

# Independent Study Cover Letter

For Winter Quarter 2013, I hope to replace my requirement of taking Journalism 320 — Interactive News with an independent study on interactive data visualization that will further my skills better than the standard Interactive News course.

For the past two years, I have been building my skills as an interactive web developer in the field of journalism. I have served as the interactive editor of *North by Northwestern* for over a year, and currently, I am the webmaster of the site. This requires me to have expert familiarity with not only HTML, CSS, and JavaScript — the primary languages that Interactive News teaches — but also more advanced programming languages such as Python and SQL.

Furthermore, I developed these skills under the tutelage of professional news applications teams during my internship with the *Chicago Tribune* News Applications Team as well as working with the Knight News Innovation Lab. Much of the Interactive News syllabus teaches the fundamentals of HTML, CSS, and JavaScript, something I have already mastered not only through my direct experience with the languages but also through equivalent courses in the Computer Science department (EECS 130, EECS 330) and in Medill itself (Innovations in Journalism and Technology, Advanced Interactive and Design). I received an A in each of these classes.

But I want to expand my skills in a new direction. My learning goal for the quarter is better understand how to tell stories through data. I want to explore data gathering, analysis and presentation.

To do so I've crafted an independent study that will help me achieve those goals and learn new skills. I have found that, while I have developed good web development skills, I have never used them to do my *own* storytelling. That, ultimately, is the goal of this independent study. I hope to produce a comprehensive, engaging data presentation that tells an original story. The three main skills I plan on learning are:

1. Programmatically perform statistical analysis on a set of data using R or similar tool.
2. Develop data visualizations with d3.js or a similar tool.
3. Design engaging presentations that are both attractive and useful for narrative storytelling.

This independent study, through extensive reading and direct application, attempts to teach me these skills by seeing the development of a large-scale data project from beginning to end, from organizing the dataset, to finding a story within the dataset, to developing and designing the final presentation of the dataset. By the end of the quarter, I hope to have connected my traditional journalism education — my news judgment, storytelling principles, and journalistic ethos — with my more modern skills — web development, design, and workflow. Please see the attached syllabus for information on particular readings and a timeline on the work to be completed. Feel free to contact me for more information about the proposal.

Thank you,  
Tyler Fisher