Christopher Sicle

Personal Narrative Essay

IDS 493

How Would I Introduce Myself Professionally

I am Christopher Sicle, a Cybersecurity Major, currently a senior at Old Dominion University. I am also a Senior Midshipman at the Hampton Roads Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) consortium. This was preceded by time as a contractor with Northrop Grumman and five years as an enlisted sailor in the US Navy. My current academic focus is on cyber defense, incident response, and network security and forensics. This is also in balance with my commitment to becoming an officer in the US Navy, where I am set to commission this spring as a Student Naval Aviator. I have a strong interest in roles that require extensive critical thinking, incident response, and the strengthening of network security frameworks.

Cybersecurity immediately drew me to its ever-changing landscape and the need to be adaptable and persistent to achieve great success at scale in the community. In addition, the initial intent was to join the US Navy as an officer, and with a degree in Cybersecurity, I could immediately contribute to national security. Also, the subject of Cybersecurity really drew me to that ultimate sense of duty because, whether I am in uniform or in the private sector, the main objective is to serve the people by either protecting their network systems or their privacy.

The combination of my academic and professional experiences has led me to the law enforcement and incident response side of cybersecurity. Being able to use what I learned academically to give back to the community so they may safely use the beautiful world of technology that it has to offer gives me determination and satisfaction in a cybersecurity career.

Although I won't begin my career as a cybersecurity professional immediately, the values of Duty, Adaptability, and Persistence, which I have gained through my professional and academic experiences, remain consistent and will carry me throughout my time as a Pilot and into my future cybersecurity career.

Key Experiences That Shaped My Path

I had the privilege of starting my professional career at 18, enlisting in the US Navy for 5 years as an Aviation Ordnanceman, where I held roles such as Quality Assurance Supervisor (QAS) and Ordnance Team Leader. These roles exposed me to high-intensity systems and environments where strict procedural compliance was mandatory. The skills acquired during my time include attention to detail, due to one of my missions as a QAS was to inspect and sign off on various airborne weapon systems. This ultimately led me to adopt a culture of accountability and ensure concerns are remedied or escalated to the appropriate authority, all the while maintaining elite, mission-critical thinking, which led me to cybersecurity, where critical thinking is an expectation. My time in the Navy laid the foundation of discipline, risk awareness, and responsibility that drove my interest in Cybersecurity.

I ended my enlisted service and joined the defense contracting world as an Engineering Technician with Northrop Grumman. As an engineering technician, I was exposed to and worked with advanced defense technology systems that supported our military. This was also an introduction to a private large corporation with a structured work environment. The skills gained from this experience were more technical than mechanical, including system operations and computing troubleshooting. Ultimately, my contractor role exposed me to real-world systems and defense environments, especially to how these systems can be vulnerable and to the need for more secure infrastructure on both the physical and cyber fronts.

With those two experiences behind me, I found that to advance my career, I had to pursue higher education. Looking at the skills I had acquired and my introduction to technical troubleshooting, I found that pursuing a degree in Cybersecurity was the logical next step. Immediately, as I began cybersecurity-related coursework, the topic clicked for me, and I became engaged with the content it offers. Security-related projects found in my Cyber Operations class and coding assignments in Windows and Linux systems were all engaging and required the critical thinking I expected. I began understanding how attacks occur and how to identify vulnerabilities. All of which sparked my interest in incident response and law enforcement cybersecurity.

What I Learned Along the Way

My military, professional, and academic experiences have all shaped and developed critical thinking and problem-solving that directly apply to cybersecurity. The high-risk environments I operated in taught me accountability and precision, and I continued to make sound decisions under pressure. These experiences translated well into my technical work, where troubleshooting systems and identifying potential vulnerabilities require the same level of attention to detail and critical thinking. When I began my cybersecurity schoolwork, the hands-on experience was priceless, as I gained industry knowledge and an understanding of how attacks occur and how small oversights can pose significant security risks.

I also came to understand that cybersecurity is not just about protecting technology, but also about protecting the people and organizations connected to it. This shift in perspective really drove my interest in cybersecurity and overall to pursue a career where I can apply both my technical skills and sense of responsibility to make a meaningful impact.

Where I Am Headed

As I look ahead, I will begin this spring jumping into my commission as a Naval Officer and my duties as a Student Naval Aviator, eventually becoming a Pilot in the US Navy. While the role does not connect directly to the cybersecurity field, it will provide me with irreplaceable leadership, decision-making, and operational skills on a global scale.

In the long term, I intend to transition into the cybersecurity field with a focus on incident response, law enforcement, and or roles in national security. Specifically interested in roles that identify vulnerabilities and protect critical infrastructure. The ability to combine technical expertise with a mission-oriented mindset is what draws me most to this area of cybersecurity.