

Writing Assignment #2: Narrative Essay

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I remember the year 2019 like it was yesterday. I was a Junior at Lancaster High School just going through the motions of school and being extremely eager to just graduate and be done. At this time, I had no intention of continuing my education as I would constantly hear about how I would have to do another four years all while the curriculum and material being harder than it was in high school. I was an above-average student, doing a little more than the average student by taking dual enrollment courses and participating in multiple extracurricular activities but never more than that. One class helped me gain an understanding of what I may want to do after graduating high school.

The class that influenced my decision was Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFJROTC) and I took that class all 4 years of high school. The class had two instructors instead of one and their names were Sgt. Doug French and Col. Ronald McManus. The two instructors were retired Air Force so you could assume that their primary goal was to try to get students to enlist in the Air Force. There was one day during my junior year while in AFJROTC where we talked about what we had in mind in terms of after-graduation plans and due to me not wanting to continue with school, going into the Air Force was at the top of the list. This was at the top because the instructors had told me about how I could enlist at a higher rank than others because I did four years of JROTC, and this drew my interest. Later in the year, before COVID, Sgt. French and I had a private conversation because he and I were close, and he was truly interested in knowing what my plans were after high school. During this conversation, he of course pitched the Air Force idea to me but since he knew that I didn't plan on continuing my education he told me about different careers within the Air Force that I could investigate. While he mentioned multiple careers there was one that stuck out to me and changed my entire perspective regarding my future.

Among the different careers that he mentioned to me, one of them was cybersecurity. At the time, cybersecurity was still on the brink of careers and was a fresh field in terms of educating people on it. Once I heard about cybersecurity and did my own research, I knew right away that that is what I wanted to do but there was another question that I had to ask myself. This question was do I pursue it through the Air Force or continue my education and pursue it through college? As I mentioned earlier, I initially had no intentions of continuing school but after evaluating both options, I began to think differently. My instructor told me the pros and cons of the military and some of them intrigued me. He informed me of the benefits that you would receive such as free schooling, housing, and untaxed pay but on the downside, you would be away from home and family and must dedicate years of your life to serving. The simple fact that I would have to commit to something for so long was enough to steer me away from the military and finally toward college.

After deciding on what it was that I wanted to do, that is when I began to put everything in motion, and that began with looking at colleges and applying. In my college search, I looked for a school that not only had a cybersecurity program but a good one also. I had narrowed my search down to three schools and they were Virginia Tech, Old Dominion University, and George Mason University. I ended up only applying to Old Dominion because my guidance counselor couldn't find my transcript somehow, so I missed the deadline to apply to Tech. After missing the deadline to Tech that left me with ODU and GMU. Picking between the two wasn't hard, GMU's culture wasn't a fit for me so ODU was the clear winner and the cybersecurity program at ODU was one of the best in the state of Virginia at the time.

Finalizing to study cybersecurity at Old Dominion was not only a career decision but also a calling. I've always had an interest in technology dating back to when I was first physically and

mentally able to understand it. Along with Sgt. French provided me with the upside to choosing to study cybersecurity. Sgt. French mentioned to me that the field of cybersecurity was new and emerging, in great need of skilled workers, broad with numerous amounts of jobs, and an almost everlasting field. Hearing these things along with my previous interest in technology and all things related, it only made sense to go this route. After my first few years of college, it was a breeze. College wasn't as bad as I thought it would be and I gained a better understanding of cybersecurity. This included an added reason for continuing the journey of studying cybersecurity. The more I learned about cybersecurity, the more I understood just how important it was and this resulted in an urge to want to want to understand, confront, and ultimately protect the digital realm. In addition, I was able to recognize the responsibility that I and others in the field would have as well as forming a commitment to wanting to make a positive impact.

As mentioned earlier, Sgt. French stated that the field of cybersecurity was a broad field with many careers to offer. With that being said, I experienced a point in my journey where I had no idea as to what it was that I wanted to do exactly. I spent countless hours researching the different jobs and recapping the classes that I've already taken in hopes of finding a specific career that I may want to pursue. It wasn't until I completed an internship at TowneBank after my Junior year that I decided on what it was that I wanted to do. During the internship I was able to experience three of the most popular careers in cybersecurity, being, cyber risk, defending against attacks (blue team), and simulating attacks (red team). After experiencing them all I was able to identify one that I liked and felt the most comfortable with and that was cyber risk. I had a great interest in cyber risk because a lot of the skills that I had were applicable to the career such as data analysis, attention to detail, critical thinking, and creativity. I knew this was the path

for me because when my manager taught me how to do the job, I was able to learn in less than a week and perform at a high level.

All in all, if it weren't for me enrolling in AFJORTC and having Sgt. French as a guide/mentor, I genuinely don't know where I would be or what I would be doing. Prior to him educating me on the field of cybersecurity, I was a regular high school student with no idea of what was next for me in life. Looking back on this experience showed me that everyone has a path, it's all a matter of when you find it and from there, how you choose to move forward.