



Name: Mariela Rodriguez

Host Organization: Gecko's Hospitality Group

Internship Role: Marketing Intern

School/Major: University of South Florida - Integrated Public Relations & Advertising

Tell us about yourself (Background, interests, career goals): I was born and raised in Palmetto, Florida, and I am currently a senior at the University of South Florida pursuing a degree in Public Relations and Advertising. Writing has always been one of my greatest passions, and that passion ultimately led me to the communications and marketing field.

As a bilingual communicator, I am passionate about connecting with diverse audiences and helping organizations share their stories through effective communication. After graduation, I hope to gain valuable experience in the public relations industry, grow my professional network, and one day launch my own PR firm. Outside of school and work, I enjoy staying active through fitness and continuously looking for opportunities to learn and grow both personally and professionally.

What made you interested in the InternConnect Program?

I discovered the InternConnect Program online and was immediately interested because it offered a unique opportunity to connect with other students and young professionals in the Sarasota-Bradenton area. As someone who hopes to build a career in this community, I saw it as a great way to expand my network, learn from local leaders, and gain a better understanding of the region's professional landscape.

What are your main responsibilities?

My responsibilities this summer include managing social media content, writing public relations materials, and assisting with various marketing initiatives. Through these projects, I have the opportunity to support brand communication efforts while gaining hands-on experience in the field.

What's one skill you're hoping to develop or strengthen this summer?

I hope to strengthen my public relations and media writing skills this summer. One of my goals is to have a piece of my writing published, which would be an exciting milestone and valuable experience as I begin building my professional portfolio and preparing for a career in public relations.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?

The best piece of advice I have ever received is, "You deserve to be here. Your hard work has proven that you are more than capable, so own it." Those words came from an educator who had a significant impact on my academic journey and encouraged me to believe in myself. It is a reminder I carry with me whenever I face new challenges or opportunities.

What advice would you give to someone applying for this internship?

My advice would be to make the most of your time and explore any career opportunities that interest you. Finding an internship can be difficult, so once you're given the opportunity, take initiative, ask questions, and get involved. The more effort you put into the experience, the more you'll gain from it.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

In five years, I hope to be working in a public relations role where I can continue learning, growing, and making meaningful contributions to the organizations I serve. I would like to have gained valuable industry experience, built a strong professional network, and be taking steps toward my long-term goal of opening my own PR firm.