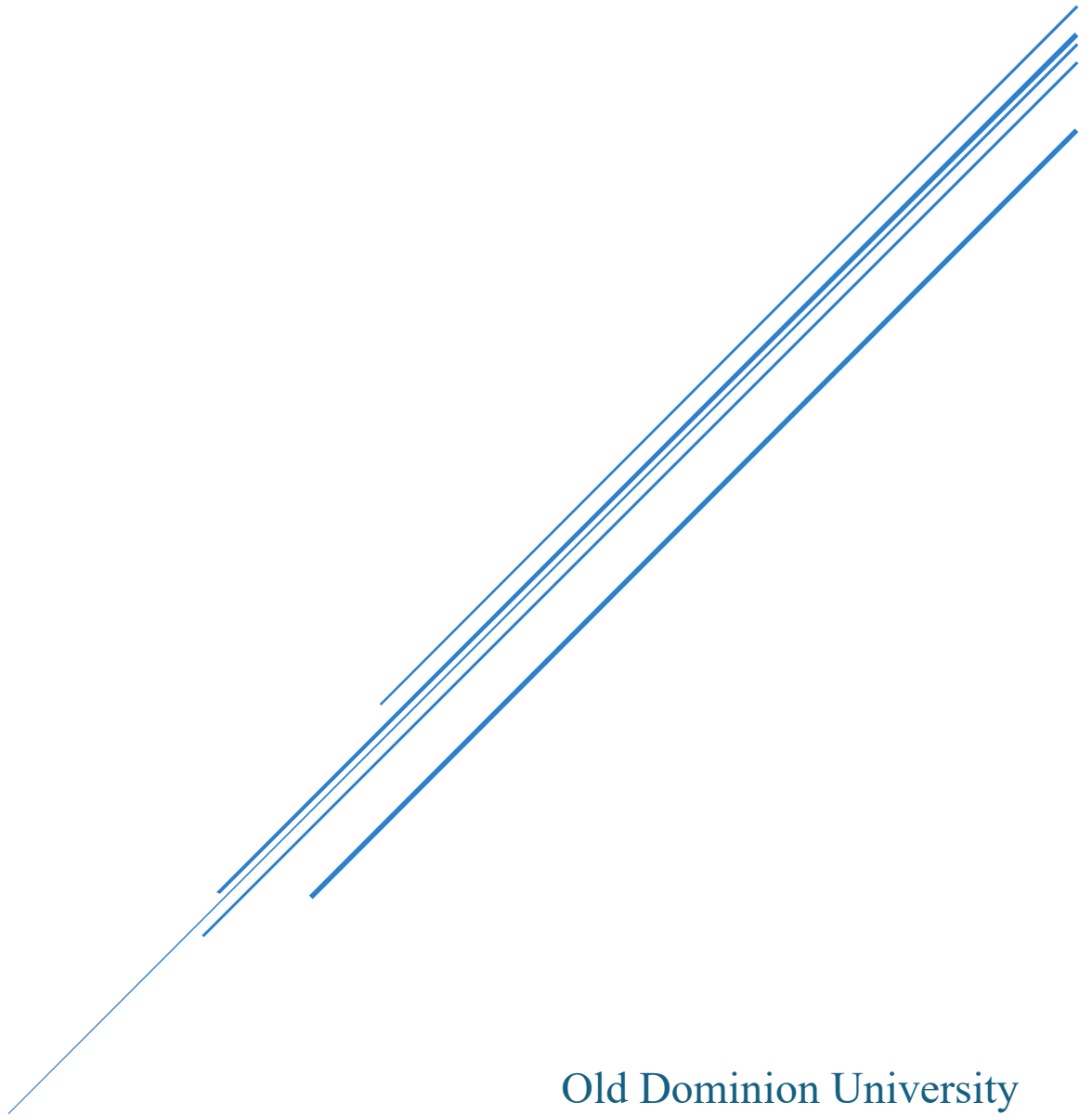


PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Story of me: Bryant Watkins



Old Dominion University

Professor Andrews

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MY BEGINNINGS

I was born on February 13, 1999, in the great city of Richmond, Virginia. My family would go on to settle into Doswell, Virginia, where I was raised from early on. I grew up with four siblings, two brothers and two sisters. Most of my siblings were far older than I and one of my sisters, so my younger of the two sisters is who I would attend school with. We attended Beaverdam elementary school in Beaverdam, Virginia. We then went on to attend Liberty Middle School in Ashland, Virginia.

HIGH SCHOOL

I attended Patrick Henry high school in Ashland, Virginia from 2013 to 2017. My time in High School was when I really began to become the academic scholar that I am to this very day. My parents were very demanding of my academic performance, and so that pushed me to achieve academic excellence. I had no idea what I wanted to do in life up to that point, all I knew is that I desired to achieve a post-high school education – something that my parents and many in my family unfortunately were unable to do. I would go on to graduate with an advanced diploma in 2017, and with that diploma came immense uncertainty. I wanted to be an orthopedic surgeon, but the nearly two decades of schooling required made me reconsider.

POST-HIGH SCHOOL YEARS

I applied for enrollment at Virginia Commonwealth University and was absolutely elated to learn that I had been accepted. Once I received my schedule, however, I felt very conflicted. I had a strong desire to maintain part-time employment while attending school on-campus simultaneously, but the stress of trying to juggle the two was unbearable for me at this time. I made a tough decision to unenroll from Virginia Commonwealth University and focus on working. I felt a great deal of disappointment and uncertainty following my decision to unenroll.

During this time period, which quickly became two years, I pondered possibly attending a trade school or community. I still had no idea what I would study and quickly became complacent in putting school off indefinitely. I was losing my desire and felt fine in just working my way up the ladder at my employment at the time at Amazon. My wonderful mother, however, knew that I deserved better and was capable of much more. She kept pushing and pushing – and eventually convinced me to try to get back into school.

While my story up to that point is certainly not as bad as many others, as I have been incredibly fortunate in my upbringing, I do feel as though this story of me is a “redemptive” story as discussed in Smith’s writing. I felt as though my academic life was a failure up to that point and lost much of my academic confidence. Getting back into college was a major redemptive step for me. Just enrolling was a major success and a first step to much more.

EARLY COLLEGE YEARS

My mother brought to me the idea of enrolling in the Old Dominion University Online Cybersecurity B.s program as a part-time student, that way I would be able to work while simultaneously having convenient college coursework. It was a great idea, so I applied and was elated to be accepted. I finally was back on my path to achieving a post-high school education. It felt like forever having to make it through all the general education courses, but as the courses were getting completed, I was tasked with truly declaring a major. Majors can be changed, but I wanted to choose one that I felt as though I could fully commit to.

My mother pitched cybersecurity to me from the beginning, and I strongly took into consideration but was not completely sure yet. We would discuss some of the pros and cons of this field. I would ultimately decide to go through with this as my declared major. Cybersecurity for me looked like a great investment – the field has essentially zero unemployment, more

security will be needed as technology grows and evolves, the money is certainly there, and this is a field that I would genuinely enjoy completing work in long-term.

LATER COLLEGE YEARS

A combination of my official major declaration as well as the completion of my general education courses also meant repercussions for my career path. At the time of my late sophomore year, much of my work at that point entailed some basic warehouse work. I knew it would be an incredibly arduous transition to go from warehousing to cybersecurity, but I also knew that I needed to at least start that process. I did not want to graduate with a B.s in Cybersecurity while having a resume full of warehouse and manual labor work.

I was able to transition to more clerical work, at least providing me with plenty of experience in basic computer operations with Microsoft Office applications. This was a great first step for me, but I still very much had a long way to go. I then was fortunate to get into entry-level work at a data center for Meta, and from there gained contractual employment with the Virginia State Police conducting telecommunication work. Those opportunities provided me with what would be further full-time employment and an internship opportunity with the Virginia State Police. I have been able to gain valuable experience in tasks such as – password management, user access management, remote monitoring, and alarm management.

I have also gained incredible experience and knowledge from my coursework at Old Dominion University. My junior and senior years have inundated me with multiple courses that are shaping me into the cybersecurity professional that I aspire to. Some of my major courses include – ethical hacking, Linux systems, Windows systems and management, cyber techniques and operations, programming, digital forensics, and cybersecurity ethics just to name a few. My coursework has given me many tools that will assist me in my path to a cybersecurity career.

COMPTIA SECURITY+ CERTIFICATION

Over the summer of 2024, I set out a bold goal for myself. I wanted to achieve a COMPTIA Security+ certification, as I knew this to be an industry standard for my profession. It was certainly a daunting task for me, as I wanted to achieve this during the three-month summer period between spring and fall semesters. I did not want to rush, of course, but giving myself this timeline gave me an immense sense of urgency. Between full-time employment and an impending fall semester, I did not want to add the stress of studying for the Security+ exam as well.

It was an arduous process, I set a timeline and spent months studying and taking practice exams. As my personal deadline was quickly approaching, I felt immense anxiety in anticipation. The day would finally arrive, I set the date of August 3rd, 2024, and it was time. I put a lot of pressure on myself for this moment, and under supervision I finally began taking the test. I was literally shaking in anticipation of seeing my final score upon completion, and that culminated in my proudest moment in life to that point. I passed the exam and achieved a coveted COMPTIA Security+ certification. While I have immense pride in this achievement, I am far from finished, I will only continue to study for and obtain further certifications in my career.

My certification is a strong part of my credentials that I will present to potential employers to showcase my capabilities of applying what I know. A degree is certainly a major part of my credentials that I am incredibly proud of, but certifications can set candidates apart from others. This certification and future others are what I believe will continue to shape my resume and e-portfolio into one of the top candidates. I will also further acquire on-the-job training and experience as well.

CONCLUSION

In writing this story, I feel a connection to a major concept from Nguyen's writing – and that is “Narrative identity”. My college and work experience have absolutely worked to change my sense of self. In looking back on all the events that have led me to this moment, they have seemingly been given more meaning as I include them in my personal narrative. These are meaningful events and experiences that I can never forget.

As my time at Old Dominion University is nearing an end, I find myself in shock at how far I have come. The work is not done, however, as I still have a few courses remaining before my impending graduation. I can only feel immense pride in all that I have accomplished and the people in my life that have made this all possible. The skills and experiences from my college coursework, work life, and internship will shape my future career in cybersecurity. As I reflect upon all the time and effort that I have dedicated to the field cybersecurity, I cannot stress its importance to me and my desire to have a long and successful career.

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