From Uncertainty to Purpose: My Journey Toward Cybersecurity

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IDS: 493 Electronic Portfolio Project

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April 11, 2025

The Start

Throughout my cybersecurity journey in Old Dominion University, I have gained many insights in the cyber field. I have been in classes that taught me ethical hacking, cyber operations, and digital forensics. It has helped in my journey to find jobs that relate to my field and potentially secure a career in the CIA.

However, I did not start that way. From the start I was fascinated by robotics. When young I was intrigued in how devices worked, I even took apart remotes, controls, and computers. This will eventually transition into robotics. The idea of building and designing robots was thrilling for me. I loved the concept of building prosthetics to help people bring their mobility back. When I got older, that dream became more of a reality. It led me to major in mechanical engineering at the University of Dayton. I remember how excited I was, as a young freshman, being dropped off by my parents at the university. I confident that this was the path for me, and that I had everything worked out. However, later during the semesters, I began to encounter problems, and I was about to find out how little I knew about engineering, and about myself.

Crashing into reality

Everything came to a screeching halt when I failed Calculus. I was not the best in math, even in high school, but I always would pass and get pretty good grades. But when I was in calculus in Dayton University, it hit me like a brick wall. I was so lost in that course. No matter how much effort I put in, I never understood the material. This would result in me failing that course. I took it a second time, and fortunately I passed, barely.

That semester took a heavy tool on me, not just academically, but mentally. I fell into a deep depression, I was homesick, and overall, I felt alone. I did not make many friends and was too ashamed to seek help from my parents. Slowly, I started to stop showing up for my other classes, I stopped studying. I felt like a failure; my dreams were being crushed right in front of my eyes. I had such a heavy weight on my shoulder that I literally felt that I was being crushed down.

Looking back, this was the contamination part of my story, the moment when things seemed to fall apart (Smith, 2017). However, little did I know that I would encounter an event that would lead into something better.

An unexpected Encounter: Meeting a Hacker

By this point, I was in the middle of my spring semester. I was still feeling down after failing my calculus course. Then on a regular night, I received a text message. From what I remembered, it was a message from one of the security teams from Instagram (so I thought it was). The individual said that there was a security breach and my data from Instagram was leaked. They asked if I could provide the password to my account recover my it. Of course, now that I know better, I would know that this was someone trying to use social engineering on me to get my password. Back then I never heard of or knew about cybersecurity. Without much thought I gave them the password. A few minutes later, they texted again. The amount of fear I experienced when I saw the message they sent. That person threatened to release rather inappropriate photos to all my friends and family, if I did not pay them a ransom. I freaked out and called my father. Luckily, he knew someone that could help me. This was the turning point into my journey into cybersecurity. This was where my pursuit of cybersecurity began.

A New Path: Transferring to ODU for Cybersecurity

After that encounter, I began to research cybersecurity nonstop. I watched endless videos, tutorials, and even attempted a few tryhackme machines (It is a website where cybersecurity enthusiasts can practice their skills on machines). The more I learned about cybersecurity, the more I realized that is what I was meant to do. Additionally, I found myself naturally talented when it came to cybersecurity and computers. I knew that I had to get into the field. Unfortunately, Dayton University did not have a cyber program. Fortunately, I remember that Old Dominion University did. As soon as I could, I completed the transfer process to Old Dominion to start my cybersecurity journey. It certainly wasn't easy, but I knew that this was the field that I wanted to study. This was the beginning of what Smith (2017) would call my redemption arc. This story shifted from failure to rediscovery and growth.

More Roadblock: Cyber operations and Calculus II

Odu was a fresh start, but it was not smooth sailing. Before I decided I wanted to do cybersecurity, I saw that Old Dominion had a Cyber Operations Program. To be honest I chose this program because it sounded cool. I loved taking the cyber classes, but there was one class I did not enjoy. That being Calculus II. Of course, I nearly failed, but fortunately I was wise enough to withdraw from that class, before I received a failing grade. Unlike, last time I did not let this setback bring me down. After that roadblock, I went to speak to my advisor, and I decided to switch to a Cybersecurity major. Which is basically the same as Cyber Operations, for the exception that it does not include calculus. The best decision I ever made. McAdams (2001) talks about causal coherence. This is the idea that we can understand our lives by connecting the dots between events. Nearly failing Calculus II did not stop me but propelled me forward to find a better fit within cybersecurity.

Cybersecurity Experience at ODU

At Old Dominion, I chose classes that involved technical and hands-on assignments. For example, there was a Cyber Operations and Techniques course that I took. It involved many hands-on labs; I learned how to conduct certain offensive and defensive cyber techniques. The same was for other courses like Ethical Hacking and Penetration Testing, and Digital Forensics. They all involved hands-on labs that allowed me exponentially developed my cyber skills. I also joined the Cybersecurity Club and started to participate in CTFs (capture the flag).

The rush of solving CTFs is unlike anything else. It feels amazing to be able to find vulnerability and solving that puzzle. It honestly feels like detective work, and I think that it is cool. This is where thematic coherence shows up in my story (McAdams, 2001). When I look back, I see a pattern. It seems that I was always driven by curiosity and had the thrill in solving problems. It seems though in the beginning, that I was seeking that wrong path.

The Future

I am near in finishing my cybersecurity degree at Old Dominion University. I feel like I am in the path that I am supposed to be. I currently own a AWS cloud practice certificate, built a solid portfolio, and applied to internships that I am excited to be a part of.

Nguyen (2013) mentions that by reflecting on key experiences, people can reconfigure their futures. The is what this journey has done for me. I have learned from my failure and brought myself back. I went from feeling lost to feeling confident.

I do not know where the future holds, but I am confident that cybersecurity is the path I should be in. I want to keep learning, and help organizations keep their data secure.

References