

Personal Narrative Essay

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This narrative essay explores how my academic, work, and leadership experiences helped shape my developing professional identity. Using the concepts from Nguyen, Mcaddams, and Smith I can reflect on the meaningful events, responsibilities, and turning points that influenced my decisions to pursue cybersecurity and develop leadership skills at ODU (Old Dominion University). Though my roles as a Resident assistant in Whitehurst, my involvement in the student activities council (SAC), and Student Engagement and Transitions (SET), and not to forget my coursework in the cybersecurity program, I will illustrate how these experiences contribute to my growth as a student, person, and professional. This essay will highlight my hands-on learning, problem solving, and community responsibility that strengthen my motivation to build a future in both technology and service.

As of today I see myself as a student leader, a developing cybersecurity professional, and someone who is still growing into the identity I want to carry into my future career. McAdams explain that narrative identity develops when we take the events of our lives and turn them into a meaningful story the defines who we are becoming. When I think about my journey so far, balancing school, work, leadership roles, my business, and personal goals; it becomes clear how my experiences shaped my sense of purpose. Some examples would be my resident assistant role, it helped me gain problem solving skills that I can transfer into the work force. It also helped me develop a crisis responding to the unknown situation I would have to face being on duty not knowing what type of ball I would be getting into. The second example would be my role as the Public relation director for SAC, while helping me feed my creativity and managing a social media account it also taught me planning and organization and how important it is to do so

giving me structure in life but a new appreciation for planning and scheduling upcoming events in my life.

My interest in technology started long before I realized it would become my major. I was always interested in technology. The love really started when I was young playing video games, then it got stronger since I was a teenager and wanted to do content creation. I started to make youtube videos and tried to learn the software to recreate the videos i was watching. Me not being able to recreate it made me want to keep learning and trying to perfect it. Nguyen describes identity formation as “ authentic becoming,” the gradual process of learning into what feels natural. Looking back, my curiosity wasn’t random, it was the first sign that technology and the digital world would have become an important and special part of my life.

In high school, I would take some stem classes but not take it as seriously. This is when my friends would also tell me that I have a knack for video making and learned software quickly. That was the start of me wanting to learn more about the internet and it gave me confidence that I could learn more about computers and what software I would need to build a better pc to edit on. Even before entering college I was unknowingly building a love for computers and building my interest into cybersecurity.

My decision on majoring in cybersecurity came after my first year of college. I remember it like yesterday. I was majoring in psychology and I wasn't feeling too sure that I wanted to do it for the rest of my life. So while being unsure i gave a call to my best friend and he told me “Why not majoring in something to do with computers sice i met you, you loved social media and always on the computer when we hung out” after that i thought he was right and since i was

always on the internet i might as well major in something to do with it. That is when my RA (Resident Assistant) at the time told me that i dont have to major in computer science but try cyber security it straight forward and a growing field. After looking into it I changed my major and ended up realizing it wasn't just about my love for social media and computers but problem solving, protecting people, and staying ahead of threats that also intrigued me in the major. After this I realized I could make a big impact by majoring in this and also kept me more interested in psychology so I fell in love with the major.

After switching to cyber security in my sophomore year the major has pushed me in many ways I didn't know I could have been pushed. When I started the classes it was easy but by the time I got in some more of the heavier coursework I was faced with many challenges and had to adjust to it quickly. For example I wasn't used to studying and asking for help because throughout my college career so far all I had to do was go to class and take a test but for this I had to put more time in studying and looking over study guides. To add on top of this change would be me having to navigate balancing classes with leadership roles and campus involvement, which taught me discipline and adaptability.

I learned some more valuable skills and lessons being in the cybersecurity program at ODU. Some examples would be CYSE Linux Labs, digital forensics, and networking which challenged me in the best way possible. Working through hands-on labs, using tools like steghide, solving picoCTF challenges, trouble shooting virtual machines, and working though command line issues taught me persistence and patience. These challenges helped me understand that

cybersecurity isn't just about changing passwords, but understanding the foundation and building upon it.

Something that I feel like influenced my identity in college would be me becoming a Resident Assistant (RA). For the four past years it has become one of my main reputation on campus, but it also became a part of my personal development too. The reason why I say this is because by helping new students adjust, solve conflicts, and creating a supportive community helped me discover new things about me. I've learned how to be a leader and help support my team through personal and academic struggles. It also showed me how to plan, promote and execute events that brought people together.

Being a part of Sac (Student Activities Council) and Set (Student Engagement and Traditions) played a big part too. Through my role as the Public Relation Director i have developed important skills, such as organization, planning, managing an account and being a spokesperson for the organization, setting up relations between different organizations on campus leading us in collaborations that benefit my organization for events that we need help with The more I reflect on my own path, the clearer it becomes that all my experiences connect. Nguyen's "authentic becoming" explains why technology always felt natural to me, even before I understood its full importance. McAdams narrative identity theory helps me understand why my leadership experiences, especially as an RA and SAC public Relation Director shaped my confidence and sense of purpose.

With that being said, while my story is still unfolding, I understand the events that shaped my academic identity and future goals. From discovering cybersecurity, to leading as a Ra, to creating campus communities through SAC and SET, each experience strengthened my sense of purpose. As I am still building my skills, refine my goals, and grow as a professional, I will carry these lessons and experiences with me. This narrative represents where I've been, but it also reflects the foundation of where I am going towards a future in technology, service, and community.

Reference

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