IAPC

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So far, I have been reasonably happy with the course of my education at NYU. Your happiness is not at issue. Just drop that first sentence. I came to NYU to study Applied Math and Cybersecurity, because NYU is the institution with the strongest cybersecurity and applied math programs and, even more specifically, Gallatin was the only place within NYU that would allow me to pursue both simultaneously. To date, I have taken the calculus sequence, Linear Algebra, Discrete Math, Chaos and Dynamical Systems, Computer Science 101, Data Structures, and Computer Systems Organization. I plan to continue next semester taking Real Analysis, Ordinary Differential Equations, Offensive Security, and Network Security.

My interest in these subjects is motivated by my ambition to become an investigative cyberwar journalist (I admit, however, that my taking a lot of the higher-level math is for fun). It would be possible, I suppose, to do this without a technical grounding in cybersecurity, but it seems to me that the primary reason stories falling under the purview of this subject are so opaque is that often the writers covering them don’t have any technical background. I want to know what I’m writing about, so I can provide clear explanations for complex topics. I want to make cyberwarfare approachable to the layperson without having to use fuzzy terms like “back-door.”

The technical aspect of my education is undeniably important. However, there is a nascent legal and political dimension to cyberwarfare that I should understand as well. To that end, I have taken a class this semester taught by Sarah Leonard on Media in the Age of Surveillance. Hopefully, given enough persistence, I’ll be able to audit a course on Cyber Law at the Law School in the Fall. I have also taken a few courses on politics and comparative literature, which, surprisingly, offer a good framework with which to analyze the cultural implications of any international conflict, including cyberconflict. I have not yet made a decision on whether or not to pursue a minor in political philosophy, however, it is becoming more and more clear that the intellectual tools I’d gain from one would be indispensable.

How am I then getting the training I need to be an investigative journalist? Luckily, I have had the privilege to work as a research assistant for the New York Review of Books writer Joshua Jelly-Schapiro. I have been working on his new book project, a biography of long time cult investigator David Sullivan. This work has given me a rigorous training in investigative research and also has exposed me to the standards of the best publications – the Review, of course, but also Harper’s, the New Yorker etc.

I should note, however, that the objective of becoming an investigative cyberwar journalist is a long-term one. I recognize that expertise comes at a considerable time cost. I hope first to get a masters in Applied Math at the Courant Institute and then to work at a cybersecurity research firm for some years before perhaps completing a PhD, then entirely devoting my attention to journalism. Of course, though, it will be essential that I continue writing throughout all of this.

Before I graduate, I would like to complete the following courses (other than those mentioned for next semester): algebra, complex algebra, numerical analysis, topography, probability and statistics, Partial Differential Equations, Introduction to Cryptography, Applied Cryptography Secure Systems Engineering, Application Security, Penetration Testing and Vulnerability Analysis, Information Systems Security Engineering and Management.

To supplement my education, I plan on a pursuing a mixture of internships on cybersecurity teams (primarily at risk analysis firms or public institutions like the DOJ), research projects in math or computer science, and editorial apprenticeships either with particular writers or in more formal programs at respected magazines or newspapers. The goal is to develop a strong foundation in practical cybersecurity as well as investigative journalism.