The registration process may have just become the easiest part of a student's independent research project.

In the past, students voiced concerns about the difficulties of registering for independent studies, and found the forms confusing. In order to streamline the registration process for students and faculty, CHC recently launched a new student portal, CHC PATHS. The portal replaces printed forms, and helps makes the proposal a dialogue among students, faculty sponsors, and CHC.

Kendra Lastowka ’16 used CHC PATHS as a way to judge her progress. A senior kinesiology major and CHC peer advisor, she used the portal to register for part two of KIN499. Lastowka is using her thesis to explore if and how motor control improves with sleep. During the first semester of her research Lastowka worked with Professor Julia Choi to conduct test studies to define the scope of her research and examined its practical applications.

“This first semester is a lot of trial and error,” said Lastowka. By performing these mini-trials, Lastowka has been able to expand upon and understand the method section of her proposal, and how to structure and define the procedure for part two of her honors thesis. She also
spent time during the first semester informing herself of the significance/importance of her research. “One population that could be helped by this study is stroke victims,” said Lastowka. Using CHC PATHS as a guideline, Lastowka worked her way through each section of the proposal and used the part one semester to define and narrow the scope of her investigation. “I really enjoyed working with CHC PATHS; it’s quick, easy to understand the process, and a good way to talk through the proposal,” she said.

Anubhab Haldar ’18 took advantage of CHC PATHS to discuss his proposal with his faculty sponsor. A sophomore astronomy and physics major, Haldar applied for an independent study to continue his work with Professor Kevin Kittilstved on multifunctional inorganics materials chemistry. The lab explores the physical properties of perovskites (crystallized minerals) with metal ions for a wide range of applications, like solar energy conversion. Haldar compares his work to masonry – “working in the lab is like being a brick mason, learning how these substances are synthesized. The next step is to be the architect, using these materials to do something.” In addition to allowing Haldar the opportunity to participate in groundbreaking research related to his interests, the independent study gives him hands-on experience for working in a lab.

“Registering for an independent study has been a great way to learn the why and how of research, and learning the basics of lab work. The system makes it that much more convenient for me and for my advisor,” Haldar added. In registering for an independent study through CHC PATHS, Haldar was able to connect with his advisor and develop a proposal that integrated his applied experience in the lab with academic study in a way that would be beneficial to both himself and the intended research goals of the lab.

Commonwealth Honors College offers students the opportunity to pursue academic interests and engage in research through Independent Studies, or the Honors Thesis or Project. CHC PATHS streamlines the registration process for these courses by clearly defining the steps for approval. In addition, faculty sponsors can review and approve these honors proposals directly in the portal, allowing students to make edits in a timely manner. Students can access CHC PATHS at honors.umass.edu/chc-paths or through the Forms and Documents page of the CHC website. Forms are accepted through the end of the Add/Drop period, but students should allow for time for the review and registration process.

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