Personal Narrative Essay

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Introduction

One of my most crucial characteristics is that my future is of paramount importance to me. Oftentimes I focus so much on the future that I have to remind myself to live in the moment and enjoy all of the chapters of my journey. I always envisioned myself attending college but studying cybersecurity was a bit unexpected. I am currently a senior at Old Dominion University working towards getting my bachelors degree in cybersecurity. Ever since I first started school it was ingrained in me by my family to take my education seriously and I can confidently say that throughout my K-12 experience and my time in college I have done just that. I currently hold a 3.6 grade point average and have passed all my classes, completing my bachelors degree within two years. Since I was a child, I have been indecisive about what career I wanted to pursue. Whenever I was asked the question of what I wanted to be, my answer would fluctuate at least every few months. When it came time for me to apply to college and choose a path I did some research into careers that would be worth pursuing. At this point I was juggling with the thought of joining the navy and being an intelligence analyst but I was not sure that either would be a good fit for me especially because I was not guaranteed a job in the field of my choosing. After some deliberation I finally decided on cybersecurity and to enroll at Old Dominion University (ODU).

Background

In 2020, during the height of covid I was accepted into The Governor's School of Southside Virginia. This competitive program allowed me to spend the first half of my day taking classes at a local community college. The second half of my school day was spent taking dual enrollment classes at my high school. For the first year that I was in this program I took all my courses remotely, only coming to campus to attend labs and take a few exams. During this

time I found it hard to learn and retain information over Zoom. I learned a lot about my learning style and that remote learning is not ideal for me. Although I maintained good grades it was the first time I felt like I was struggling with school and that made me uncomfortable. Additionally, during this time I felt extremely isolated and bored. Being the only child meant that I spent the majority of my time during lockdown home alone. My mother was considered an essential worker and due to the pandemic she often worked long hours, leaving me by myself. I did pick up a few hobbies during this isolation period but overall I do think that it has affected me in the long term.

By the end of 2021 COVID restrictions started to ease and I began attending school in person again. I got to have the senior year that I was afraid I would never get. Governor's School taught me a lot about college level work and prepared me for the transition into college. In May of 2022 I graduated with my high school diploma and my associates degree. The ceremonies were only a day apart and the weekend felt so surreal. I did all of this while participating in sports almost year round and maintaining a part time job.

Making my choice

While Governor's School was a blessing that helped me financially, after graduating I started to see the tradeoffs. Because I was already halfway through my degree it meant that my college experience was cut in half. I did not get the same amount of time to adjust and find myself that traditional students get when they attend a four year university. I felt pressured to be sure about my major from the start because I had to hit the ground running with core courses only pertaining to my major. If I decided to switch that would mean I wasted money on courses and put myself behind.

When I was choosing what field I wanted to get into I was going back and forth between cybersecurity, anesthesiology, military, and intelligence analyst. After visiting a few schools I decided to attend ODU for cybersecurity. What drew me to cybersecurity is that I wanted to have the ability to work for the military without having to enlist and cybersecurity would be a good way to do that. I also thought that if I wanted to apply to be an intelligence analyst my degree would be useful. Finally, I realized that I would have the potential to make a good salary and there are a multitude of jobs in the field and I could find something that worked for me. Since making my decision I have been on the journey of obtaining my degree and finding my place in the cybersecurity field.

Reflection & Thoughts

In retrospect, I can admit that I put a lot of pressure on myself that really is not necessary. While I do use pressure to stay motivated it does stem from a fear of failure. However, embracing the idea that "individual differences in life stories are just as rich and interesting as individual differences in any other aspect of human individuality"(p.118), as McAdams suggests, allows me to recognize the beauty in my own journey, despite its imperfections. I often find myself feeling a bit out of place because I am always the youngest in my classes and haven't had the same life experiences as everyone else. However, understanding that my story is just one part of the diverse human experience encourages me to embrace my differences and acknowledge that failure is simply a part of that narrative. Rather than viewing my age as a reflection of my inadequacy, I can see it as an integral part of my growth and development. By reframing my perspective in this way I can release the unnecessary pressure I place on myself and instead focus on embracing the complexities and nuances of my own unique life story.

Present Day

All of this leads me to the present moment, only a month away from walking across the stage to get my bachelors degree in cybersecurity. I have plans to start my cybersecurity masters in the fall and see where that journey takes me. I hope to take advantage of the vastness of the cybersecurity field so that I can have what I really want in life. I want to be able to eventually move back to my rural hometown to be around my family. My family is responsible for my work ethic and they mean everything to me. Their unwavering support and encouragement have fueled my determination to succeed and I am eager to repay them by achieving my goals and making them proud. As I look forward to the next chapter of my journey, I am committed to seizing every opportunity to further my education and hone my skills in cybersecurity so that I can have the life that I want for myself.

Conclusion

To wrap up, I take my education and my future very seriously. I have done a lot of work to set myself up for success and I intend to become everything that I imagine myself to be and more. I am a big believer that everything happens for a reason and I believe that all my decisions so far have led me to the path that I am on. I am on track to have my bachelors degree at 19 years old and potentially my masters before 21. I want to make a difference and be able to help my family when I am older. By doing so, I hope to not only fulfill my professional aspirations but also create a life that allows me to be present for the ones who matter most.

References

McAdams, D. P. (2001). The Psychology of Life Stories. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(2),

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