

Personal Narrative Essay

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Ever since I was young, I have had an interest in gaming. Even today, I still play video games. This interest in video games has led me to the path of getting my degree in cybersecurity. I've always liked gaming, which has led me to want to learn more about technology. In high school, the courses that interested me the most were the ones related to technology. Eventually after high school, I went and earned my Associate of Applied Science (AAS) in Information Systems Technology from Virginia Peninsula Community College (VPCC). While I was in community college, earning my degree, I obtained two IT related certifications, the CompTIA Network+ and Security+ certifications. After that, I decided to go after a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Cybersecurity from Old Dominion University (ODU). This paper will discuss how I obtained my degrees, specifically the classes I took, and how I learned the skills I have that led to getting my degree in Cybersecurity.

Early Life

To start, I mentioned that gaming is what got me started on this journey. I decided that when I got older, I want to do something related to technology. Originally, I wanted to get into game design because I liked games so much that I wanted to create them. Getting into the technology field would be great because technology is always evolving and highly needed for businesses and just about everything else innovative. As a society, the need for technology has become more dependent than ever before.

In high school, I was considering my options for degrees. I took a course called Computers and Information Systems in high school. This course helped me prepare for the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) Word exam, although not required to graduate, and focused

on using other Microsoft Office products, such as PowerPoint and Excel (Microsoft, 2025). I chose computer science as my first option. As I went through senior year in high school, I had second thoughts. This was based on my performance in the higher-level math classes. Although I passed, those kinds of courses just aren't for me. Personally, I never thought I was the best or worst at math, usually doing my best with algebra and maybe geometry, but I draw the line with trigonometry. When earning a degree in computer science, this requires taking a lot of math courses, such as multiple levels of calculus and other math courses. What I enjoy about computer science is the technological aspect of it, programming. Depending on the type of programming, there can be some math to it, which I thought was boring. I looked at other options in degrees, and an IT degree requires less math than a computer science degree. After careful consideration, I chose to get my AAS in Information Systems Technology, specializing in Cybersecurity. Part of me wanting to learn more about technology is how devices work across networks, including how they can be manipulated. Many people think that hacking sounds cool, including me, so figuring out how devices can be manipulated is something I wanted to learn while getting my degree.

Earning My Associate's Degree

Throughout my time at VPCC, I took many classes that either improved my previous skills or introduced me to new concepts. One class I took was called Information Literacy. This course taught me how to perform research with an IT focus using Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. I was required to create documents, charts, and presentations based on my topic, the economic effects of cyber-attacks on the tech industry. I was already familiar with creating word documents, spreadsheets, and PowerPoint presentations from high school, so this class was very interesting and an easy A.

The most interesting classes I took at VPCC were the computer networking courses. I started in Internet and Network Foundations. This course provided me with an in-depth introduction to computer networking. I started learning about the Open Systems Interconnection (OSI) model, and from there I learned about protocols, how data is created and sent across a network, subnetting, and some information about cyber-attacks. This course helped me earn my CompTIA Network+ certification. Another course I took was Network Security Basics, which talked more about the security aspects of computer networking. More attacks, such as social engineering and web application attacks, were discussed. Cryptography and public key infrastructure were introduced, discussing the importance of encryption and the different types. Risk management was also another important topic, which showed us many deliverables, such as a business impact analysis, business continuity plan, and incident response plan for reacting to threats and how to mitigate potential threats to a business, continuing operations in the event of an attack. This course helped me get my Security+ certification after I earned my Network+, opening me up to more jobs, such as working for government agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) or Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

After the basics, I took Network Attacks, Computer Crime, and Hacking, Internet and Intranet Firewalls/VPNs, and Network Communications, Security, and Authentication. These three courses provided me with even more knowledge about how to protect a network from attacks and ensure data is communicated almost flawlessly on a network. I learned about new protocols, such as Session Initiation Protocol (SIP). One project I had to provide a mitigation plan for a physical break-in incident on a server room. Other projects included designing a topology of a network and giving recommendations to improve the network through phases. One

of these focused on network firewalls, while another was about network communication in general.

Working On My Bachelor's Degree

After I graduated with my AAS and two IT certifications, I decided I wanted to open myself to more opportunities. I started working on earning my BS in Cybersecurity at ODU. As part of transfer requirements, I had to take some extra courses at VPCC and transfer them, such as Precalculus I and College Composition II to be able to start at ODU. My first and second semesters included prerequisite courses and some required that were outside the focus of my major, such as General Biology I and II. I learned a lot about microorganisms, genetics, the environment, and the human body. I also took Linux System for Cybersecurity where I learned how to manage the Linux operating system. Many assignments included password cracking, account management, basic networking, creating shell scripts to automate tasks. All of these were hands on labs where I had to use a Kali Linux virtual machine (VM) running on my computer. I also took Cybersecurity Techniques and Operations, where I learned about tools to perform traffic analysis, firewall configuration, ethical hacking, and steganography. Some of the content I already learned from previous courses, such as using Wireshark to perform traffic analysis. This course still gave me some hands-on experience utilizing tools used in the field of cybersecurity, including tools that I haven't used before, like Steghide to encrypt text files into images.

During my second semester, I took Interdisciplinary Theory and Concepts. This course taught me how to take a variety of disciplines to solve problems. Our final paper was worked on throughout the course with discussion boards and feedback received from workshops. My topic focused on how fingerprint scanners can prevent data theft. A lot of refining went into my topic

for my research paper. I eventually had a more specific research question, which was how fingerprint scanners in online banking systems reduce personally identifiable information (PII) theft. My topic consisted of biology, mathematics, cybersecurity, criminology, and economics. It wasn't the easiest task to integrate these disciplines together, but I made a coherent topic that relied upon multiple disciplines to solve a problem.

Conclusion

Overall, I have learned a lot throughout my journey. I've always been intrigued at the power of technology, even at a young age. This has inspired me to take my passion and turn it into a career that I'd love. In order to get to the start of my career, I've had to face many challenges. First, I needed to graduate from community college with professional industry certifications. Second, I have to get through ODU to get my bachelor's degree. Once I get my bachelor's degree, I will have more opportunities in the field, increasing my chances of getting hired. As I go through my path, I will be adding more skills than ever before. I might have to do some learning outside of coursework and renew my IT certifications on time, but I think it's possible for me to achieve. I've faced uncertainty before in my life. It's not always about all of the exhaustive events we've been through, it's how we take those bad events and turn it into something good to make our lives meaningful, growing as a person (Smith, 2022). I've overcome obstacles, found alternatives that can shape a better future for myself. This type of thinking can help me overcome challenges in life so that I can become successful.

References

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