

Interview with E. J. Corpus - Research Security Engineer for ODU Security
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E. J. Corpus is a research security engineer that currently works for ODU ITS Security. Corpus became interested in cybersecurity way back in high school. In his free time, he played video games and built computers for fun. He became really connected with cybersecurity after falling victim to multiple phishing scams. One of his driving passions was to find ways to prevent them, and a career in cybersecurity was the perfect way to do that. Another motivation he had was because of his cousin. Corpus' cousin worked as the head of cybersecurity for a hospital in Chesapeake and was able to help him obtain an internship in his department, giving him valuable experience. His cousin showed him all kinds of cybersecurity tools, tricks, and what being a cybersecurity professional is all about. In college, Corpus worked an IT position for ODU under the Networking and Infrastructure department. His job was to grant and verify user's door access, troubleshoot MFPs, and deliver printer paper around campus. During this job, he had lots of free time, which he used to study for cybersecurity certifications and complete homework assignments for his degree. After college, Corpus applied to a research security job at VMASC and with the experience and certifications under his belt, got the job.

Starting out, Corpus believed that the best tools he had for getting into the cybersecurity field were his degree and first certifications. His degree, no matter what grades he got, showed that he was able to understand and pass classes related to basic cybersecurity. It helped having his degree in order to connect with cybersecurity professionals in the field. Certifications that Corpus did in college also helped him get his first security position. His first certification was the ISC2 SSCP. Later on, he got certifications such as the Security+, CCNA, and others. One thing that Corpus wishes he did earlier on in his career was to start his cybersecurity career earlier. Some examples included applying for jobs and internships earlier, researching what roles he was interested in, etc.

Some questions I asked Corpus about talked about skills and knowledge that people would need in cybersecurity in the future. He stated that something that everyone needed to be effective in was how to research things. Researching and finding resources to help whatever you are working on can be incredibly valuable when it comes to working phishing tickets, as an example. Another important topic to be well versed in is AI. Learning how to govern and understand AI security or AI in general could be a huge factor in getting a job or being laid off. The last important topic Corpus talked to me about was access control. Corpus and I both worked in a department of Old Dominion University where we worked with granting or removing students and staff access control to whoever needed it. It was always important to verify users before granting or removing access, as it could cause plenty of problems in the future, depending on the level of access granted. This is why the principle of least privilege is so important, and why everyone in cybersecurity should learn what it is.

I was interested more in learning about Corpus' technical skills, so I also asked him about his day-to-day activities and routines. Some of the tools that I am learning now include Palo Alto firewalls, Crowstrike, and InsightVM/Rapid7, which are the tools that Corpus uses the most on a daily basis. To stay up to date with cybersecurity threats and practices, Corpus recommended some newsletters he subscribes to including "Govtechweekly,

huntressthreatreports, bleepingcomputer, thehackernews, securityweek”. One skill I was worried about in my future was coding, so I asked how much coding was involved in Corpus’ role. He stated that he did not do much, but knowing bash scripting had been helpful for him when automating small tasks. Hopefully I will find a similar role where coding is not essential.

The biggest soft skill that Corpus said was essential for any cyber job was communication. Communication among peers, especially when there is an older/younger generation gap is essential. Professional communication, not just technical, needs to be a perfected skill in this line of work. If an urgent security incident were to happen, being able to communicate freely with other teams and higherups to get involved is a must. Corpus even stated that while working firewall tickets, he has to work closely with other teams all the time. A recent DTT transition has helped bring teams together despite all the change happening. Great communication skills were needed for this transition and are needed for every part of the job. Even documentation skills require a higher level of communication that is needed to secure tickets for firewalls, phishing attempts, etc.

The final few questions I asked Corpus related to the cybersecurity industry, and advice for my future. The number one thing that I learned from Corpus was to learn as much as I could about AI. AI is unpredictable, evolving, and it is important to learn new things regarding it everyday. Some of the biggest challenges in the cybersecurity industry include phishing and AI. Despite the challenges, Corpus also stated that it was important to have a work-life balance in cybersecurity. The field itself is not stressful, but there is burnout that everyone faces. If you are passionate about your work and have a good work-life balance, then you will do great in the field. Another important note from Corpus was that experience matters more to people than certifications do. To get a starter role, it is important to have a few basic certifications like Security+, but the higher roles you apply for, they want more focus on experience in the field. Researching what you are interested in before tackling experience and certifications can save you lots of time in your early career. It is just as important as finding out what you want to go to college for after high school, or even what job you want to get after high school. It determines the next few years of your life. The End.