Luján begins six-month sabbatical with WebAIM

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Sergio Luján Mora at his desk in the WebAIM office.

When Sergio Luján Mora arrived in Logan in early January, he was greeted with a four-inch snowfall and daytime high temperatures in the single digits—quite a change from the winter daytime highs of 50 to 60 degrees in his native Spain. The eight-hour time difference was difficult at first, but Luján, an associate professor from the University of Alicante, is settling into a six-month sabbatical with the WebAIM program at the Center for Persons with Disabilities. A computer engineer since 1998, Luján already had a lot of experience in web design—but not accessibility—when he attended a summer school session in 2004. “I didn’t know a lot about accessibility, I had only heard about it,” he said. A web-surfing demonstration by a woman who was blind helped him understand how useful accessible web sites could be for people with disabilities. For example, he said, supermarkets are not prepared for blind people, but those same people can buy what they need online from an accessible web site. Accessible news sites let people read online without any help. “People with disabilities want to be independent, they don’t want help all the time,” he said. “I decided to continue my professional life in web accessibility, so I could apply what I learned.”

Luján discovered the CPD’s WebAIM program in 2006 or 2007 after reading some of the program’s articles on web accessibility. He used some of the tools, as well as the Spanish translator, and eventually started a dialogue with WebAIM’s associate director, Jared Smith. “I applied for a six-month sabbatical and thought, what is the best place? WebAIM,” he said. His goals for the next six months are to work on projects and strengthen relationships with the WebAIM staff and to do some research. “I hope to learn a lot of new things and to be able to apply them to future work and … to promote concern about web accessibility,” he said. “Some think people with disabilities can’t use a computer. The main problem is that people don’t know.” He also wants to improve his command of the English language. All scientific research papers are written in English, he said, and he has plans to teach some classes in English. He has already taught seminars on web accessibility in Ecuador, Mexico, Russia and Poland. For now, though, he is enjoying his first real contact with American culture. Life in Utah is much different than the two weeks he spent visiting Boston and New York on his first trip to the United States, he said. He has been exploring Logan with the help of Cache Valley Transit District buses and looking forward to spending time in the mountains.