A Student's Journey: My Personal Narrative Essay

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IDS493: Electronic Portfolio Project

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July 4, 2025

Abstract

This is a personal narrative paper that recounts my journey throughout high school and Old Dominion University learning the valuable knowledge necessary to reach the future cybersecurity career I hope to achieve. From getting my feet wet to crossing the finish line, it will detail how my interest in cybersecurity defines who I am. It will also detail the courses, challenges associated with them, and the skills and discipline that I worked to achieve to help better hone my profile for the cybersecurity workforce. My feelings and experiences throughout this journey are based on my own ambitions and how it affects my future.

A Student's Journey: My Personal Narrative Essay

Looking back at how my path into cybersecurity came to fruition, I believe the inspiration that I gathered could actually go all the way back to when I was a child. This was back when I had started having a fascination for computers and technology in general, when it just started becoming more of a part of our daily lives. Simplistic experiences such as playing video games or hearing about new technological inventions made me understand the unlimited potential that exists in this industry. I even saw my brother build his own computer which gave me aspirations that maybe in the future I could do something as astounding as that. My first encounter with anything cybersecurity-related was when my own computer got infected with a virus, which showed the evil side that exists with technology. However, it was not until the beginning of high school that I decided I wanted to learn about utilizing technology, specifically computers, but for the greater good. It was too frequent I would hear news on the television about how cyberattacks have devastated conglomerates and ordinary citizens alike. I saw this as an opportunity to hone my potential and learn what was necessary to begin my path. While I did at the time find certain concepts of cybersecurity intimidating, I believe this sets the stage for where I am today as an Old Dominion University student about to begin my career in the world of cybersecurity.

Paving the Way

Before I started taking computer-related courses in high school, the concept of cybersecurity was rather vague to me. I did not understand the intricacies of the topic, but rather only an overview of what it consists of. But I also chose cybersecurity because it was a major, I felt the most comfortable with my technological experience. I never even knew what it was like to be an entrepreneur in cybersecurity, which I would not have learned about until later on. In

high school, I sought courses I felt I would be familiar with, which in this case it would be about computers. This was the same approach to how I took art courses. Because cybersecurity was nonconceptual to me during this period, my experience would become similar to how Ricoeur (1992, as cited in Nguyen, 2013) describes the experiences that make us who we are. As time grew, I felt that I was starting to resonate more on the traditional path towards choosing cybersecurity. The first computer-related course that I took was called Keyboarding, which essentially meant that the course consisted of learning how to function a keyboard fluently such as typing and using commands. It was a rather basic course as it did not contain much beyond this, but it set a foundation for me being able to perform tasks on computers more efficiently, which is a feat that many employers look for in tech jobs. The two courses I took a few years later helped me further understand the hardware intricacies of a computer. It also taught me how to use various occupational applications such as Microsoft Word and Excel, which is important even as an entrepreneur. It was during this point that I decided to make a commitment towards this cybersecurity approach as I have already started laying the groundwork for the fundamentals.

Understanding the Technicalities

I did not think much about coding until my later years of high school when I was closer to the time of college. I did feel that it was a complex skill to learn as there are so many different languages necessary to create programs or even manage security. However, I understood the endless possibilities that coding inherits if I were to learn it. My senior year Electronics course in high school, which was in my last semester, was what I felt really set off my inspiration to learn the aspect of coding and use it for what I felt interested in, which was the dangers and security procedures surrounding technology. My experience with this course provided a feeling similar to

how Smith (2017) described the feeling of transcendence, how our connections in what we enjoy provides us with such great fascination that we feel disconnected from reality. The project that set this experience was when we had to develop a game through a program called GameMaker. There was not much technicality with the program. However, the development gave me the creativity and critical thinking necessary to learn coding, understanding how expansive it could be for my future in cybersecurity, and how it can be utilized as a tool to success.

Learning Skills and Discipline

As I transitioned into Old Dominion University (ODU) after my personal experiences with the courses in high school, there were no doubts about affirming my cybersecurity path. I believe this was around the time when my brother got his own degree in computer science at a different school, which may have also contributed to me continuing. At this point, I believe that I acquired at least some of the most basic skills necessary to perform a career in cybersecurity. Skills such as creativity and critical thinking were improved through courses such as Electronics because it would impact my learning of the future depending on how I refined the work. There were also skills that still needed to be acquired such as cooperation and hands-on experiences. Cooperation is both a skill and discipline that I felt would be crucial to learn because a lot of times in the cybersecurity industry, cooperation is perhaps the most important skill and discipline to possess to protect against cyber threats. I was hoping to get hands-on experiences with cybersecurity, as getting a feel of the tools necessary for this career would help me understand the functionalities and situations they may be used in.

The Fundamental Experience

When I first enrolled at ODU, I met with my student success advisor to discuss the curriculum necessary to continue my cybersecurity path. I knew that going in, a lot of these courses were going to feel noticeably more advanced, but it was necessary to hone the skills and discipline that I desired. A lot of my potential and hard work was on the line as I was approaching the finish line. In the early stages, I had to start with rather broad courses dedicated to cybersecurity such as the ethical approach to cybersecurity in "Cybersecurity Ethics." There was the course "Cybersecurity and Social Science," which taught the significance of social cooperation in cybersecurity. The list goes on as they were not exactly technical courses, but they helped expand my knowledge of the overall framework of cybersecurity. However, the courses that stood out to me the most would be these said technical courses such as "Linux System for Cybersecurity," "Networked Systems Security," and "Cyber Techniques and Operation." They taught me the valuable coding and technicalities about computer systems that I desired, and thought it was necessary to make myself feel qualified to be a part of this career path. Python, which I felt was a difficult but rewarding programming language to learn, helps expand the opportunities I have for my future. It is worth mentioning that I can also learn other programming languages to complement it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, cybersecurity was a long-time interest that was fated to become my career path. My journey helped me gather the knowledge, experience, skills, and discipline necessary for cybersecurity. It was necessary taking these broad and technical courses to make sure I am prepared to face my future on this career path. The journey from when I first chose this path in high school and up until the end of my time at ODU now, has brought challenges and lessons

that taught me how important applied knowledge will become once I face real-time situations in the workplace. There were objectives I was not able to achieve, such as the physical hands-on experiences of internships and projects. However, I still feel like I have learned enough to show that I am capable like anyone else of being an effective contributor to fighting the existential threats that exist in cybersecurity.

References

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