LACIS Internship Grant Report: Fall 2010

My LACIS internship grant made it possible for me to intern for three months with Colombia Reports, the only daily online newspaper exclusively covering Colombia. As a LACIS and journalism major, I have always looked for a way to combine my interests, and this internship in Medellin was the perfect opportunity. I lived in Colombia in 2009 and was especially excited to live in the country again and further explore the current political situation through my writing. It was also the perfect way to launch a career as a foreign correspondent, which has long been my dream. Colombia doesn’t receive a lot of news coverage in the United States, and the coverage it does receive is largely negative. I was eager to explore other aspects of the culture and news landscape outside the topics of civil war and drugs, and bring those stories to an English-speaking audience.

My favorite part about my internship was the fact that I wasn’t treated as an “intern.” I was just as integral a piece of the newsroom as the director, and was put to work immediately writing stories. I had to learn extremely fast, because many of the topics we write about are reoccurring and there is always a history you must familiarize yourself with before being able to properly write the story. The biggest challenge in the beginning was catching myself up on all the on-going topics and make sure I understand the history behind a story, what had happened, and why. For example, we covered the status of the diplomatic relationship between Colombia and both of its neighboring countries of Ecuador and Venezuela. Both countries had broken relations with Colombia due to diplomatic conflict, but Colombia’s new president was actively working to restore
relations. I was constantly reporting on the latest development in the restoration of relations between Colombia and both countries, so it was necessary to understand what had happened between them in the past and what the current status of the relationship was so I could write the stories efficiently and on deadline.

During my internship, I had the opportunity to attend a press conference of Under Secretary of State James Steinberg as he was visiting Medellin. I was able to ask him a question at the press conference, and afterwards also got the chance to meet U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Michael McKinley. As the audience of Colombia Reports is mainly in the U.S., we are always extremely interested in the status of relations between the U.S. and Colombia, and as an American myself, it was a really cool opportunity to meet and report on the diplomats’ visits to Colombia (read my story here).

I was also extremely happy to be using Spanish constantly, and to have the chance to truly become fluent. When living in Colombia in 2009, I was teaching English and had many English-speaking friends, making it difficult for me to use the language all the time as I had planned. This year, I was reading constantly in Spanish and speaking it with our research assistant, although I was writing in English. It has long been my goal to become fluent in Spanish, something I’ve never before been able to achieve neither in Spanish class nor living in Colombia before. I am very proud of the strides I made with my language skills, and now hope to utilize it in future work.

As my language had improved so much, I also had the opportunity to research and write an in-depth story about the disappeared in Colombia. No concrete numbers exist, but it is estimated that 50,000 Colombians have been disappeared. I interviewed victims who had had family members disappeared, activists who work on behalf of the victims,
and government officials who work in the missing persons search unit. All of my research took place in Spanish and took me a considerable amount of time to process and then write the story, but it was an extremely rewarding experience. The extremely high number of disappeared in Colombia do not receive Western media attention, and it was very meaningful for me to be able to listen to stories of families and tell them to an audience who otherwise wouldn’t hear them (read my story [here](#)).

The experience I gained as a foreign correspondent with *Colombia Reports* will be invaluable in my career, and it never would have been feasible without the LACIS internship grant. I am extremely appreciative of the opportunity and hope the LACIS department will continue to be able to fund these vital and career-building internship experiences to graduates in the future.