**Reflective Essay**

Damian Richardson

Old Dominion University

Course number: IDS493

Professor Andrews

4/28/2025

**Introduction**

Throughout my enrollment at Old Dominion University and my military career as a Navy Chief Petty Officer, I have gained a deep level understanding of how my technical expertise in cybersecurity, leadership experience, and interdisciplinary studies contribute to my career readiness. While I transition to Commission as an IP officer, I recognize that effective leadership, quality assurance, and risk management are the foundation of success. My long time in leadership positions, alongside my academic work, has taught me to develop not only technical proficiency but also strong personal and managerial skills. The interdisciplinary courses I’ve taken at Old Dominion have helped me integrate knowledge from various fields, which has enhanced my ability to market myself as a well-rounded professional in the cybersecurity and defense sectors.

This reflective essay will discuss the skills I’ve gained in leadership, quality assurance, and risk assessment and management. These skills, along with the artifacts that show my development, will show how interdisciplinary studies have strengthened my professional growth, giving me a edge as I move forward in my career. Additionally, I will reflect on how the integration of various disciplines, such as studied in this class and other classes, allowed me to become a more strategic leader, communicator, and problem solver.

**Leadership**

Leadership is a very important skill that I have been developing in both my military service and my academic studies. While in the Navy, I learned that leadership is  not just about giving orders but about motivating, inspiring, and guiding teams through high-pressure situations. Serving as a Chief Petty Officer and Leading Petty Officer in various roles has allowed me to develop an understanding of how to lead in complex environments, such as submarines and cybersecurity settings.

Three key artifacts that highlight my leadership development include my Advanced Leadership Development course, my Navigation Supervisor certification, and my Division Officer qualification. All of these GREAT experiences have, over the years, developed my approach to leadership and taught me valuable lessons on team dynamics and strategic decision-making.

The Advanced Leadership Development course provided me with theoretical and practical frameworks for leadership. It helped me understand how different leadership styles work in diverse contexts and how to adapt my approach based on the needs of the team. IDS493 has helped me work on my ability to assess situations and respond appropriately to mission success.

The Navigation Supervisor certification/qualification is another important artifact in my leadership development. This qualification required me to manage high-risk navigation operations, making critical decisions under pressure. The Navigation Supervisor qualification helped me create confidence in my ability to lead through situations while maintaining safety and efficiency.

Finally, my Division Officer qualification had me leading a division of sailors, overseeing both their professional development and operational commitments. This position tested my leadership skills in real world scenarios, where I had to balance requirements with human management, ensuring a good environment for my team.

Through these leadership experiences, I learned that effective leadership is rooted in clear communication, empathy, and adaptability. These lessons were shown by my interdisciplinary studies, particularly courses that focused on team dynamics and organizational behavior, like IDS 300W, which have equipped me to market myself as an adaptable leader in both military and civilian settings.

**Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance (QA) has played a big role in my career, particularly in ensuring the reliability and safety of systems, both in military operations and in cybersecurity. In the Navy, I have held several QA roles that required me to implement rigorous systems for maintaining standards, improving processes, and ensuring the operational success of teams and projects.

Three key artifacts that demonstrate my QA development include my QA Maintenance Planner qualification, QA Inspector qualification, and Controlled Material Petty Officer qualification. Each of these roles required a level of attention to detail and accountability, skills that are transferable to my future work in cybersecurity and management.

As a QA Maintenance Planner, I am responsible for looking into= the maintenance of critical equipment, making sure it was in working order and ready for deployment. This role required dilligent planning and risk mitigation, skills that are needed in cybersecurity where preventing potential failures is important. The skill to anticipate problems before they occur and to create systems that ensure continued functionality is vital in both the military and civilian sectors.

The QA Inspector qualification allowed me to evaluate systems and processes through detailed inspections, making sure that they each met the highest standards. This has taught me to identify weaknesses, correct them, and drive continuous improvement. The skills I gained in inspection and evaluation are directly applicable to cybersecurity, where attention to detail can prevent costly errors and security breaches.

Additionally, my Controlled Material Petty Officer qualification required me to manage and safeguard materials critical to Navy operations. This role involved ensuring the accountability and proper handling of materials, which parallels managing resources in cybersecurity.

**Risk Assessment and Management**

Risk assessment and management have been critical to my roles in the Navy and my studies in cybersecurity. Being able to assess risks, make informed decisions, and develop strategies to mitigate those risks has been crucial to my leadership development.

Two significant artifacts that showcase my risk management skills are my EP Evaluation as Department LPO and Command Fitness Leader and the two Navy Marine Corps Achievement Medals I received for managing materials and operational postures. These artifacts reflect my ability to assess risks, make decisions under pressure, and ensure that critical operations are running smoothly.

As Department LPO at COMSUBLANT, I am responsible for managing the welfare and performance of sailors, ensuring they were fit for duty and able to meet the demands of their roles. This required me to assess the physical and emotional health of my team and create strategies to

The two Navy Marine Corps Achievement Medals I received recognized my challenges in managing materials and ensuring operational readiness.

 I have learned the importance of balancing risks with rewards, and how to make decisions that minimize potential threats while maximizing operational success. The interdisciplinary nature of my studies at Old Dominion University has helped me look at risk management from various perspectives, giving me with a more comprehensive understanding of how risk affects organizations and how to make decisions that benefit the team as a whole.

**Conclusion**

Looking back on my experiences as a Navy Chief Petty Officer and as a student at Old Dominion University, I have acquired a understanding of how leadership, quality assurance, and risk management are interconnected and essential to career success. The interdisciplinary nature of my studies at Old Dominion University has give me the opportunity to integrate knowledge from different disciplines, making me a more strategic leader, a more efficient problem solver, and a more effective communicator. The artifacts I have created, such as leadership courses, certifications, and evaluations, reflect my development in these areas and have helped me market myself as a well-rounded professional. I am thoroughly looking forward to accomplishing my goals as an IP officer, perfecting my skills, and developing new ones. The lessons I learned in the military and at ODU will be ones I carry for the rest of my life!