Personal Narrative Essay

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Old Dominion University

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Abstract

I am a senior at Old Dominion University, I will be graduating in May 2025 with a bachelor's degree in cybersecurity. This paper reflects on my journey, describing my academic and work experiences from high school to university. It examines the challenges I faced, the lessons I learned, and the personal growth I achieved along the way. These experiences have shaped who I am today and have guided me in making better decisions for my future.

Introduction

This narrative paper summarizes my personal and academic journey, from my early education in Haiti to pursuing my bachelor's degree in cybersecurity at Old Dominion University. As I overcame obstacles like changing cultures, struggling in school, and not knowing what I wanted to do with my life, my story is one of resilience. Through these experiences, I am stronger and more self-aware, and I have learned a lot of important lessons.

Early Academics

I was born and raised in Haiti, where I spent most of my childhood and early teenage years. At the age of 17, I moved to the United States to looked for a better life. I did not finish high school in Haiti, my parents said it was important for me to finish high school in the U.S. However, registering in the American education system was difficult since I am from a different country. When my parents tried to enroll me in 11th grade, the school informed that my credits from Haiti were not transferable. I had to start over in 9th grade. Hearing this news was dissatisfying. "Imagine you're 17 years old and going to 9th grade" I felt sad and discouraged, knowing that I would be the oldest teenager in the school. I asked the advisor if I would ever catch up or graduate. My parents were my biggest supporters, and their encouragement kept me going. My parents told me that setbacks were temporary, and that persistence would lead to success.

I enrolled in Hampton High School, and on the first day, I was surprised to find some other kids in the same situation, which gave me so much encouragement. Throughout high school, I worked hard to adapt to new environment and make best of my situation. During my senior year, I had a part-time job at McDonald's, where I worked as a cashier. I would have a free block every day and got off school early. I did great throughout my 4 years of high school. I was

unsure about my future. While many students were busy applying to colleges, I did not. As a child, I had always wanted to become a pharmacist, but since I was setbacks for 4 years, I changed my mind because it would take 9 plus years to become a pharmacist. Instead, I decided to join the military after high school. Went through the process, I took the ASVAB test but did not pass. Disappointed but determined, I began researching what career that had math but not to become a teacher because my favorite subject is math. My parents insisted to continue my education, so I enrolled at Thomas Nelson Community College. I didn't know what I wanted to study, but I believed that higher education would open doors to new opportunities.

Community College

In August 2019, I started my college journey at Thomas Nelson Community College, I enrolled in computer science program. I thought high school and college would be similar, but I underestimated them. I understood that college required more time, discipline, and flexibility. During my first semester, I took elective courses and computer science-related classes. My first computer class was Python programming, which I found easy and enjoyable. I struggled with some aspects of college, I completed the semester with A's and B's, which boosted my confidence.

Beginning in early 2020, COVID-19 came, classes transitioned online, and I had to adjust to online learning. This period was challenging, as I found it difficult to stay motivated and learn on my own without in-person instructions. I had Calculus 1, which required a lot of practice and guidance. It was hard to achieve in online learning. I enrolled in the summer also, took 8-week course, and tried to finish my associate degree on time. However, the online learning environment was stressful, but I was able to adapt to it. During this time, I also began to re-evaluate my career. I found coding courses like C++ was extremely difficult, which led me to

question whether computer science was not the right path for me. After researching and reflecting on my interests, I saw many programs that are similar to computer science, so I decided to switch my major to cybersecurity. This is the best decision I could make, as cybersecurity better matched my strengths and offered exciting career opportunities.

In Fall 2022, I graduated from TNCC with an associate degree in computer science with a GPA of 3.3 and transferred to Old Dominion University. The enrollment process took time, as I had to gather all the necessary documentation. During the spring and summer of 2023, I focused on working, traveling, and preparing for the next chapter of my academic journey. By Fall 2023, I was ready to begin my first semester at ODU.

Old Dominion University Experience

As a transfer student, I would go to the campus and spend some time in the library, where I research to learn more about cybersecurity. My first course was an introduction to cybersecurity. This course opened my eyes to the field and made me curious. I discovered how people get scams and how hackers launch data breaches. I became fascinated by how cybersecurity intersects with various aspects of our lives and how it is important in the world. I have gained technical, coding, and communication skills throughout my time at ODU. My education has raised my awareness of the importance cybersecurity plays in protecting people information, and companies. I have learned about the responsibilities and strategic that required to address cybersecurity challenges. These experiences have prepared me for a career in the field and taught me how to protect myself from hackers. As I come to my final semester, ODU has been excellent and provided me with skills and knowledge.

Conclusion

Earning a bachelor's degree in cybersecurity is one of my most important decisions. Challenges, growth, encouragement, and stability have marked my journey from high school to Old Dominion University. Dealing with COVID-19 and trying to adapt to a new country and school system, the challenges I encountered have increased my determination. I have learned to accept change and adjust to new situations. I am excited about the opportunities that will come in the future. Cybersecurity inspires me to learn, grow, and make a positive difference continually.