

**My Experiences and Takeaways from the COVA CCI Cyber Clinic**

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## **Introduction**

My overall experience in the COVA CCI Cyber Clinic was a valuable opportunity that taught me a lot and helped me gain some key skills that I can carry with me to future internships and jobs. This internship gave me an opportunity to get hands-on experience in what a cyber risk consultant might do. Throughout this internship, I've had many successes, pitfalls, lessons learned, realizations, and recommendations that could be helpful for future aspiring cyber clinic interns.

## **My Successes and Challenges**

The project that my team and I got to work on was a great experience for me, and I believe that what went right for me was being able to be prepared, knowledgeable, and communicative. The CPGs that we learned about helped broaden my questions and prepare me for what I could ask the client in the first meeting, in order to understand more about how they ran their business. For the executive brief presentation, I did a lot of research on the concerns of the client which helped me be more knowledgeable when discussing the topics and possible solutions. This also allowed me to gain soft skills in communicating the technical knowledge I learned to a non-technical audience. Lastly, I believe that as the team lead of my group I was able to help communicate efficiently between my teammates and the client, by relating every message between the two.

The executive brief presentation and the Valor risk assessments that I got to do for the Hampton Roads community were some of the most exciting aspects of this internship for me. I was very excited to get to hand over the report that I had put a lot of effort into and be able to

present all of the findings that my group and I had. I also really enjoyed the opportunity to help Hampton Roads businesses and relating knowledge that I have learned about in my classes.

With my successes, however, I did have some challenges as well. The most challenging aspects for me included some communication issues with the client at the beginning of the project and unequal workload division between my teammates. I had trouble getting responses from the client at the beginning. Eventually, after taking initiative, and getting a hold of the client, I changed the communication plan to one email a week, this way, I was able to get more responses from the client. My teammates and I had different work ethics, which was challenging for me. I like to get work done ahead of time, but my teammates did not share this quality, therefore, I did a lot of the work by myself, ahead of schedule. After talking with my team about the problem and dividing the report into sections for each of us to complete, I was able to get through this difficulty and present with my team for the client.

### **What Lessons I Learned**

After facing many obstacles and experiencing new opportunities, I was able to learn several valuable lessons that I will take with me to every job that I enter. The first challenge that I faced was not being able to get a lot of responses from the client. This helped me think strategically in order to get the most out of the limited communication present. This was a great lesson for me to learn, because businesses are going to have busy schedules and they might not be able to have a lot of time to communicate with a consultant. By treating every interaction with the client as if it would be a while before I heard from them again, I was able to get more information from them that helped build the report and provide more resources that could help them.

I also learned that allowing others to step in when needed, is ok and that being able to communicate with a team about my problems, can help alleviate them as well. The challenges that I faced with my team could have been resolved faster, had I allowed the professor or one of the TAs to get involved earlier. I wanted to discuss the issue with my group and eventually, it did get resolved. For a future job, however, I have learned that immediate action can be more helpful in the long run. This is a lesson that I will not forget.

Some of the experiences that I got to be a part of, also helped me learn some professional skills. The day that the clinic got to go out into the Hampton Roads community and provide free cyber risk assessments to small businesses was an experience that I will never forget. I got turned down more times than I can remember, but I also got to talk to a lot of business owners about cybersecurity, even if they were not interested in the assessment. I felt like this was a great opportunity to make more people aware of digital security and I learned that even with rejection comes experience.

### **What I Wish I could have Redone?**

If I got a second chance at this internship, I would have redone a couple of things to get the most out of this experience. The overall interaction and engagement with the client are things that I would have tried to redo. I would have liked to have set a schedule with the client for a specific day every week that they would expect to hear from me; in order to get quicker responses and I would have set a mid-project meeting with them. A mid-project meeting would have been helpful in order to engage more with the client and provide an opportunity to do more personalized resources for the report. For example, I would have liked to have done an incident response plan with the client in order to not only show them how they can make one for their own business, but provide them with a working model of one, that is based specifically on what

would be discussed during that meeting. Other things that I wish I could have redone was to allow the professor or TAs to get involved early on when I noticed issues in my team. This could have helped with timing issues as well.

### **Objectives I had at the Beginning vs. End**

I set 4 different objectives at the beginning of this internship that I wanted to meet: develop knowledge in more cybersecurity concepts and experience, collaborate with a team and real businesses, implement prior and new knowledge to help businesses with risk management, and work with policies to help businesses with digital security. I was able to meet all of the objectives that I set at the beginning of this internship. I learned more about CISA and SWOT analysis, which are new concepts to me. I was able to get hands-on experience by consulting businesses in the Hampton Roads community and providing risk assessments. For the project, I worked with a team with similar skill levels, and we were assigned a real business in the community. I implemented my prior knowledge about malware and my new knowledge in credit card safety in order to help the client mitigate risks associated with their business. I also got to work with many different policy examples that the client could use for their business to secure their digital assets.

### **Recommendations for Future Cyber Clinic Interns**

There are some recommendations that I used that would be helpful for future interns in the Cyber Clinic. These can include things like time management, set schedules, updates for professor and TAs, and communication. Time management and set schedules for the client and team are very important to help prevent procrastination and full engagement on both sides. Keeping the professor and TAs in the loop throughout the entire process is also important in

order to help alleviate any situations that might occur during the project. An example would be the challenge that I had with my team. Communication with the Cyber Clinic cohort, team, professor, TAs and client are all very important as well to set a good example of interns for others, including the client, and help build a stronger bond between the team.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, I have gained so much experience from this internship that I will carry with me for the rest of my career. Some of my main takeaways from this internship are the many skills and concepts that I got to learn. I was able to learn how to apply the frameworks that I have learned about before, to an actual scenario. The guest speakers helped me to think more empathetically towards a client, critically analyze all the risks involved in a business, present myself professionally when meeting the client, and research what exact niche that I want to work in for the cybersecurity field.

This experience has showed me that for the rest of my time at ODU, I can do more than just research; I can apply the concepts I learn about and see what hands-on experience I can gain outside of the class. I also want to do more research into different niches to find out how exactly I can get to where I want to be. This internship has opened up new doors for me and I would like to gain more experience in this job field before I get into my desired career in digital forensics. I feel like the challenges that I dealt with have also prepared me for a real job, and how to professionally deal with and strategically use them. If I were to pick one thing to change about this internship, it would be having set days during the duration of the project where the client agrees beforehand to meet with their team. This could help with better engagement on both ends. I loved everything else about this experience and I hope that more students get to enjoy and learn from this opportunity.