

Reflection on Interdisciplinary Learning and Professional Development

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Abstract

This reflective essay accounts my journey studying Cybercrime at Old Dominion University (ODU), exploring the skills I developed, the challenges I overcame, and the connections between my coursework and professional goals. It highlights key skills such as leadership, technical expertise, and problem-solving, supported by artifacts that exemplify my growth and learning. While this degree represents a significant personal achievement, its true value lies in how it has prepared me to mentor and guide the next generation of cybersecurity professionals and Sailors. Additionally, the essay reflects on the broader interdisciplinary insights gained and how they have contributed to my professional and personal development.

Personal Growth Through Cybercrime Studies

Studying Cybercrime at ODU has been both a transformative and affirming experience. After serving 23 years in the Navy, I approached this program with a unique blend of professional expertise and an eagerness to formally align my knowledge with academic theory. This was not my first attempt at college, but the motivation, discipline, and drive I developed during my military career enabled me to excel this time around. Maintaining a 3.92 GPA has been a testament to my dedication, and the program has provided me with an invaluable opportunity to connect real-world experiences with scholarly learning.

The interdisciplinary nature of the Cybercrime program was particularly engaging, as it allowed me to explore the technical, legal, and ethical dimensions of cybersecurity. The program's interdisciplinary approach fostered a deeper understanding of how sociological theories of deviance intersect with technological advancements in cybersecurity, enabling me to analyze cybercrime through multiple lenses. Courses like CYSE 407: Digital Forensics and CYSE 250: Cybersecurity Programming and Networking enhanced my technical expertise and understanding of cybercrime. Each assignment, project, and discussion contributed to a well-rounded perspective that I now bring to my professional endeavors. Moreover, the program consistently challenged me to expand my thinking and connect cybersecurity concepts to broader issues, such as societal responses to crime and the ethical implications of digital technology.

Growth Through Interdisciplinary Learning

My overall learning experience at ODU has been marked by significant growth in both technical aptitude and personal reflection. The program challenged me to think critically about complex problems, adapt to new learning environments, and refine my communication skills. One of the most rewarding aspects of my studies has been the ability to directly apply academic

knowledge to practical scenarios. For instance, understanding network protocols and security measures has deepened my appreciation for the intricacies of cyber defense, while studying leadership principles has reinforced my approach to guiding teams effectively.

Through courses like CYSE 407 and CRJS 340: White Collar Crime, I was able to explore the social and behavioral dynamics of cybercriminals alongside the technical methods to counteract them, highlighting the importance of integrating criminology and cybersecurity. The supportive academic environment at ODU has also played a pivotal role in my success. Engaging with professors and classmates brought fresh perspectives and fostered a collaborative atmosphere that enhanced my learning. These interactions encouraged me to continuously reflect on my strengths, identify areas for improvement, and strive for excellence. Additionally, the program's emphasis on research and interdisciplinary connections enriched my understanding of the global impact of cybercrime and the importance of bridging technical expertise with societal awareness. This degree is not just an academic milestone but a culmination of years of perseverance and the fulfillment of a long-held aspiration.

Skills in Action: Leadership, Technical Expertise, and Problem-Solving

Building Resilient and Effective Teams

Leadership has been a defining aspect of my career, and my studies at ODU have allowed me to further refine this skill. One artifact that encapsulates my growth in this area is the Leadership Lessons Paper from CDP 400: Foundations of Leadership. This analysis of Admiral William H. McRaven's leadership style reinforced my ability to inspire and empower teams, with a focus on resilience, communication, and strategic vision—skills essential for mentoring and guiding others. This leadership approach has also been shaped by the psychological insights from McAdams's (2001) framework on life stories, which emphasizes the importance of creating a

narrative that aligns personal values with professional goals. In analyzing leadership strategies, I incorporated insights from sociology and psychology to understand how group dynamics and individual behaviors influence team performance.

Developing Robust Technical Solutions

Technical expertise has been a cornerstone of my academic journey, as demonstrated through multiple artifacts that reflect the depth and breadth of my skills. The Socket Project from CYSE 250 demonstrated my ability to design and implement technical solutions, focusing on software development and network communication. Additionally, The Forensic Investigation Report from CYSE 407 showcased my ability to apply digital forensic techniques and analyze evidence in real-world scenarios. Using forensic tools, I preserved and interpreted digital evidence, bridging technical knowledge with investigative processes. Another key artifact, the Networking and Security Plan from IT 315: Introduction to Networking and Security, illustrates my capability to develop robust network solutions, including structured cabling, VLANs, and firewalls, crucial for combating cybercrime. These projects underscore the interdisciplinary connections explored in Graham and Smith's (2024) exploration of cybercrime, which highlights the integration of sociology, criminology, and cybersecurity as essential for understanding and addressing digital threats.

Navigating Complex Challenges in Cybercrime

Problem-solving requires both analytical thinking and adaptability, qualities I have honed through my coursework and professional experiences. The Research Paper from CRJS 222: The Criminal Justice System analyzed the U.S. court system, demonstrating my ability to evaluate complex systems and draw meaningful conclusions. This artifact complements my technical expertise, as it reflects my ability to evaluate intricate frameworks that intersect with the legal

dimensions of cybercrime. The Research Paper also reflected the integration of legal frameworks with technical cybersecurity challenges, showcasing my ability to address issues at the intersection of law and technology. Nguyen's (2013) work on ePortfolios further highlights how reflective practices can enhance problem-solving by encouraging connections between academic and professional experiences.

To further enrich this section, I integrated relevant interdisciplinary research to deepen my understanding of cybercrime. For example, Smith (2017) highlighted the evolving role of cybersecurity in global justice systems, aligning directly with my focus on legal frameworks and technological solutions. Goode's (2023) exploration of deviance and technology's role in modern crime provided insights into the social behaviors influencing cybercriminal activity. These sources collectively illustrate how theoretical insights have shaped my problem-solving, leadership, and technical capabilities, preparing me to address complex challenges in the digital age.

Navigating Challenges in an Evolving Academic Landscape

This academic journey has not been without its challenges. As this is not my first attempt at college, I approached the program with a renewed sense of purpose, driven by the motivation, discipline, and focus I developed during my Navy career. Balancing academic responsibilities with personal and professional commitments required careful time management and perseverance. However, these challenges only strengthened my resolve, culminating in a degree that represents both personal growth and professional advancement.

A particularly notable challenge arose during this Fall Term when my professor significantly altered his teaching approach in response to the growing use of AI. This required adapting to group-based projects, encouraging collaboration, and utilizing emerging technologies

creatively. Ultimately, this approach highlighted the importance of teamwork and adaptability. Adapting to the interdisciplinary nature of my coursework, such as analyzing sociological theories while applying technical skills, required a shift in my analytical approach but ultimately enriched my understanding of complex issues.

Each assignment demanded not only technical proficiency but also an ability to analyze broader societal implications. This challenge was particularly evident in courses like CYSE 406: Cyber Law, where the intersection of cyber law and policy required an in-depth understanding of both technical systems and their legal contexts. Overcoming these challenges involved leveraging my prior military experience, particularly the adaptability and problem-solving skills I had developed, to approach academic tasks with confidence and focus.

Connecting Academic Insights to Mentorship

One of the most meaningful aspects of this program has been the alignment between academic theory and professional application. The transition from military operations to academia allowed me to bridge my practical expertise with theoretical knowledge, creating a foundation for mentoring the next generation of cybersecurity professionals. Courses such as CYSE 407 and IT 315 provided invaluable insights into the technical and strategic aspects of cybercrime, equipping me with the tools to teach and guide others effectively.

Looking ahead, I plan to continue teaching the next generation of Sailors, fostering their development and preparing them to tackle emerging challenges. While there may not be immediate direct applications of my degree, the skills and knowledge I have gained will undoubtedly enhance my ability to inspire and mentor others. Furthermore, this program has solidified my belief in the importance of integrating technical expertise with an understanding of

societal impacts, a perspective that aligns with Graham and Smith's (2024) emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of addressing cybercrime challenges.

Conclusion: A Reflection on Growth, Learning, and Impact

Reflecting on my time at ODU, I am filled with a profound sense of accomplishment and gratitude. This program has not only equipped me with technical skills and academic knowledge but also reaffirmed my commitment to lifelong learning and teaching. Each course, project, and challenge has contributed to my growth, enabling me to connect my military experience with academic theory and professional goals. The ability to synthesize technical expertise with a broader understanding of societal and ethical considerations has been particularly transformative, deepening my perspective on the interconnectedness of these fields.

The support and collaboration I experienced at ODU—from professors who inspired critical thinking to classmates who offered diverse viewpoints—played a crucial role in my development.

As I look to the future, I am confident that the lessons I have learned and the skills I have developed will continue to shape my journey, empowering me to leave a lasting impact in the field of cybercrime and beyond. My aim is to leverage this education to mentor others, contribute to advancements in cybersecurity, and advocate for solutions that address both the technical and human aspects of cybercrime. Moreover, the interdisciplinary insights gained throughout this program have prepared me to navigate and address the multifaceted challenges of an increasingly digital world, ensuring that I remain adaptable and forward-thinking in my professional endeavors.

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