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Directed Study Takeaways

As a student studying English literature and computer science, I have recently begun to seek out ways in which I can “integrate” my two fields together. A lot of my work in this regard has been either independent or borne out as a final project: devising a sentiment analysis tool, generating text via a Markov chain, or quite simply choosing to enroll in a natural language processing course.

I enjoy working with technology to retrieve information that may be otherwise hard to uncover, but also to create something of value for a larger audience. I wonder what sort of role the combination of the two might play in the publishing sector and am eager to find out.

I walked into Maggie Mulvihill’s office during the fall 2015 semester and asked if it was possible to take on a directed study under her supervision. I started out college as an English major and have always loved writing. As a computer scientist, though, I knew that technology could only serve to inform my study. Professor Mulvihill believed in this idea as well.

This semester was eye-opening for me because I learned how to apply my knowledge to real-world data as opposed to data made available to me for the purpose of completing a homework assignment. I first inputted all information for our criminal case reversals project into an Excel spreadsheet. Initial patterns were seen via pivot tables.

For the final culmination of my term, I built a model of this database from start to finish. I had previously enrolled in a databases class at Northeastern University and learned about the theory behind database design. I utilized my knowledge about relational databases while constructing our tables. Eventually, I was able to generate a portable script. This will allow anyone who has access to it to generate the database itself while preserving all its features.

I am extremely proud of my work and all that I have learned. I am excited to further my studies at Columbia University, learning more about the intersectionality between writing in general and writing code.