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Gloria Lopez: History Major Awarded Getty Multicultural Internship

July 15, 2010 – When Gloria Lopez was in the seventh grade at Virgil Middle School in Los Angeles, her teacher taught her and her classmates that history was “more than just memorizing dates and events, it is about understanding different cultures and their experiences.” Later at Belmont High School, her passion for 20th century European and Latin American history was encouraged by her tenth grade teacher.



“History is the one subject that I find the most intriguing,” says Lopez. “Back in the tenth grade I found it interesting to learn about World War I, World War II, and the Cold War, about Hitler, and about communism. Now, I enjoy learning the stories of the people that lived during these wars and what their lives were like.”

The history major at California State University, Dominguez Hills participated in the Practicum in Applied History program last semester as a research intern at the [Wende Museum and Archive of the Cold War](#) in Los Angeles. This summer, she was awarded a Getty Multicultural Internship, which supports summer interns at various institutions. She is transcribing the documentation of Wende’s Ferris/Komov Poster Collection, as well as cataloging the collection. The project involves providing descriptions, photographing the posters, and writing comprehensive biographies on the artists.

“It is my job to put in writing the message that the artist was conveying in the context of life in the Soviet Union in the late 1980’s and in the Russian Federation in the early 1990’s,” says Lopez. “In every upper division history class I have taken, my professors have helped me develop my research and writing skills. We are taught to critically analyze historical documents in the context of their day and we are trained to clearly communicate a thesis, both orally and in writing. I get to put these skills to the test on a daily basis as a research intern.”

Lopez says that the Wende is focused on “preserving a record of a disappearing culture” of the former Warsaw Pact states with an emphasis on life in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Although the fall of the Berlin Wall took place in 1989, she notes that to the younger generation, the event is ancient history.

“Life behind the Iron Curtain is being rapidly historicized,” she says. “If one visits a museum like the Getty Center and/or LACMA, [they can see] art of cultures that have been gone for hundreds of years,” she says. “At the Wende Museum, one finds artifacts of everyday life from no more than fifty years ago. You can still go to Germany and find some of these artifacts - such as radios, old magazines, and soldiers’ uniforms - hiding in an attic.”

Lopez says that her internship, which has included duties such as assisting with museum tours, gathering objects to be displayed, and helping to put together a website for an upcoming exhibition, has been “fun!”

“I went into the internship with no expectations, [but] full of a curiosity to learn,” she says. “I have had the opportunity to meet people who remember living in Berlin when the Wall was up; I found it fascinating to hear their stories. These kinds of links make history intriguing.”

Looking ahead to graduate or law school, Lopez says that her experiences as a history major at CSU Dominguez Hills and an intern at the Wende Museum have helped her to “think like a researcher.”

“This particular skill will make being a graduate student much easier,” she says. “The most exciting thing is knowing that you have contributed to the study of history. It makes me feel that I am a part of something.”

For more information about the history department at CSU Dominguez Hills, visit cah.csudh.edu/history.

- Joanie Harmon