



## Under the Sea...Biology, Philosophy, and Mentorship!

# Office of Pre-Health Professions Advising

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

**G. Thomas** Proverbs 22:6 King James Version (KJV) reads, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Take the time to visit Dr. Collado-Vides and you can't help but notice the picture of her mother that is proudly displayed. Her mother is dressed in a white lab coat in the style typical of the 1970's. I didn't ask her who took the picture but I do know that this woman inspired her daughter to follow her dreams and pursue a career in the sciences from a very young age. Today Dr. Ligia Collado-Vides speaks with us on her work at FIU, her philosophical view of what college students should gain from their college experience, and her concerns for the research she is doing on



the oceans of the world. Born in Guatemala, Dr. Collado-Vides told me she was raised with a concern and responsibility for her community. Her mother had a PhD in Epidemiology and her dad was a medical doctor with a PhD in Psychology. As political refugees they found themselves exiles from their home country of Guatemala, living in Mexico and even spending a year in France. At age 13, Dr. Collado-Vides was interested in nature. She began to consider a career in veterinary medicine. This interest was influenced by her relationship with her mother. She often went along with her mother who frequently gave talks on vaccines and other public health issues for the local community. She explained that she absolutely enjoyed working with her mom. She was given a copy of Odum's *The Fundamentals of*

*Ecology* by her mother. She says, "This book changed my life. It brought everything into perspective and I discovered that my passion was to understand how nature works."

Although she is now interested in science, her education has its foundations in the arts and humanities. She studied philosophy and ballet as a young person and these subjects had a lasting influence on her values. Recounting her experiences with philosophy and ballet she remarked that her high school was a venue for learning and expressing ideas. She explains, "Philosophy gave me the opportunity to discuss with others the great concerns of our time. How would our generation make the world better? It was a chance for me to explore and reason with those who had both opposing and similar ideas. It was a chance to grow." Continuing she says, "Ballet, on the other hand, was an alternative career to ex-

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### And Then There Were...THREE!

The Office of Pre-Health Professions Advising (OPHA) has grown and the services offered are expanding. We are delighted to welcome a new member to our team to help us continue to serve our students and provide careful attention to their success.

Mrs. Christina Callahan has joined the College of Arts & Sciences as an advisor for both Pre-Health students and Biological Sciences majors. She received her bachelor's degree in Psychology at the University of Florida and her master's degree in School & Guidance Counseling at Nova Southeastern University. She began her career at FIU

a year ago and notes that she was immediately drawn to the vibrant and diverse atmosphere which is unique to our University.

When asked about the best part of her job Mrs. Callahan's responses were, "It brings me great joy to be able to help guide Pre-Health students to achieving their very challenging goals. It's extremely rewarding to witness their successes in overcoming obstacles and ultimately receiving their acceptance letters." She also explained that she looks forward to meeting and working with students and emphasizes her open door policy. "Even if it's just to stop by to

say 'hello', I am always available to my students. I look forward to the opportunity to connect with each one and to help them meet their academic and career goals."

In her spare time, Mrs. Callahan enjoys reading contemporary fiction, relaxing at the beach, and spending quality time with her husband, new baby girl, Ashley, and her schnauzer-mix, Benji.

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## Me and My Shadow

**G. Thomas** The Office of Pre-Health Professions Advising has several goals. Each goal involves providing our students with better preparation for the professional programs they aspire to attend. We have recently been able to meet a new objective that brings into play resources from outside the University. Establishing a collaboration with Delta Dental Insurance and Boden PR enables our pre-dental students to shadow local professionals. Fulfilling the required shadowing component is often a challenge for pre-health students. In most cases, getting accepted into a program depends on the quality and depth of the shadowing experiences a student has been able to complete during their undergraduate career

*I nearly fell off my chair when I got the return call from Natalie Asorey of Boden PR. I recall that her exact words were, "We would like very much to help FIU establish a shadowing program for pre-dental students... are you still interested in providing this kind of*

*opportunity?" My answer was a resounding "Yes!" and we were off and running.*

Between FIU, Delta Dental, and Boden Public Relations this opportunity became a reality for eleven pre-dental students who began shadowing at seven dental locations throughout the Miami-Dade and Broward counties. Delta Dental Insurance is one of the



nation's largest dental insurance providers and has chosen to work with FIU to inaugurate a showcase plan as a means to give back to the communities they serve in South Florida and to promote the success of future professionals.

FIU participants were selected through a competitive application process at the end of the summer 2013. All of the students were members in the FIU Pre-

Dental Society, one of the most active clubs on campus. Participants ranged from sophomores to seniors, most will be participating in the 2014 application cycle and were very excited that Delta Dental, Boden PR, and FIU would be able to provide them the opportunity to gain this essential experience in their chosen career.

At a reception in the Graham Center Ballroom on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013 the Director of Public Affairs for Delta Dental, Elizabeth Risberg, welcomed our students into the program. Christina Ulloa, the President of FIU's Pre-Dental Society, and several officers were present to provide their support to the new participants. Ms. Ulloa observed, *"This is going to make a real difference for FIU and the Pre-Dental Society"*.

Our eleven participants (*Andres Cruz, Christina DeSouza, Maricel Godefroy, Maria Julca, Adolfo Sandoval, Christina Smith, Cindy Torres, Esteban Parada, Lorena Delgado, Margie Luque, Gabrielle Jones, Maria Ortiz, Lina Caicedo*) have just completed a semester shadowing. We are now looking forward to renewing our partnership with Delta Dental and Boden PR and selecting new participants for the fall term of 2014. Keep your eyes on our Facebook and Twitter pages for updates on the application and deadline for fall 2014.

## The Inside Scoop on the Application Process

**C. Chiou and J. Gonzalez** From our experiences both as Graduate Assistants for the Office of Pre-Health Advising and as undergraduates at FIU applying to medical school, we understand that the application process can be a daunting and confusing time in a student's life. We wrote this article in the hopes of taking some of the mystery out of the application process and showcasing a few tips that we have learned. We promise you that applying to professional school is a more manageable process than it might seem and with a little help from our office you will get you there!

**Letters of Recommendation:** *They are not written over night...* A common mistake students make when applying to professional schools is procrastinating, especially when requesting letters

from faculty. Keep in mind that *full-time* faculty members have hectic schedules and writing your letter is **not** their first priority. You should make your requests well in advance (this means at least 2 months before you actually need them!). I had a professor wait almost three months to decide she would not have time to write for me, after she had enthusiastically agreed in early spring. Luckily, I had enough time to ask another professor for a letter. Once your letter writers agree, you should draft a well-written but concise email to touch base a few weeks after your request. I would suggest giving these faculty members an updated resume with your employment and extracurricular activities to jog their memories about you and to help remind them of some specifics to write

about and to make your letter more personalized. Remember that during the summer term many professors are **not** on campus at all. In short, if you are asking near the summer term, expect to wait a lot longer, possibly until August!

**The Personal Statement:** *Possibly the most difficult page and a half you will ever write.* Another misstep is not getting started on your personal statement (PS) early enough. Here at the Office of Pre-Health Professions Advising, we review PSs submitted to our office **before March 1<sup>st</sup>**. This doesn't mean you should start on your PS in February! Start working as soon as possible to give yourself plenty of time to rewrite – you're going to need it! Several drafts

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and nearly three months after I started my PS was finally in a state where I was satisfied. The finished essay looked nothing like my original draft! I found it helpful to write a draft and come back to it a few weeks later; you'll be surprised how much different (and slightly embarrassing) your draft may seem through fresh eyes.

**Prioritizing:** *Don't wait until the deadlines!* Get your documents into the Office of Pre-Health Professions Advising (OPHA) early. As time consuming as the requirements to qualify for the Committee interview may seem, it is an excellent way to strengthen your application. In fact, many schools expect this Committee letter. Committee interviews begin as early as May and finish by October 15<sup>th</sup>. Never underestimate the perks of applying early! I submitted my application two days after the AMCAS site opened and it was verified within 3 weeks. Students who applied a month and a half into the cycle had to wait as much as 8 weeks for their applications to be processed by AMCAS! (Don't forget, after

you have completed a successful MCAT you are ready to submit your primary application!)

**The Wonders of a Journal:** *The diary that will help you get into medical school.* Keep a record of everything you have done throughout your undergraduate career. First, it will come in handy when you are ready to complete your central application. Central applications all ask for a list of your activities and expect you to provide details, including a description, the dates during which it was completed, the total hours spent (a rough estimate is ok), and contact information for verification purposes. Entering this information is much easier (and much more accurate) when you have it written in your resume or journal. Looking back over my resume, I was surprised at how many of my undergraduate activities I had completely forgotten about. Even details about job positions are easy to forget without some record!

**The Beast:** So..., you thought organic chemistry was hard? Meet the MCAT. The MCAT is a beast! But, it is a beast you can tame. Many people underestimate the difficulty of the exam – I

definitely did! I thought I could study a few days a week for 2 or 3 months and do amazingly well just as I had in my science courses. The MCAT is very different from the tests that you are accustomed to taking. Not only do you need a solid background but you need to know how to apply this knowledge while thinking critically. Plan to study for a few months with very limited distractions. Even before you start preparing for the science sections you should begin practicing for the Verbal Reasoning (VR) section. This is a section that students often struggle with and it is a difficult section in which to increase your score. English is not my first language and some of the vocabulary used in the passages was new to me, so I found the VR section to be quite a challenge. Many students forget that your VR section score is just as important as that for your science sections. You should plan to dedicate the same amount of time to it in order to do well. To begin preparing, start reading news articles, in journals such as the Economist, and complete a few MCAT Verbal passages every day. For the science sections, take advantage of

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## My First Year, Laura Florez

**C. Callahan** While most pre-med students have an idea of what they believe they can expect when they start medical school, for most, the ins-and-outs of medical school remain a mystery. In an attempt to shed some light on what students can anticipate during



their first semester, I contacted Laura Florez, a recent graduate and first year medical student at FIU. I spoke with Ms. Florez on her lunch break, one of the few moments that she had available to chat during her busy day. Our discussion offers a small glimpse into the life of a medical school student as well as a few tips on how to make the most of your time during your undergraduate years.

**Q:** How many hours a week are you dedicating to studying?

**A:** *My classes are from 8AM – 12 PM, Monday through Friday. I study an average of 6-8 hours a day, usually more than that on the weekends since I don't have class on those days.*

**Q:** What about medical school met your expectations? What surprised you?

**A:** *Going into medical school, I was expecting a challenge. I knew I was going to have to put in a lot of work at a very high level of intensity, so that aspect did not come as a surprise to me. I have been happily surprised at the amount of clinical practice that I've already been able to experience. I had imagined that as a first year medical student most of my time would be spent reading medical texts. Although I've dedicated a lot of time to studying and reading, I've also spent a large portion of my time seeing patients. Additionally, I was surprised at how close I have become to my classmates – they are my biggest supporters! We work together, study together and collaborate on all as-*

*pects of school.*

**Q:** What do you know now that you wish you had known as an undergraduate student?

**A:** *The amount of time management skill that goes into being successful in medical school is enormous. I wish I had known what to expect in terms of the day-to-day surroundings of a medical school, so that I could have been more prepared to undertake the tasks that lay ahead. I would love to have shadowed a medical student as an undergraduate student. It would be great if students could participate in some kind of program where they could all shadow a medical student for a day.*

**Q:** What is one aspect of your time at FIU that most prepared you for medical school?

**A:** *I would say what prepared me the most was my involvement in pre-med student organizations. The pre-med organizations often brought speakers in to talk to students. Hearing*

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## Doctors of Tomorrow



The Florida International University Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine (FIU HWCOC) Office of Student Affairs offers a great week of summer preparation to students planning to apply to medical school. Participating students spend 5 days in a residential program which

includes activities that enrich current academic abilities, introduce them to learning-skill development, communication, counseling techniques, as well as build character and examine important personal issues associated with their career development. The main focus is to help students become more competitive applicants for medical school.

For the summer of 2014, FIU will be accepting applications from students who are planning to apply to medical school in 2015 and expect to matriculate in August of 2016. Of course, the requirements of the program are competitive. Students must have a minimum GPA of 3.0 and students must have completed the 2-semester courses in Biology and Chemistry required of all pre-medical applicants.

Participants have reported that

this program is a great way to see FIU HWCOC up close. It gives you a perspective of how things work at FIU HWCOC.

Spending a week in FIU's medical school is a great way to strengthen your preparation to be a strong medical school applicant!

Information on the program is available directly from the FIU HWCOC.

- Visit <https://dot.medicine.fiu.edu> for more information and the application form.

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plore. I was one of the few students selected to try out for the National Ballet Troop in Mexico." When she arrived for the audition, sitting on the steps outside the auditorium she decided that ballet was not the right choice for her and without further hesitation walked away without ever trying out. Of course, she still enjoys ballet but since then she has become a parent with many other commitments and responsibilities. She finds that she enjoys ballet as a beautiful opportunity to work out and to remain fit while maintaining a very busy schedule.

She says, "I am a biologist. Biology can answer some fundamental questions of philosophy." She explained that her professors in college allowed her to volunteer in their labs. She earned her Master's in Marine Sciences: Biological and Fishery Oceanography and then a PhD in Biology at the National University of Mexico, in Mexico City. Undergraduate research enabled her to learn about the different ecosystems in Mexico, the deserts of Sinaloa and Durango, the mountains of Puebla, the rain forest, the bat caves of Veracruz, and the beautiful coral reefs of the Mexican Caribbean south of Cancun. She explained, "Professors wanted us to see how things work in real environments." On top of these diverse experiences, travelling around the world to Vancouver, British Columbia in

Canada, and then in Seattle Washington during her early career years were the most, scientifically and culturally important experiences she could have. "I highly recommend traveling to any FIU student, if they want to take from life all it can offer. The world is there to be discovered through the eyes of every single student." She observes that during her early career, "I basically went wherever the algae took me". Her research today is enabling us to see what is happening to the oceans of the planet. As she works with FIU students, she wants them to trust in their ability to critically think and to have greater freedom to search for answers. "Students need to be empowered to invent new opportunities. We as professors should show them how to be free with their ideas. If students come to the University simply because it is a way to find a job then they are missing out on the greatest part of this experience, the expression and tolerance of ideas."

Undergraduate students working in her lab need to have a personal commitment to the work they are doing. Becoming involved as an undergraduate and working in her lab is as simple as sending an email. This can lead to an interview and when spots are open, a chance to participate. Most of the students will get an ample amount of time to work with macroalgae and attend scientific meetings

where they will present the results of their own research activities.

Dr. Collado-Vides' story is a fascinating one and her commitment to science has global implications. I wondered about how she sees her research as a tool to guide environmental policy. She responded, "As we become conscious that we live in a new reality, the first step is that we urgently need to adapt to and change our interaction with nature. We need to help our students to become nature-oriented persons. We are also going to have to see what the next generation comes up with. There is so much that we are just now starting to understand. Noticing the problem is the first step in the fix. Because of this students at FIU need to transcend their comfort zones and reach out to a community that will recognize their abilities and talents. Yes it is difficult because it will also involve a cultural change but it is necessary for our country to witness what FIU students have to offer."

As we concluded our conversation, I was struck with how much she believes in the power of students. I encourage any student to get to know her. She is someone on campus you must meet. Bring your thinking caps...she may not always give you the answer but she will inspire you to find one of your own!

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from current medical students and physicians was very encouraging when I found myself struggling and losing sight of my goal. Participation in these organizations was also a great way to connect with physicians willing to have students shadow in their practices.

**Q: How do you manage your time as a medical student?**

**A:** Proper time management is pivotal to your success as a medical student. Every week I put together an agenda of what it is I need to accomplish. I make sure to take breaks so that I don't burn out, and I always make time for relaxation. In my case, exercising is a part of my daily schedule. It acts as a stress reliever and leaves me refreshed and ready to conquer all the challenges that go along with medical school.

**Q: What undergraduate level courses have been the most relevant to you in medical school?**

**A:** The two courses I feel have helped me the most coming into medical school were Genetics and Biochemistry. A couple of the courses I'm taking this semester have required that I apply the knowledge that I picked up in those classes. In addition to helping me in medical school, they were very helpful to my performance on the MCAT.

**Q: Is there anything else you would like to tell students?**

**A:** I would tell students to stay focused on their goals. It's very easy to lose sight of why you want to become a physician in the first place; when you're juggling a full course load, shadowing a doctor, participating in research and volunteering it is sometimes not easy to remember why you are doing all of these things, especially when your friends aren't so busy!

Medical school is a very demanding and challenging time in a person's life. As a pre-med it is important to remember that in order to be successful you need to achieve that ideal balance of personal, professional, and academic commitments. Ms. Florez recommended, students should take full advantages of the services offered to them at FIU. The Office of Pre-Health

Professions Advising located in DM-331A. For students on the BBC campus you can obtain an appt. in AC1-180.

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the many inexpensive or free resources available. Websites, such as [mcat-review.org](http://mcat-review.org), cover every topic on the MCAT content outline. **Khan Academy** has a section now completely devoted to the MCAT, and other science sections, such as Human Biology, which are useful for obtaining a strong intuitive grasp of concepts. **Chad's Videos** ([coursesaver.com](http://coursesaver.com)) is a comprehensive tool that is equivalent to prep-course lectures for a small fraction of the price. If you have long commutes, you may wish to consider investing in **ExamCrackers Audio Osmosis** which you can listen to in the car. Also, make sure that you are mixing your review of topics. For my biology review I used the Princeton Review book and found it to be excellent! The most effective schedule should include days that alternate subjects. A trick to keep material fresh is to do end-of-chapter practice problems for a subject on the following day. Taking full-length exams is also very important for performing well. It helps you to build endurance. I took all of the practice exams offered by the AAMC (Kaplan also has great exams). If you're taking the MCAT after March 1 of 2015, it will be 2 hours longer than the current version. It will also have a section on Human Behavior that tests concepts in psychology and sociology- so make sure you buy up-to-date preparation materials. Success on these admission exams is based on your ability and commitment to prepare well.

**Secondaries:** Life as a full-time author. You submitted your AMCAS so now you think it is time to relax while your application is verified, right? Wrong! Trust me, that's what I thought too, until I received ten secondary applications on the same day! Do the math. I had just applied to over ten medical schools and each one wanted me to write about five essays - that's almost fifty essays! It is very like-

ly you will receive them ALL in a brief interval, right after your application is verified. Although most of these essays are relatively short, they add up! To top it off, you should follow the 'golden rule' and have your secondaries submitted no more than two weeks after they are sent to you. The solution to this problem is to start on your secondary application essays even before you receive them. I regretted having taken this advice lightly when it came time to start writing. Don't make the same mistake! Find the essay prompts for each school in advance by searching for the schools' current year or last year's thread on [studentdoctor.net](http://studentdoctor.net) (BEWARE: not everything you read on this site is absolutely true!). During the time your primary application is being verified, or even before, you can start writing your essays, have them edited, and be one step ahead of the game.

**Interviews:** Time to strut your stuff! Who do you think is going to cheer for you if you don't lead the squad! Personally, I get really nervous during interviews. I have found this to be true during interviews for jobs and even volunteering positions. I knew it would be the same, (actually worse), for medical school interviews. I managed to overcome my nerves by building my self-confidence. I did this by preparing and practicing. How should you prepare for interviews? Re-read your AMCAS application and the secondary essays you sent the school. These are the obvious topics for discussion. There are many frequently asked questions and you should have an idea of what you want to say in response to these. E.g. Why do you want to be a doctor? Tell me about yourself? It can be helpful to look on websites and in books to help you organize your thoughts and get a feel for the types of questions you may be asked. I read "How to Ace Your Medical School Interviews" by Sal Ektmi. Be sure to stay up-to-date with the current news, particularly if it relates to healthcare. You will also want to consider your body language and vocabulary. I have a very bad habit of slouching in my chair and I use the word 'like' often when I am speaking. These were details that I had to work on very hard to improve. I asked a number of different people to inter-

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# FIU Pre-Health Professions Organizations

[prehealthadvise.fiu.edu/student-societies/](http://prehealthadvise.fiu.edu/student-societies/)

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view me for practice, and they provided me with some great feedback. You can also set up some mock interviews with FIU's Career Services. The most helpful thing I did was reviewing and formulating answers to the questions that had been asked by the schools' interviewers in the past! Where can you find these questions? They are posted on [studentdoctor.net/schools](http://studentdoctor.net/schools)! Click on the interview feedback number then scroll down and click on the questions tab. Start prepping, remember that the more you practice the more confident and less nervous you will be. Also, get a good night's rest before the big day, and above all be yourself! Memorized responses will be obvious; so know what you want to say and be comfortable enough with your responses to answer in a normal conversation!

Information is power! Although these categories are going to help you prepare, there is one more tool that will help you to be successful with your pre-health application. Coming to the OPHA's workshops and speaking with our advisors will also increase your chances for successful submission. As two students currently admitted to medical school, we were fortunate to be graduate assistants in the office. We recommend that you come up and visit early and often.

WEB: [Prehealthadvise.fiu.edu](http://Prehealthadvise.fiu.edu)

 Groups: [FIU.Pre.Health.Advising](https://www.facebook.com/PreHealthFIU)

 [PreHealthFIU](https://twitter.com/PreHealthFIU)

 [PreHealthFIU](https://www.instagram.com/PreHealthFIU)



HOSA



PHI DELTA EPSILON



PRE-DENTAL



AMSA



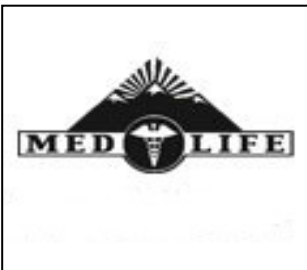
AED



MEDS



PRE-VETERINARY



MED LIFE



PRE-PHARMACY



FOSA



CURE



M.A.P.S.

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