Interview with Laura de Socarráz-Novoa, July 23, 2012

Where do you work?
I worked as an intern in the Collections and Registration Department at the Philip & Patricia Frost Art Museum at Florida International University in Miami, FL.

What do you do?
I did a variety of tasks that truly furthered my understanding of working in a museum setting. They included assisting with data entry and collection data management; maintenance of exhibitions, galleries, art storage areas and work spaces; the preparation, installation and removal of museum exhibitions; maintaining records of accession, condition, and location for objects in the museum; and the receipt, dispersal, packing, crating, and handling of objects in the collection.

What have you learned through your internship?
My internship at the Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum has allowed me to experience the inner workings of a museum. Working in a museum is a completely different experience than visiting one, and understanding all the things that allow for a museum to run smoothly, just make you appreciate it so much more. A lot of tough and tedious work goes into keeping a museum up and running, not just planning exhibitions, but making sure the database is organized, the artwork well-preserved, and the paperwork, such as loan agreements, is kept up to date.

What did you like best about the experience?
What I liked best about my experience at the museum were the people I got to work with. My coworkers at the Collections and Registration Department are extremely dedicated and are always looking for new ways to improve the museum. I think it is this dedication that makes a very big difference. I was so appreciative that my supervisor, Sherry, allowed me to observe and participate in every activity, because that truly made a difference.

What are some of the challenges you face in the workplace?
Doing an internship is a good way to find out what you like and do not like about the career you intend to pursue. I feel like it is always challenging to realize that the career you wanted to pursue is not exactly how you pictured it or thought it might be. Although I enjoyed working as an intern in the Registration and Collections Department, I would have liked a more research-oriented internship. Besides the typical mishaps and difficulties that come with learning new skills and information, my internship was pretty much “challenge” free.
What advice do you have for students who are looking for internships or looking for work?
The best advice I can give them is to be persistent and determined during the application process. Before my internship at the Frost Art Museum, I had applied to another internship and they kept me waiting way beyond the date they were supposed to have informed me of their decision. The weeks I waited was lost time, because I was too embarrassed to call and ask. If you don’t hear from a company or business after a certain amount of time, just call them and politely inquire about the state of your application. Second, always have a plan B. And lastly, when you do get your internship, have a good work ethic, always offer your help even when not approached, and ask as many relevant questions as you can, but never in a way that is too intense or overly needy.

What advice do you have for other students as they begin work in a new environment?
Always keep a positive attitude. It is hard to get accustomed to a new environment, but more oft than not, the people around you are willing to help you, especially if you show yourself to be friendly, helpful, and hardworking.