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# FINAL REFLECTION: MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

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By: Quintin Sumpter



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EMPLOYER: LENORA THORBJORNSEN  
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As a person gets closer to the end of their college years, they must seek real-world experience in the field they practice. Some people find solid jobs right away to further their careers and enhance their skills simultaneously, while others find internships to enhance their skills before continuing on to the real thing. Personally, I struggled to do either as I was not having any success no matter how many places I applied to, but I was instead provided with the opportunity to develop or enhance my soft skills while also providing some help to others. I chose to join the cybersecurity mentorship program at Old Dominion University to serve as a personal guide to those who are entering the program after me. The mentorship program allows me to provide my own personal insight throughout my college years and provide the freshmen students with tips that helped me and also with information that I should've used to enhance my education. With the mentorship program being something different compared to an internship, I decided that the three learning outcomes I hoped to achieve during the program are enhancing my critical thinking skills, enhancing my communication skills, and developing digital compliance skills. In this paper, I will be discussing multiple aspects of the mentorship program including the positives, negatives, challenges, what gave me motivation, etc.

The mentorship program allowed me a chance to connect with students choosing cybersecurity as their major by giving them tips on how to not only be successful academically but also allowed me the chance to properly reach out and offer personal guidance with other troubles they may have. My goal was to put my best foot forward by taking the role of mentor seriously so that each student may reach their academic goals as well as their personal goals. The mentorship program can seem like something laid back and easy but, that is only for those who do not truly see just how doing a poor job can affect the students. I was under the watch of Lenora Thorbjornsen while in her mentorship program and received word documents, google slides, and PowerPoints containing the necessary tools to help best prepare me. Professor Thorbjornsen set a zoom call with me to clearly explain what exactly my role as a peer mentor would be by having all that I would need be set up in PowerPoint or google documents with thorough verbal explanations as she went over each slide with me. With how her presentation for me was set up, Professor Thorbjornsen had all answers to my questions ready even before I asked them showing that she truly invested time to make sure I was not confused and can do my duty to the best of my ability.

Using these tools I began to study them to prepare for my encounter with the students because it is important to have a proper understanding of the guidelines in any profession. As their mentor, I have the ability to discuss and view some of the student's sensitive information that is meant for their eyes only. A lack of professionalism causes information such as university identification numbers and grade point averages to be viewed by others when I mishandle that information. Whether during a meeting or emailing a student I must take my job seriously so that no information is mishandled or viewed by another person. This could happen during a zoom meeting where I accidentally give access to the meeting to multiple people or through emails where I discuss sensitive information with the wrong student. With all that can be discussed, learning to continuously check whom I am reaching out to and what is being discussed to avoid all possible mishaps.

Learning about my duties as a mentor was the first step before taking action to communicate with my mentees. It is my task to guide the new students to a successful academic lifestyle by providing helpful tips and information to aid them in their journey but, I will not be able to help any of the students without allowing them to become comfortable with me first. As their mentor, I am to be trusted with their personal information and expect them to share what troubles them, but I should not anticipate them to fully trust me when I am considered a stranger. The mentees are freshman students whom I would like to not only aid in their academic journey, but also connect with on a personal level so they can let down any social barriers and allow me to help in other ways. I understand I am not their professor, advisor, or therapist and should still refer them to those who can better help depending on the situation but, it is still important that I am an approachable person. Making myself available as a person they can discuss their current struggles with can allow me to provide personal advice and walk them through possible solutions for the current problem. Naturally, this will only be for situations where I can provide the best answer but should still make note of the situation and monitor the student's progress throughout. As for the more serious situations I need to accurately understand what is troubling the student so that I can refer them to those better suited to help and follow up afterward to check the situation's progression. I needed to show them that I am still a student as well and just because I have a duty as their mentor, I am still a peer they can contact if they need to discuss other matters. I created a short bio about myself to make them comfortable by mainly giving a short look into some interesting facts about my life and some personal hobbies of mine. The short bio about myself was meant for me to show the students I am a normal person attending the same school that is trying to help and not someone who only wants to hear from them if they have academic struggles.

After providing the students with a short bio to get to know me began to reach out to them and brainstorm what to discuss during these meetings. My experience as a senior attending Old Dominion University allows me to help them better adjust to their new surroundings and situations. Starting by first doing a simple introduction face to face through zoom calls or in-person office hours would be the first on the list as I would like to get to know them as well. The goal is to understand them more as a person within the first few minutes and make a nice connection so they can warm up to me resulting in any possible barriers being dropped. Following the formal greetings would be to hear any immediate concerns that they may have whether it be navigating the campus or how to use the ODU portal. The freshmen entering ODU are being placed in a territory that is new to them which can create multiple questions, I believe that first answering these questions will show that I am putting their concerns first and could also be a smooth transition into the topics I already planned to discuss with them.

As an ODU senior, I believe freshmen knowing the campus is very important as it may take most of the first semester to become acquainted with where lectures, food, and other points of interest can be located. This is also possibly the easiest problem with the easiest solution as my only recommendation is to acquire a university map and have at least two in possession. Helping them navigate the ODU portal would be the next topic of discussion as it is important to make note of all that can be located within the portal. There is a Monarch Wellness tab where students will be able to monitor, schedule, and cancel appointments at the wellness. The tab also lets you check any messages from doctors and lab results from previous tests that were taken. There are numerous other tabs located in the portal such as a tab for canvas, degree works, financial aid, student success services, word press, and more. During the meeting I would take

the time to go over each tab individually which could lead to other topics of discussion, for example, the degree works tab would allow me to show the freshmen mentees exactly what classes are required before graduating and also properly plan to effectively reach all necessary requirements. After discussing all important topics I would then give the floor back to the student so they may ask for better clarification in what we discussed or possibly ask a new question that was not originally covered.

The reality of being assigned as a mentor is that not everyone will care to respond to emails or seek you for guidance, but there are other ways to still aid the students even if they do not openly ask for it. I chose to create a PowerPoint with tips to help them through their first semester at ODU. The slides within the PowerPoint consisted of a small number of topics that would be discussed within meetings along with what I believe to be helpful for university students. The PowerPoint included a mixture of information that may be already known and information I feel is not stressed enough. Studying tips are always talked about with students encourage they use flashcards, participate in study groups, and take good notes. Those are some of the more common topics discussed, but as the mentor of these freshmen students, it is my job to create a bond with them and discuss more than just study tips. The PowerPoint included other topics such as how to choose the proper courses needed and to prioritize their health. It is important to note that the purpose of this PowerPoint is to provide a simple survival guide for the mentees while also answering a few questions they may have. Not every student will respond to emails asking to meet with them so by creating the PowerPoint I can still provide my services to them.

As the senior and mentor of the freshmen students, I have gained prior knowledge over the years of what is necessary to succeed. This knowledge allows me to share my personal success tips with the student while also opening up about my own failures even if I do not specifically list them. This is another duty as the mentor to make sure that the students do not make the same mistakes that I have over the years and allow them to avoid any major struggles or setbacks while in pursuit of their major. The knowledge I have acquired is what allows me to create an effective PowerPoint to be used as a guide and my knowledge allows me to be an approachable mentor that can provide aid in the current struggles the students could be facing. Along with this knowledge, I must have effective soft skills and this mentorship has allowed me to acknowledge my best soft skills while further developing others. I have had to use multiple soft skills such as time management, communication, interpersonal skills, problem solving, adaptability, creativity, and attention to detail. Developing these soft skills will further aid me in a work place setting as I must effectively use each skill at some point in time.

Time management must be used to effectively do work and finish that work before the assigned due date. Without proper time management, there will a rush to finish a project which will then compromise it leaving the project to have more flaws that would have been caught if time had been taken to thoroughly analyze the work. Communication and interpersonal skills must be used when collaborating with other coworkers and must also be used when interacting with customers. A lack of these skills will begin to negatively impact the team's progress on group projects with all the possibilities of miscommunication. Having bad communication and interpersonal skills have the ability to negatively affect the company since it will leave the customer with a negative experience with my lack of efficient communication to help them with their needs. Effective problem solving, creativity, and adaptability skills will provide me with the ability to encounter difficult situations whether alone or in a team setting, and allow me to think

more outside the box and deliver the most efficacious results. Developing attention to detail skills will allow for me to do my assignments accurately and efficiently before presenting them to others. Although I have begun to develop and enhance some of these skills that does not mean I am perfect and have mastered these skills. I understand that there will come a time when I will make a mistake and not effectively apply one of these skills, but my journey will continue to allow me to enhance all of these skills and develop new ones for the future and better avoid further mistakes.

The soft skill that I believe is my best quality is my skill to work effectively within a team setting. I did not get to properly enhance this skill in the mentorship program as I was doing all the brainstorming and project creations by myself and other than being assigned students by Professor Thorbjornsen I made the effort to reach out to them and create a group chat with the students. I developed my teamwork skills previously before my mentorship program from my time in sports and involvement in other projects throughout my four years at ODU. My time in both sports and group collaborations showed that without everyone working in cooperation with one another the group is doomed to fail. Communication allows for ideas and plans to be bounced off one another and without everyone speaking up there can be holes left unfilled simply because others were not willing to apply themselves. Everyone also needs to reach a common understanding while communicating so that instead of violent arguing there can be argumentative discussions instead where others do not feel as if they are being ridiculed and everyone has the freedom to express their viewpoints. A team setting is where I believe I can excel with my interpersonal skills making me an approachable and dependable person that can maintain a peaceful environment during times of tension while still striving for fairness amongst group members.

The most motivating and exciting part about my mentorship program was getting to aid those younger than me on their journey. I have younger siblings and it fills me with an overwhelming amount of joy when I am able to guide them in life with the personal connections we have where they can voice their troubles to me no matter what. I have also always believed that it is important to encourage and guide the youth of tomorrow as the world can be a nasty place at times and without proper guidance, many will turn down a wrong path in life difficult to escape. The freshman students will be able to turn to me for guidance and I welcome that role because I do see myself as just a mentor, in this role I believe myself to be an older sibling having a genuine interest in my younger sibling's journey. I was motivated to do my best as their mentor so that their future can be bright and their dreams eventually made a reality.

The most discouraging part about the mentorship program is the sad truth that none of the students are obligated to respond when I reach out and have other options as to whom they can talk to about their concerns. Although Professor Thorbjornsen made it known I was there to help and I reached out on my own as well, not every student will respond or make an attempt to join group chats. The students do have access to their advisor, professor, tutoring, and even their peers if they need help with situations but, I do not believe the students realize just how useful I can be to them having been in their situation already. It is unfortunate that some students did not respond but that does not mean I simply cast them aside and only provide help to those who responded to me. The challenging part is to make sure that all who are assigned to me, whether they respond or not, are treated equally and receive the same opportunities as others. I am still assigned as their mentor and must act accordingly by providing them with the same opportunities to reach out to me and providing the same tools for success as given to others. The most exciting

part for me was being able to guide those younger than me so I will not simply ignore other students because they do not respond and will still make myself available in case they are in need of my assistance.

For those looking to take my place as a mentor in the future, I would advise you to look at my approach to guiding the students. Developing a close relationship with the students so that they can become comfortable with you and be more open to sharing any troubles they may have is still a good way to approach them. They need to realize that you truly care and can be more of a friend or older sibling and not just someone trying to accomplish an objective for a grade. Take more time into contacting the students one on one if contacting them all together has not worked. There is a possibility that a person is assigned over twenty students to mentor and it can seem like a hassle to contact them individually but that may be necessary to attract more responses from them. When working on an informative project to aid them it is fine other references are used but, try to be as authentic as possible since the mentees will be looking to their mentor for guidance because of the experience and knowledge the mentor should have accumulated through the years.

The mentorship program taught me how to overcome adversity by adapting to the situation and challenged me to find solutions. When in a real work environment there will be a number of times when calculations are incorrect and the outcome is not the best, but I must use the soft skills I worked on developing in my mentorship program to aid me when I face these challenges. The effect the mentorship program will have on me in the future will come from the development of my soft skills. Although I was unfortunately unable to have hands on cybersecurity experience, I believe the development of my soft skill in the mentorship program still better prepared me for when I do enter a real work environment. I will be able to face multiple problems head on finding creative solutions to them and work well with others due to my communication skills. After graduating I am eager to see where life takes me and just how much more I can learn after already learning so much from my time in college.