

Jackson Maxfield Brown

Personal Statement

I am passionate about civic technology and its wide ranging applications in information access, utilities and infrastructure, public health, and more. I have seen first hand how public interest technology development brings together a diverse set of skills and values to form incredible pieces of work. And at each point in my career, I have specifically looked for opportunities that would further my understanding of how technology can be used for good in the public sector.

Informatics and civic technology share the philosophy that technology should be created by an interdisciplinary team to improve the lives of each member of a community. My original interest in Informatics arose from a desire to understand how data visualization methodologies can be used to better inform decision making processes. However I credit the growth in my desire to understand public interest technology to the undergraduate Informatics capstone projects.

My capstone developed a prototype application for the Washington Road Usage Charge - a proposal to replace taxes on fuel purchases with a more equitable pay-per-mile system. From this work, I became fascinated in understanding how technology can shape an individual's interactions with a government.

I proceeded to work with Prof. Nicholas Weber where I studied government transparency, software sustainability, and began to understand the importance of open collaboration in the development of civic technology. Working as a Research Engineer at the Allen Institute for Cell Science, I grew my expertise in open source software and infrastructure development and created systems and tools utilized by teams internal and external to the Allen Institute. I currently work as a Data Engineer at Numina, a startup utilizing IoT infrastructures to measure multi-modal use of public space, where I aim to understand how civic technology can be used for data-driven equitable urban planning.

The UW Information School produces the best work in Information Science and public interest technology. I have a strong desire to return to the UW iSchool for my PhD to not only conduct my own research in civic technology, but additionally, contribute back to the program that provided me with so many opportunities to begin with. And in completion of my PhD, I plan to continue researching and creating technology that enables every member of a community the opportunity to participate in open, collaborative, governance.