

To whom it may concern,

I fondly remember the first time a program I had written for my introductory Java class successfully compiled. It was more satisfying than landing several front-page bylines in the Arizona Republic newspaper where I was an intern reporter for about a year. I likely wrote several hundred, mostly crime-related news stories while there, and before long, I had been sort of granted my own beat covering Phoenix cold cases. Doing so eventually led to my first data-oriented piece and left me with a soft spot for crime statistics.

I had always known computers could do more than facilitate Google searches and provide high-speed access to memes, but my awareness of their impact on journalism was heightened when I took a data-reporting class at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Steve Doig teaches the class, but there was a brief time when that almost wasn't the case. He was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, which is statistically a death-sentence in most cases. He regularly attends the Investigative Reporters and Editors' NICAR conferences, but was unable to last year and sent me in his place. He has recovered, thankfully, and can keep teaching future data-journalists.

His class is incredibly thorough for a journalism course, but there aren't any other data-specific classes at Cronkite, so I sought them elsewhere at ASU to supplement my new interest. I've become proficient in Java, R and Unix, the latter being incredibly useful and frankly, I'm surprised more journalists don't take advantage of it. For example, it could have been used to search government documents obtained by the Tampa Bay Times and Sarasota Herald-Tribune for their investigation into Florida's mental hospitals. Unix could have been used to search those records for specific fields, parsed them when necessary, and formatted them into CSV files operable in R or Excel for analysis. That's assuming the Times was looking for spreadsheet information. If the records were formatted analogously, a few Unix scripts using awk and sed commands could have helped to streamline the process of sifting through so many records.

I'll be taking my first web-development class next semester, though I've taught myself enough HTML and CSS to build my website and am learning how to automate HTML using the terminal. I've studied geographic information science, taken several statistics courses and have been working with the Arizona Center for Investigative Reporting for the past few months to keep honing my writing skills by penning some data-driven stories of my own.

I'm no professional programmer, genius statistician or expert journalist, but I'm taking steps to becoming some combination of the three, and I aspire to opportunities in which I would have the pleasure and fortune to learn and work with people I admire and regard as the best in the industry.

Sincerely,
Justin Price