

My Journey: Personal Narrative Essay

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IDS 493 Electronic Portfolio Project

Professor Carin Andrews

September 13, 2025

Abstract

My name is Amira Muaket, and I'm majoring in Cybersecurity. Currently, this is my final semester here at Old Dominion University, class of 2025. I want to display a reflection and my thoughts throughout my time at Old Dominion University as well as my chosen career path in cybersecurity. Presenting my growth, newfound abilities, and skills that helped shape the person I am today. I will display “who I am” through mentioning my main personality traits as well as my past and how/why I chose to attend Old Dominion University. I also want to exhibit my cybersecurity academic journey and what I've learned throughout my classes here. Finally integrating my internship, as it played a huge part in confirming my chosen career path. Adding these facts about myself can enhance my E-portfolio and my online reputation when posted, “Your online reputation consists of everything that comes up in a search about you.” (Cahill, 2021)

My Journey: Personal Narrative Essay

I am currently 23 years old, and I would like to describe myself as communicative, driven, and a hustler. Whenever it's my work, school, or interests, I take full pride in putting in the work through full integrity and staying authentically myself. I believe that my experiences and developments helped shape and recognize my personal brand. As mentioned, "Your personal brand is the combination of your skills, the values you present, and the impression you leave on others" (Montañez, 2023). This idea can relate and reflect upon my hustler mentality. Which is consistently wanting to try new things, adapt new skills and expand my capabilities. I also enjoy being productive. Having a sense of accomplishing different tasks excites me. For example, earlier this year, I was juggling four major duties at once. This included my two jobs (Sephora brand ambassador and substitute teaching), my cybersecurity internship at the Commodity Future Trading Commision (CFTC), and university. I won't lie, balancing all these roles was extremely challenging, I did learn so many valuable lessons such as perfecting my time management, multitasking, communication skills, and my adaptation to different environments. These experiences will not only help prepare me for my career in cybersecurity but also assist in shaping my personal brand.

How Did I Get Here?

Coming into Old Dominion University, I was a transfer student from a community college called "Richard Bland College," where I completed my associate's degree in science. Looking back at what made me choose and pursue my current major and career path was "CSCI121 - Intro to Computer Science" presented in my community college class. Granted, before taking this class, I had no experience or even a remote interest in computer science or any technology related fields. But, in this class, I was introduced to computer science and

programming through various hands-on computing provisions such as algorithms and data structures by understanding a computer's design, organization and its operations. But the main takeaway I realized from taking this class is how broad and the various opportunities are in a technology-driven field. In other words, a career that's associated with or relating to IT/computers is one that you can go very technical, or non-technical, or even a general approach, relating to many other fields such as marketing, law, criminal, etc. making it an ideal career path for myself, which confirmed my decision of choosing cybersecurity. Once I completed my community college, I was in search of a school where I could complete my undergrad. My main search was for schools that provided online schooling that could fit into my hectic schedule, but also a school that displayed both strong ideals/missions and cybersecurity. After rigorous searching and calling, I ultimately chose ODU as my place to study. I really enjoyed the staff and my counselor coming on board, as they displayed professionalism and clear communication regarding my timeline of completion and what was expected of me.

With that experience, it ultimately helped me choose cybersecurity as my chosen career path. As mentioned before, I love learning and adopting new skills and broadening my knowledge, and since cybersecurity is always evolving to new trends and challenges, it just confirms my decision. Thus, making a perfect career path that aligns with my personal brand and future career goals.

Cybersecurity Academic Journey

Coming into Old Dominion, I had many prerequisites and general electives completed. My priority was to focus mainly on my cybersecurity major requirements that included core, principles, application, and capstone courses. I would start off with what turned out to be my favorite class, "CYSE425W — Cybersecurity Strategy and Policy." It placed my career path into

perspective and steered me into a possible career interest I may pursue after graduation. I really appreciated the policymaking aspect, which included and focused on different frameworks and strategies that users or companies can adopt to ensure systems are kept safe and protected. It was an engaging class that explored several approaches to different cyber strategies that weren't from a technical viewpoint. But through the scope of the political, ethical, and social implementations that may arise. Connecting these strategies at both a national and international level of security with cybersecurity policies.

A class I struggled with but still have benefited from was “CYSE270 — Linux System for Cybersecurity.” It focused on the basic operations of Linux through using different virtual machines administrating different functions of Linux systems. I think my challenge was understanding and using both graphical and command-line interfaces to achieve hands-on tasks presented. Such as shell scripts, user authentication, or configuring and installing Linux systems. But after some trial and error, I managed to understand how these systems work and adapted this newfound skill into other classes that had the same concepts. With these challenges

Cybersecurity Internship

Over my time in Old Dominion University (ODU), I've conducted and completed an internship through the CFTC (Commodity Future Trading Commission), a U.S. government agency that focuses on the derivatives market. I was placed on the cybersecurity side, where I shadowed several federal employees, such as the Chief Security Officer (CSO), the Deputy Chief of Information Security Officer (CISO) and other IT specialists. My internship was research heavy, since it was made for beginners in this field. Which I truly appreciated since I was coming in inexperienced. This included reaching material related to this field, such as the Risk Management frameworks (RMF), a lot of NIST publications, and different Federal Information

Processing Standards (FIPS). I was also tasked with completing a training program that covers Information System Security Officer tasks and entry-level topics. Each topic that was covered had relations with cybersecurity main policies and what was adopted and aligned with CFTC's procedures and policies.

What I've reflected from this internship is how important cybersecurity is, especially how it's applied to real-life settings. Being placed in this federal environment sets the tone of what is expected in this field of study, especially when I gain hands-on experience and shadowing different employers through their daily routines. While upholding both CFTC and cybersecurity standards when it comes to the CIA triad. But once I completed my internship, this further confirmed my decision to pursue cybersecurity as my career.

Conclusion

Knowing and understanding my personal brand while adapting it to my future career in cybersecurity is critical. Especially when faced with challenges in my classes at ODU, during my internship or in my personal life. It's important to learn how to reflect on these experiences and apply them to future responsibilities. "Even making smaller story edits to our personal narratives can have a big impact on our lives" (Smith, 2017). Focusing on positive outcomes and learning from the past, can assist in editing my own personal narrative. While considering the meaningful impact that each event that occurred had impacted on my growth, my goal is to stay consistent with myself and retain as much knowledge as I can for my future career. Cybersecurity is always evolving, and I want to make sure I am ready for any obstacles that may arise.

References

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