Personal Essay

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Introduction

In this essay, I will cover why it is I decided to major in cybersecurity, how I decided on what college I wanted to attend, my experiences throughout my academic career, as well as some general information about myself. This essay is a recollection and reflection of my academic career, covering my past, present, and future goals and decisions. I aim to provide an insight into these decisions and how they have shaped my interest in technology into the pursuit of cybersecurity through academia.

Why Cybersecurity?

Ever since I was a child, I have been interested in computers; how they work, how to build them, and the things they can do. This fascination is what led me to pursue a career in cybersecurity. However, I didn't always know I wanted to pursue cybersecurity. While I love technology, and it is one of my biggest hobbies, I have others as well. In my free time, I enjoy reading books, watching movies, playing games, as well as listening to and creating music. I had formal instruction when it came to learning how to play piano and saxophone. However, I am self-taught when it comes to learning guitar, bass, and drums. Creating music has always been a creative outlet and means of expression for me. I toyed around with the idea of pursuing music production, but decided I would rather find something more computer and technology-oriented as a career. While one would initially think an interest in computers would be more likely to lead to the pursuit of a computer science degree, through the classes I took in high school, I became aware of and interested in cybersecurity. In high school, I took several classes that informed my decision to become a cybersecurity major. I initially did take computer science classes; however, they were more akin to Java classes. I did not enjoy programming in Java and looked to find

other options. That's when I found an introductory class in cybersecurity. This class taught me

the core concepts of cybersecurity and prepared me to get my first cybersecurity-related

certification: the Microsoft Technical Associate certification (MTA). I learned about common

attacks such as phishing scams and distributed denial of service attacks (DDoS). This class really

opened my eyes to the importance of cybersecurity. I am very fortunate that my high school

offered such a course, for I don't think I would have had such an interest in cybersecurity

without that class. Since no follow-up course was offered at my high school, I ended up taking a

CISCO networking class the following year. This class was also informative as it taught me how

the internet is actually set up and how to operate CISCO's networking devices. While it wasn't

strictly a cyber-related course, I felt the networking information it provided was highly beneficial

to a career in cybersecurity (this would later prove fruitful when I took networking classes in

college). It was through these courses and earning that certification that led me to pursue

cybersecurity as my major in college.

Choosing a College

Since I knew what I wanted my major to be, I needed to determine where I wanted to go

to get my degree. Admittedly, the choice was rather simple. Despite cybersecurity's importance

in this day and age, not many colleges in Virginia offer it as a major. It is instead offered as a

concentration under a computer science degree, not as its own major. Old Dominion University,

however, has a whole school dedicated to cybersecurity. This made Old Dominion University a

highly compelling choice from the get-go. Additionally, when touring the campus, the main

building for cybersecurity, Monarch Hall, was a major selling point as well. It was evident that

Old Dominion's cybersecurity program was one that they took seriously, and the choice was a

no-brainer. Additionally, my older brother was currently enrolled at Old Dominion, which meant that I already knew someone there familiar with the campus. I did not have any friends who were planning on going to Old Dominion. However, through the introduction programs the school of cybersecurity had, I quickly made friends within my major. I also managed to convince one of my friends from high school to transfer to Old Dominion from Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) with their two-year transfer program. My decision to attend Old Dominion was ultimately made based on the strength of the cyber program, the welcoming campus, and my ability to grow academically.

My Time At ODU

At the time of writing, I am in my senior year at Old Dominion University and will be graduating after one more semester. Alongside pursuing a major in cybersecurity, I have been pursuing a minor in risk management and insurance. The cyber classes I have taken so far have been informative and have given me hands-on experience configuring firewalls, using tools like Wireshark, learning important concepts, and best practices. I have learned more in-depth information about the Windows operating system as well as Linux distros such as Kali and Ubuntu. I have also learned the foundations of the programming language Python, which I prefer over Java. With the knowledge I learned, I was able to sign up for and pass the CompTIA Security + certification exam. This certification is an industry standard, entry-level certification, and a demonstration of a portion of the knowledge I have acquired at Old Dominion University thus far. Furthermore, Old Dominion University accepts certain certifications, such as the CompTIA Security + certification, as transferable credit hours. This allowed me to invest in myself, obtaining an important certification as well as contributing to my academic progress. I

am currently in the process of getting an internship to gain some industry experience that will hopefully lead to further opportunities. Cybersecurity is an ever-evolving industry that will never remain stagnant. While my academic journey is coming to an end, I will continue to learn new information and master new skills as I attempt to keep up-to-date on current cyber advancements, policies, and threats.

Conclusion

Upon reflection of my academic career, I believe it is evident how childhood curiosity led to high school discovery and to the pursuit of specialization in college; how choosing cybersecurity wasn't a spontaneous decision, but rather a series of experiences and insights that led to it. Old Dominion University has provided me with the tools, knowledge, and confidence I need to succeed in this field, and I am grateful for every opportunity I've had thus far. As graduation grows ever nearer, I aim to build upon the foundation laid and continue the pursuit of a fulfilling career in cybersecurity.