián because they emphasized the use of real language. White recalls, “Julián always displayed a gentle nature in my class. He also showed a sincere optimism about his own language improvement, and I’m confident he demonstrates this attitude in all his endeavors.”

Indeed, after finishing the ESOL program, Julian enrolled in the Mechanical Engineering Technology program at LSC-CF, and he hopes to graduate with his Associate’s Degree in May 2011. He has been impressed both by the level of technology available on the campus and the teaching methodology. His professors encourage him to design and create whereas in Colombia the educational system focused more on fixing and repairing. When asked about the role LSC-CF has played in his life, Julián stated, “Everything I do here is worth it. Everything made me grow like a person [and] in my profession.” He sees his future associate’s degree as a complement to his bachelor’s degree and hopes to one day work as an engineer or possibly teach.

Currently Julián is putting his technical skills to use in the LSC-CF Language Lab. Georges Detiveaux, Manager and Instructional Technology Consultant in the Teaching & Learning Center (TLC) commented, “Julian has been a godsend here in the TLC labs. As a part-time lab coordinator who just began with us recently, he’s adapted quite quickly to his fast-paced surroundings. I’m so lucky to have hired him: he’s one of those great learners who only has to see you do something once to be able to do it himself!”

This same “can do” attitude is reflected in the advice that Julián would offer to newcomers in the United States: “Don’t worry about your pronunciation. Just talk. I don’t like to make mistakes. I would like to speak perfectly, but I realize it’s not possible.” He encourages language learners to simply speak, read, and write as much as they can because only through hard work and persistence can dreams come true.