

Finding My Path: From Uncertainty to Radiology

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Abstract

This essay tells the story of my journey from academic uncertainty to discovering my career path in radiology. Along the way, I explored different majors, worked as a clinical lab assistant, and shadowed a nuclear medicine technologist—experiences that helped me figure out what I enjoy and where I want to go professionally. Through these experiences, I developed personal traits like ambition and a strong work ethic, while also learning how to reflect on my growth and decisions. Using ideas from Nguyen (2013) and McAdams (2001), I explore how these turning points helped shape my narrative identity, giving meaning and coherence to my past experiences, and guiding my future goals. This essay shows how reflecting on academic and professional experiences can not only clarify career choices but also strengthen personal understanding and growth. All the while inspiring younger students and letting them know that college is hard, but it's worth it at the end

Introduction

I Remember sitting in my dorm room, unsure of what direction to take with my studies. I had changed my major multiple times, feeling increasingly uncertain and insecure about my future. These moments of doubt were uncomfortable, but they also became critical turning points in shaping who I am today. As McAdams (2001) explains, “People living in modern societies provide their lives with unity and purpose by constructing internalized and evolving narratives of the self” (p. 102). Reflecting on my academic journey, I can see how each experience—exploring different fields, working as a clinical lab assistant, and shadowing a nuclear medicine technologist—contributed to the story of my personal and professional growth. These experiences guided me toward a career in radiology, helping me develop traits like ambition and perseverance, and ultimately giving coherence to my evolving narrative identity. In this essay, I will recount the key moments, challenges, and reflections that have shaped my academic and career path, highlighting how my past experiences inform my present and future goals.

Early academic experiences

When I first entered college, I was uncertain about which major to pursue. I started with general education courses, thinking I would figure it out along the way. However, as I explored different subjects, I frequently questioned whether I was making the “right” choice. Changing majors' multiple times left me feeling insecure and anxious; I doubted my abilities and worried that I was falling behind my peers. At times, it seemed as though I was wandering without a clear direction, unsure of what I truly wanted to study or what career path I should follow.

Despite this confusion, these experiences were formative. Each shift introduced me to new ideas, perspectives, and academic challenges that gradually clarified my interests. According to Nguyen (2013), portfolios allow students to re-articulate their ideas of self and gain new understandings from past experiences. Similarly, Smith emphasizes that navigating academic challenges contributes to the

development of self-knowledge and identity. Through trial and error, I learned to evaluate my strengths, interests, and values more critically, which ultimately shaped my identity as a student. The uncertainty I initially experienced became a catalyst for growth, encouraging me to reflect on my academic choices and recognize the direction I wanted to pursue. Eventually guiding me toward a career in radiology.

Key Experiences Shaping Career Choice

One of the most pivotal experiences that helped clarify my career path was shadowing a nuclear medicine technologist. Observing the technologist at work, I was struck by the precision, technical skills, and patient interaction required in the field. The environment was both fast-paced and detail-oriented, with a constant need for focus and accuracy. I remember feeling a mix of excitement and nervous anticipation as I watched procedures being performed, realizing how much I enjoyed being in a healthcare setting where science, technology, and patient care intersected. This shadowing experience gave me a concrete understanding of what a career in radiology would look like and sparked a genuine interest in pursuing it.

Currently, I work as a clinical lab assistant, which has further reinforced my career choice. My duties include preparing samples, performing routine tests, and ensuring accuracy in lab results. This role has taught me valuable skills such as attention to detail, time management, and teamwork. More importantly, it has given me insight into the inner workings of healthcare environments and strengthened my confidence in pursuing a patient-focused, technical career like radiology. Each day in the lab reminds me of the importance of diligence and precision. Qualities I know are essential for success in my future field. Reflecting on these experiences, both shadowing and lab work served as critical turning points in my life story. As McAdams (2001) explains, "Narrative identities reconstruct the autobiographical past and anticipate the imagined future ... to provide the self with temporal coherence

and some semblance of psychosocial unity and purpose” (p. 108). These experiences not only confirmed my interest in radiology but also contributed to a coherent life story, linking past exploration with present skills and future ambitions. Through hands-on engagement, I was able to connect my personal traits—hardworking, ambitious, and detail-oriented—to tangible professional goals, further shaping my evolving narrative identity.

Reassurance

Once I recognized radiology as my career path, other experiences began to make sense. The major changes, the uncertainty, the anxiety, the lab job—they weren’t random events. They formed the structure of my narrative identity. Nguyen (2013) argues that narratives help us create coherence across time, allowing us to understand not only what happened but why it mattered. I realized that my past wasn’t disorganized; it was preparing me. Each step strengthened my work ethic, curiosity, and willingness to grow. McAdams (2001) explains that narrative identity often includes themes of agency and redemption. I see both of them in my story. Agency appears in the moments when I actively search, explore, and make choices about my direction. Redemption appears in the way my confusion transformed into clarity. The parts of my journey that once felt frustrated now feel meaningful because they helped me reach a fulfilling destination.

Looking Forward: Goals and Purpose

Today, I am pursuing my path to radiology with purpose and excitement. My future goals include completing my radiologic technology program, gaining experience in imaging specialties, and

eventually working in a hospital where I can continue growing professionally. I hope to explore further specialization in nuclear medicine or advanced imaging modalities. Radiology excites me because it combines technical skills, critical thinking, and direct patient care. Every image tells a story, and as a radiologic technologist, I hope to help patients understand their own stories through the images that reveal what is happening inside their bodies.

Inspiring Younger Students

If there is one message, I want younger students to take my story; it is that uncertainty is normal—and temporary. College is not a straight path for everyone. It can feel overwhelming, confusing, and stressful. But those challenges do not mean you are failing; they mean you are growing up. Your major might change. Your plans might shift. You might feel lost for a while. But as long as you stay open to learning and willing to explore, you will find direction. And when you do, the struggles will feel worth it. Nguyen (2013) reminds us that we give meaning to our experiences by shaping them into a narrative. You may not see the bigger picture right now, but one day you will. Every moment—even the uncertain ones—plays a part in the story of who you become.

References

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