

To Dr. Jane Daquin and Dr. Andrea Underhill:

Hello! My name is Chris (they/he), and I am currently a math sophomore at University of Illinois Springfield. I want to briefly highlight some aspects about my application in this cover letter, given my untraditional path into academia.

Firstly, I am a college re-entry student and career transitioner! My first bachelors was in art history, and my first career as an art analyst involved supporting under-represented artistic narratives (I focused mostly on LGBTQ+ artists). When looking for better art classifiers, I “accidentally” discovered machine learning/AI and instantly fell in love. Since then, I’ve been trying to make a career transition into AI research—particularly at the intersection of interpretability and regulation—because I am both fascinated by the technology’s potential for good and committed to my original drive for advocacy (only now through AI instead of art).

Come 2020, I left the art market to pursue a self-funded and self-directed journey in AI. While it was difficult making the transition, I open-mindedly pursued any and all AI opportunities that were available to me at the time, leading to the large variety of engagements seen on my CV. Likewise, as an art historian who knew little math, I promised myself that I would never let the excuse “I’m not a math person” hold me back, and thus, I decided to enroll in formal mathematics courses to further improve my quantitative foundations.

While my profile is untraditionally varied between a dayjob, school, and part-time research projects, I want to confirm that my interests have always been aimed at an academic career in AI interpretability, ethics, and regulation. This is also why I am so excited for the Language Evolution project with Prof. Daquin, as it not only involves the NLP technology I am most excited and knowledgeable about, but also aims it a moral cause that I think is heavily overlooked in industry and policy. I am eager to pursue academic projects that better protect under-privileged populations, and I can think of no better project and mentor than the one with Prof. Jane Daquin!

Thank you!

Christopher Denq