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My Academic Journey: A Reflection

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Through numerous academic challenges, I have gained valuable insights into becoming a valuable hand in the cybersecurity field. As I reflect on my journey through university, this electronic portfolio will serve as a canvas showcasing the work, skills, and growth I have experienced along the way. I will explore my personal and professional development, my achievements, and how these experiences have shaped my goals moving forward.

Although I started my university career focused on medicine, my interest in computer science was still evident in my hobbies. After making the switch, my interest in cybersecurity and digital forensics grew significantly over the past few years. It felt more natural to turn a personal hobby into a professional pursuit. Old Dominion University offered me hands-on experiences, personal development, and opportunities to exercise resilience.

The first artifact showcased is a photo of my home lab. The home lab is really my workbench for my hobbies. I use this space to experience and apply what I've learned in class to real-world scenarios. I actively engage in investigation projects found on digital forensics forums and certification platforms like Security Blue Team. Most of the time, I use this space to help family and friends with troubleshooting or recovering old family photos. As explained in my narrative, I also enjoy modifying gaming consoles and fixing devices.

Additionally, these experiences from university have sharpened my problem-solving skills. The second artifact comes from one of my favorite academic experiences. For the final project of Digital Forensics CYSE 407, we were asked to analyze and create a report on digital communications between a fictional public figure and a suspicious contact. This assignment challenged me to apply both technical and ethical reasoning while documenting findings clearly and professionally. I was inspired to add my own touches of creativity when creating mock

evidence to support the report. I felt immersed in the process, and it reinforced my desire for the field. The class taught the importance of paying attention to detail and legal awareness when it comes to digital investigations.

Among my showcase for my digital forensics experience is a photo of my main desktop computer. With money saved from summer jobs, I was determined to research and build a cost-effective system that would support my creative and academic journeys. To me, the system is a testament to my ability to apply what I know to acquire what I want. Over time, I've upgraded and optimized the system to handle increasingly demanding tasks, video editing, virtual machines, forensic analysis software, and music production. This computer is more than a tool, it represents the time and effort I've invested in building a future with technology.

My professional life, outside of university, has helped me to understand the value of teamwork and the power of effective communication. This skill set has been developed through my work in the pharmaceutical field and extracurricular involvements. The first artifact is a photo of me with some of the pharmacy team. Time constraints made it difficult to get everyone available for the shoot. This photo reflects years of working alongside a driven group of individuals and the best set of mother figures I could ask for. Working behind the counter came with high-pressure situations. Whether busy flu seasons, short staffing, or a global pandemic, we had each other's backs. Through it all, I learned how to step up when needed, listen actively, and self-motivate.

The second artifact is a photo from our pharmacy's vaccine outreach campaign. Our team was tasked with reaching out to customers to inform them of the importance of staying protected with vaccines. In our most recent flu season, we administered over 650 vaccines through

consistent, respectful, and effective communication. I learned how to engage with people from the community of different backgrounds and maintain a knowledgeable and professional position.

The third artifact is a group photo from my time in the Japanese Club. Before I came to Old Dominion University, I was enrolled in Bowling Green State University, where I worked alongside other students to help foreign exchange students feel more welcomed on campus. This experience helped me grow as a communicator by navigating a language barrier. It taught me to understand the needs of others, bridging cultural differences, and keeping an open mind for new experiences. Whether in a pharmacy or overseas, communication and teamwork are at the heart of every challenge and every success.

In addition to cultivating my communication skills, my passion for teaching and learning has been a motivating force in both my academic and personal life. The first artifact is a photo from my time volunteering for ODU's GenCyber summer program. In this role, I supported mentors and students through hands-on activities such as steganography and assisting in navigating virtual machine environments. It was incredibly rewarding to help students understand complex concepts in cybersecurity and watch their confidence grow.

The second artifact is from another summer program, the LCCC S.T.E.A.M. Camp. In this summer program, I helped introduce K-12 students to science, technology, engineering, and math subjects through interactive activities. I helped set up and lead them through team-based exercises like using LEGO robotics kits and physics crafts. The students were of differing learning styles and experience levels, but being the patient and guiding hand to introduce them to

possibly their life's career was rewarding. This experience reminded me how important it is to break down complex ideas into manageable steps.

My third artifact is a Security Blue Team digital forensics certification. Understandably, a cybersecurity degree is a great start to getting my foot in the door. However, the best way to demonstrate to companies what I am capable of starts with certifications. This certificate was earned by me outside of school and is a major milestone for me. Soon, I plan to complete the CompTIA Security+ certification. Certifications are more than a check mark on my resume; they're a reflection of my determination to master my craft.

On this journey, I learned that in dire times, I can step outside of myself to resolve any situation and that strengths and weaknesses are shaped by what is required of you and what you're willing to give. As I move forward, I'm focused on pursuing a federal position that will allow me to use technology creatively and to make a real difference. I believe I have the skills to bridge the disciplines of cybersecurity and public service and contribute to societal missions. Although my career focus has changed, I feel that finding another fast-paced environment would keep me more engaged. I would love to find a position in the digital forensics side of cybersecurity someday.