

Ongoing Journey of Growth

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Abstract

I am a senior at Old Dominion University, graduating in the upcoming spring semester with a Bachelor of Science in cybersecurity. I have taken time to reflect on my experiences, challenges, and growth that have shaped my academic and personal identity. This paper covers my early development and motivation to help us both answer the question of why. I use concepts introduced by Nguyen and Smith to better understand my journey. By reflecting on my academic and personal life, I hope to respect my own growth while inspiring others through my story.

Introduction

As I entered my final semester at Old Dominion University, I find myself reflecting on the long path that led me here. I think about this paper, the moments, and motivations behind major turning

points in my life. One of these turning points was switching my studies from computer science to cybersecurity. My small interest in technology grew into a deeper understanding of the impact and importance of security in digital spaces. The responsibility is significant, as cybersecurity is a complex and interconnected field. This paper explores that journey. Through my early development with technology, my challenges in college, and my core inspirations, I have uncovered my path and purpose. Concepts like Nguyen's idea of ePortfolios also help me understand the value of telling my story.

Early development

Before starting college, my interest in technology was shaped by many roles. At a young age, my relatives weren't very tech savvy, so they came to me for tech problems and needs. Ranging from turning on the cell phone to figuring out how different apps work. This early responsibility helped me realize how natural technology felt. Some of the more impactful and foundational experiences came from helping my granny with her computer problems. Like almost every weekend, I would be down there helping her fix it. Whether I was trying to figure out why the screen wouldn't turn on or warning her not to click on pop-up ads promising she won a free cruise, I slowly developed a passion for solving problems and understanding how devices worked.

At the same time, music played a huge role in my development. As I learned piano when I was 10 to then learning trombone in the 6th grade, then eventually marching band for all four years of high school, and most recently finishing four years of college marching band right here at ODU. During that time, I learned to do AV systems for my church, which piqued both my interest being music and technology. So, as you can see, technology and music became the two areas where I felt confident and capable. These early interests shaped my identity long before I understood how they would influence my academic life.

Transition to college and my challenges.

When I accepted and entered ODU, I initially chose computer science because I enjoyed computers and everything about them, from how they are made to how they operate. Yet, as I settled into the campus and its environment, I quickly learned that college experience is not without its challenges. I found that to be apparent, especially in marching band, but also in my various courses and coursework. Playing at the college level demands far more discipline than I'm used to and calls for a great deal of energy.

In academics, I honestly started to struggle a lot. The math was a huge obstacle, and it only got larger as the next math course was built on the previous course. As they started to become more challenging, I started to lose confidence, and I began questioning whether I had chosen the right major or whether I could succeed in such a demanding field. This period of doubt became a major turning point. Which ultimately led me to make a huge decision.

Turning Point

My major point was just a deal done. I was inspired by someone to take that leap of faith into something I know nothing about. The inspiration came from one of my brothers in Phi Mu Alpha, who was a computer science major but switched to cybersecurity. He was a small guide when he was still there, and he gave me some words of wisdom that just didn't help me make the decision to switch, but helped me when I was losing confidence and wanted to quit. His words touched me and helped me grow with the words he told me. With my work ethic and determination, I would reach wonders, saying that you never know if you'll be good at it if you don't try. After that talk, I manned up and took the leap of faith. After learning more about cybersecurity, I fell in love. I realized how important and intriguing it was. It made me gain a sense of protection, as the field is all about protecting those from digital harm. I

always had a little spark of it that began years ago with my granny's computer, making me feel more confident in making the switch.

Reflection Through concepts

When I began writing this paper, I found myself asking Why this paper? Why are reflections necessary to grow? The ideas introduced by Nguyen helped me answer and make sense of my own questioning. Nyugen (2019) brings the idea of "living portal" to describe ePortfolios, as this drives the narrative that allows students to reflect on their experience, identities, and connect their academics to personal life, bringing meaning and purpose. The idea helped me really dig deep and examine my challenges and achievements because they do, in fact, bring meaning to my life and experiences. Therefore, I am shaping who I am.

In addition, using Smith's ideas helped me understand the real meaning of the word reflection, or what it means to reflect. Smith preaches that an individual's identity is built through their story, as the reader gets to see how the individual there reads about changes and how these changes are brought on. Applying Smith's concept helps me recognize that writing this paper is not just about telling my story, but it's more about an active process of detailing and defining who I am. By organizing my story into a coherent narrative, I am able to identify patterns of growth, connect challenges to long-term development, and articulate the values that guide me as both a student and an emerging cybersecurity professional.

Motivation and Purpose

Everyone has different motivations that drive them. One of my biggest goals is the desire to achieve financial stability. Beyond that, my strongest motivation is deeply rooted in my desire to give back to my family. I have watched both of my parents work incredibly hard to support me, and I want to

repay even a portion of what they have given. My academic journey would be the same without their support and cheering me on through my ups and downs.

Conclusion

So, here we are. As a senior with one semester left before graduation, I feel more confident in myself and the person I've become. Through my decisions, challenges, and turning points. It has shaped my identity and created my journey. Reflecting on my experiences through the lens of Smith and Nguyen's work. It helped me see and value this paper and my ePortfolio. Documenting my growth, path, and purpose has led to a deeper connection with my academic decisions and my personal goals and motivations. As I grow closer to being ready to tackle the real world without college, I and pursue my dream job and career in cybersecurity. I carry on my back and in my life the lessons, bonds, disciplines, and relationships that I have developed throughout my time at Old Dominion University. I look forward to the opportunities that await me and the many more lessons I'm yet to learn as I continue growing as a person.