

How I Arrived Here: A Personal Narrative Essay

Brandon Pearson

Old Dominion University

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Professor Carin Andrews

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INTRO

Throughout my life, I have always had an interest in learning new things. There wasn't any one thing that I didn't want to learn more about. Even to this day I still have that childlike curiosity. It never fails that when I encounter something new or discover something about life, I ask the question, "Why?" There isn't some grand reason or purpose in why I want to know how things work other than I find it interesting. Being able to understand how things work or why they do just helps things make sense. Often when trying to make sense of things it brings forth even more questions, leading to a never-ending search for knowledge.

INTEREST IN SCHOOL

Growing up I found all types of disciplines captivating. While no one generally finds school fun or interesting. I enjoyed it to a certain degree. It gave me the ability to learn and apply my learning to real life. It allowed me to feel like I was always learning or working towards something. School was the one thing I felt I was truly good at. I prided myself on my ability to learn and understand things feeling that it was the one area or quality I could be successful in. I think this is one of the reasons I wanted to go to college. Not only has no one in my family gone to college I also felt as I needed to. I felt as if I had to otherwise, I would be lacking that one area in life I truly felt good at. Honestly, whenever I don't have courses or classes I feel lost or as if I'm missing that key thing in my life. Without that, something to work towards or learn more about it leaves an emptiness.

POTENTIAL CHOICES

When trying to decide what I wanted to study or pursue a degree in I found it difficult. Being interested in all different types of disciplines made it hard to make such a decision that in my eyes would define a lot about my future. I had various thoughts on what I wanted to do with all of them coming from some basis. Economics was one potential route I wanted to go because I found it interesting and how much of a role it plays in society. Additionally, my mother works in the financial field, so I knew it was a field that had potential. Psychology was another field I found interesting because growing up I would always want to know how the mind worked. What drove people to do the things they do and overall, why humans are the way they are. One day a girl I was in a relationship with pointed out that not many people sit around and watch YouTube videos about Psychology. In that moment, I really did feel like I found the thing I would go to school for. She was right not many people in their free time sit around and try to understand humans and learn about Psychology. Yet, I felt that the options in this field didn't seem like something I could do for the rest of my life. Luckily at the time, it was my last year of high school so I didn't have to know what I wanted to do.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

While in high school I always planned to go to community college. This was for many reasons and some I look back on as regretting. Upon graduating high school, I went to John Tyler Community College now known as Brightpoint. I made this decision because I figured it would save me money compared to going directly to a four-year university. I also was working at Target and was in line to be promoted so I felt that if I left to go to school, I would be missing out on an opportunity that I worked hard to have. One reason I also didn't go to university

directly was because I felt that it would be too scary to leave my family or be away from them. At this time in my life, I had never been away from my family for an extended period of time. Additionally, I am very close with my family as well as at the time a more introverted person. Leaving to go to a college at the time seemed like it would be a daunting task and therefore was a big reason I didn't want to. Looking back, I regret that I was too scared and felt that since I was introverted I would likely not like the college atmosphere. Entering community college, I decided I would do general studies that way I could transfer my credits easily to a four-year school.

ASSET PROTECTION

I started working at Target when I was 18 years old. I applied to be an electronics or technology team member since I had an interest in technology. Ultimately, I got hired for general merchandise since that was the only position they had at the time. After my two weeks of training, someone in the electronics section had decided to leave so they asked if I still wanted to do the technology section. Of course, I wanted to since it was my original pick. Shortly after I was trained in that section for two days until they found a better spot for me. While being trained I learned how to set or follow blueprints on how to redesign the aisles. I was able to follow the blueprints and didn't make any mistakes which is uncommon for most people. Since I had done well doing that this led to me getting trained in presentation. This is the role that constructs the aisles and updates them. I ended up doing this role for about two years after this while still helping out in the previous two roles. Throughout my time on the sales floor side of things, I wanted to be a manager. This was because I felt that there were a lot of things I could improve or make better about the store if I were in such a position. This drove me to work hard every day

and network with others within the store. Doing so allowed me to find mentors and people who would help me throughout my time at Target. Eventually, a position opened up at my store in asset protection. At first, I was unsure of the move to this role since I felt that it would be drastically different from what I had been doing. Ultimately, I decided to commit to the asset protection role for various reasons. It had consistent hours, was a promotion, and had more career potential.

I wasn't sure that I would like to be in asset protection upon first joining. I felt that it may be something that required me to do things that were outside of my skillset. Little did I know how much of an impact this role would have on my life. While doing this role it made me realize how much of a rule follower I am. Growing up I always wanted to behave and follow the rules, but I didn't realize how important it was to me. In asset protection, you are trying to prevent shoplifters and at times this means you collaborate with law enforcement. It made me realize how much I like holding people accountable for their actions and protecting assets. About this time, I was just finishing up my associate degree and when figuring out what I wanted to do for my bachelor's, I came across cybersecurity as one option. This was driven due to my current position in asset protection as well as my love for technology. I figure that if I enjoyed asset protection at this level in the chain then I would like it even more at higher levels. Pursuing cybersecurity would allow me to do asset protection but in a much more complex way.

Additionally, while working in asset protection I had to collaborate with law enforcement. They would always ask if I wanted to be a law enforcement officer and try to get me to join. I never really saw myself doing so until one day I collaborated with a detective, and we worked together to track down someone who had stolen a car and had come to the store where I worked at. In doing so I had to run metadata and do a lot of computer and camera work. The detective

mentioned that maybe I'd like cybersecurity if I enjoyed the computer side of law enforcement. The detective said, "Cybersecurity is kind of like the police of the internet." which confirmed my decision to pursue a degree in cybersecurity.

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

When deciding where to pursue my bachelor's degree at I decided Old Dominion University (ODU). I decided on ODU because they have a dedicated online program that allows students to get the same education as those who are on campus but through a fully virtual format. I made this decision because I wanted to be able to work at the same time as finishing my degree. At the same time, ODU offered cybersecurity as one of the degrees I could go for. These two things served as to why I decided to attend ODU.

While I was initially worried that cybersecurity would be too complex or hard for me, I was gladly wrong. I have taken various courses which I have found to be very interesting to me. Previously, as much as I liked technology and the internet, I didn't know much about how it worked. Throughout my courses, I have learned a lot about networks, coding, and computer systems. While these topics are complex and have offered many challenges, I have enjoyed learning about them. Cybersecurity as a degree is considered interdisciplinary and I now understand why. In order to understand cybersecurity as a whole it takes the collaboration of multiple disciplines. Requiring someone to understand various topics across multiple disciplines and then putting them back into cybersecurity. I like this because it allows me to branch out and learn skills across more than one discipline. I have been able to learn more about laws, policies, and ethics alongside the technical stuff.

GOING FORWARD

Now that I am approaching graduation and reflecting on my education and how what has led to this moment. I am shocked at how far I have come, and the impact different things have had on my life. I definitely wouldn't have predicted I would be pursuing a STEM major (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and learning the things I am. I am fortunate that things have aligned in my life that have allowed me to find a discipline I truly enjoy. Even though I am coming close to finishing my degree I am still pursuing certifications in the cybersecurity field. Hoping to learn more and better the skills I've gained from school. Cybersecurity is a complex and ever-evolving field that requires someone to always be open to learning. This couldn't be a better field for me because there will always be something within this field that will have me asking "Why?"