

Individual Reflection Document

Diane Gilzow

Old Dominion University

CYSE 368 - Cybersecurity Clinic

Professor Teresa Duvall

May 7, 2026

This Spring semester, I had the opportunity to participate in the ODU/COVA CCI Cybersecurity Clinic, and through this experience I was able to apply what I learned in the classroom into making a meaningful impact on a real organization. In the Cybersecurity Clinic, I was able to strengthen not only my technical skills but also my soft skills, as I learned how to communicate and collaborate within a team and in a professional manner. The organization that I got to work for was the Norfolk Botanical Garden, and it was a great pleasure being able to help them with conducting a risk assessment and provide recommendations to improve their cybersecurity posture. I gained a lot of meaningful experience from this internship that I will carry with me once I start my professional career.

As I look back on my experience, I found that I encountered both successes and challenges throughout the internship. Starting with the successes, I was able to grow significantly in both technical and professional areas. One of these successes was the ability to apply classroom knowledge in a real-world setting. In my classes, I learned about common vulnerabilities in organizations, risk assessments, and security best practices, and this internship gave me the opportunity to apply those skills in a practical environment. As part of the internship, I collaborated with my team to conduct a risk assessment for the organization. This involved identifying areas of security weakness and providing tailored recommendations and best practices to improve their overall security posture. Working directly with a nonprofit client made the work feel more meaningful and grounded, and it motivated me to approach each task with greater responsibility and professionalism. After we presented our deliverables, our main point of contact, Nidia, appeared pleased with our findings and recommendations and said that they were valuable for the Norfolk Botanical Garden.

Another key success I had was developing stronger workplace communication and collaboration skills. Working in a team environment has really helped strengthen these skills and made me more confident in communicating my ideas. Through the internship, I worked closely with my team to address the client's cybersecurity needs. Because the project involved multiple responsibilities, we divided our tasks based on each of our strengths and communicated our progress with one another. This made the report feel less overwhelming and allowed each of us to focus on specific sections that helped ensure that the final report and presentation was well-developed and thorough. I also strengthened my communication skills with the interviews we had with Nidia and our presentations. I was initially nervous about having to speak out, but over time I gained the confidence to ask questions and contribute to our presentation. I felt like I improved my ability in communicating within a team and with other professionals.

The internship overall has also satisfied the Memorandum of Agreement that we had to sign at the beginning of the semester. When I looked through that document, I knew I was expected to apply my classroom knowledge, collaborate in a team environment, conduct risk assessments professionally, understand industry best practices, and research cybersecurity solutions for our companies. I was able to meet all of these objectives through my work in the Cybersecurity Clinic. I utilized what I've learned about the NIST Cybersecurity Framework and risk assessment methodologies when evaluating our client's security posture. I collaborated closely with my team throughout the project and we worked together to develop and refine our findings. In addition, I researched cybersecurity best practices and relevant solutions to ensure our recommendations were practical and aligned with industry standards. Through this experience, I believe I was able to achieve what was outlined in the MOA and gained valuable experience.

I've faced successes through this internship, however, there were some factors that I thought I could've done better on. The main factor being my time management skills, my schedule was pretty busy this semester with having a full course load and a part-time job, so it was challenging for me to find dedicated time for this internship. There were some instances where I was doing work at the last minute that has contributed to stress and also the quality of my work. Additionally, we faced some scheduling conflicts when it came to setting up meetings with Nidia, as all of us had busy and sometimes conflicting schedules. This occasionally slowed our progress, and I felt like earlier planning could've helped resolve this issue. Finally, another major challenge for me personally was my presentation skills. I was really nervous about speaking in front of others and clearly explaining technical information in a structured way. I had to practice a lot on my presentation skills to become more confident and comfortable, which did help me improve my ability and I was a little less nervous once I actually presented to our client.

Looking back on the challenges I faced, there are some things I can improve on if I were to do this internship again. I think the biggest thing being my time management skills, starting the report at a much earlier time would not have made the workload more manageable but also reduced stress and improved the overall quality of my work. I would've also been more proactive earlier in the project, it would've allowed more time for reviewing and refining my work. Lastly, better planning at the beginning of the project would have helped me stay more organized and efficient over time. With the time crunch of composing the report, I realized how important it is to pace work consistently throughout a project rather than relying on short bursts of effort near the deadline.

These areas for improvement also helped me identify several recommendations that may benefit future interns. Future interns entering the Cybersecurity Clinic should be prepared to

manage their time effectively and balance the internship alongside other academic and personal responsibilities. I would strongly recommend that future interns should start assigned deliverables early to make time for review and revisions without the added stress. Additionally, interns should be prepared to work in a collaborative team environment where communication is essential. It's important to share progress and coordinate responsibilities with teammates, as this will help ensure consistency across the project and prevent misunderstandings. Finally, future interns should ensure that they have a solid foundation in basic cybersecurity concepts. It would also be beneficial if interns learn what can make smaller organizations more vulnerable to cyber threats.

In conclusion, this internship overall has really sharpened my technical and soft skills. I've learned how to apply cybersecurity concepts in a real-world setting while also improving my communication skills. I had the opportunity to collaborate in a team to produce something that an organization can effectively use. What made this internship special for me personally was that I was able to help out a non-profit organization that's local to our area. I was happy to hear that I had the opportunity to work with the Norfolk Botanical Garden, as I loved attending there as a visitor and being able to make a difference for them is very meaningful for me. Although I did face some challenges, I ultimately learned and grew from the experience. Once I begin my professional career, I will carry forward the skills I developed in this internship, particularly in teamwork, communication, and applying cybersecurity principles in real-world environments. I feel more prepared and confident as I move forward in my professional career.