A Week in the Life of an iSchool Student

My name is Nikita, and I am a second year CRO student at the Faculty of Information (iSchool). As a CRO (Concurrent Registration Option) student I am currently working towards a Master of Information with a concentration in Archives and Records Management as well as a Master of Museum Studies, to be completed over 3 years. As a 2nd year student in a three year program I already feel like an old hat in terms of balancing school, work and everyday life. For those of you considering coming to the iSchool or who have already applied to the MI, MMSt or CRO programs, maybe a little perspective into the daily life of an iSchool student will relieve any doubts or concerns you may still have.

I should also provide a brief disclaimer in terms of my schedule this semester. You will note when looking at my schedule that I am registered in 5 instead of 4 courses. 4 courses are a full course load at the iSchool and it is highly recommended that students don’t overload, as it can be extremely challenging, even for those who are extremely well organized.

This winter, I have classes 4 days a week, although other students are able to schedule classes that allow them to attend class from 2-4 days a week. Classes are scheduled in 1 of 3 timeslots every day: 9am-12pm; 1-4pm; and 6:30-9:30pm.

**Monday**

Monday morning I generally let myself sleep in (a wonderful luxury, although by sleep in I usually mean till 8:00 or 9:00am) unless there are some readings I have left to do for my evening class, or some other assignment due later in the week. Around 1:00pm I head to school for my 2:00-5:00pm work-study shift as an iSchool ambassador. At 5:00pm I grab dinner, usually with other classmates on campus and then head to class.

In my Ethics, Leadership and Management course, we generally start the class with a hour long lecture, discussing topics of museum ethics and contemporary approaches to leadership and management as well as the external environments that shape and challenge the museum and the role stakeholders and funders. In the second half of the class we discuss the case study assigned as part of the weekly readings, reflecting on what we examined during lectures, and relating it to the other readings assigned for the week, which include reports and museum management research that supplement the case studies.

**Tuesday**

Tuesday mornings I work at the iSchool from 10-1pm as part of my work-study position. Afternoons are devoted to errands, readings and assignments due that week. Alternatively many of the classes also require additional hours outside of class time devoted to visiting museums in the area, conducting case studies, or working with collections as part of a 3 week practicum. Tuesday afternoons provide an ideal time for me to complete these course related tasks while I am already on campus. For example, along with two of my classmates, I visited the Art Gallery of Ontario to discuss public programs (e.g. volunteer led tours) with the Coordinator of Information Guides, in order to compose a case report for our Public Programs & Education course.

Once in a while, if my coursework/readings aren’t too demanding, I may join some friends and go see a movie.
Wednesday

Arguably, Wednesday is my most intense day as I have both a morning and an afternoon class. Mornings are spent in my Collections Management class. Once again the first hour of class is generally devoted to lecture, discussing both historic and contemporary management practices, as well as the theory of collections management. Lectures tend to be open with student involvement. The second half of the class involves practicing safe handling techniques, using the in-house teaching collection. We may also practice filing in various documents (accession records, object tags, conservation assessment forms) using either items brought from home, or those belonging to the teaching collections. As mentioned above the class also includes a 3 week practicum in which students in groups are assigned to work with various collections located on campus, working with the collections to complete an assigned task. This work is done outside of class in 2-3 hour shifts at least once a week, providing us with practical hands on experience working with various types of collections.

After a brief lunch I then head to my Issues in Cultural Policy course. Class tends to begin by groups of students (3-4) presenting on the readings assigned for that week, presenting the key ideas and themes as they relate to the theme for the class that week. This 20 minute presentation is then followed by an additional 30-40 minutes of class discussion based on the questions that the group for that week have compiled for the class. The second half of the class is lecture based, going more in depth into the readings, often with additional examples of the issues being discussed.

Wednesday evenings I complete any additional readings I have for the week (particularly for my Thursday class), and maybe do some pilates or go for walk. Alternatively Wednesday evenings may include an iSkills course taken through the Inforum, for example on Framing & Matting. iSkills workshops are one way that iSchool students develop, enhance, and refine their research, professional, and technical knowledge. Wednesday evenings are also occasionally spent enjoying the free admission hours (6:00-8:30pm) at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Thursday

Thursday mornings I generally try to leave open, either for meeting up with groups for various projects, or to complete hours required for my Collections Management course working with the collection assigned to my group. After lunch I then head to my Public Programs & Education course, where we discuss the theory and practice behind the development and management of interpretive programming and education. As part of the course we are required to complete two case studies, which include visiting and observing one education program, and one public program at different institutions in the city.

Thursday evenings will generally be spent preparing for my Friday class, or getting ahead on other work/readings before the weekend.

Friday

Six Fridays this semester I am in my Museum Environments course from 9:00am-5:00pm. The course is an introduction to preventive conservation, where students partner with an institution to conduct a survey of their institutions collections, including: identifying the factors that affect the collections;
developing strategies to mitigate identified factors; and evaluating the conservation requirements for the collections with an understanding of the materials present.

As the course only runs 6 weeks, alternative Fridays I tend to spend working on assignments or getting readings done for the following week, as well as going grocery shopping or doing laundry. Even with work and class, on Friday nights I typically will get together with some friends and go out for dinner or a drink, to decompress from the week.

I should note that although I have opted out of the internship offered to MMS students in the summer between their first and second year, the winter course in which students enroll to participate in this program takes place on Fridays. This course helps students identify the type of internship they are interested in according to their academic interests and future career goals, as well as assists students in contacting organizations and setting up their internship for the 12-week placement which takes place over the summer.

**Saturday**

One Saturday every month starting in October I work at the iSchool from 9:00am-4:00pm at one of our information sessions for prospective students. On most Saturdays, if it is nice out, I try to get out and enjoy a bit of fresh air, whether running errands, or exploring different neighbourhoods. Saturdays I also try to get a jump on my readings for the following week or on upcoming papers and assignments. Some Saturdays are spent in the Inforum working on projects, or having a meeting to complete group assignments.

**Sunday**

Like most people I typically try to sleep in on Sunday mornings, more so than on Monday. Sunday's are popular brunch days and I may meet up with my family or a couple friends and try out a new place for brunch. Sunday afternoons I typically try to get my readings for Monday and Wednesday morning done, so I am all ready to start the next week.