

**Reflection Paper**

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IDS 493: Electronic Portfolio Project

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## **Introduction**

As I reflect on my academic journey and career readiness, I see how my experiences have shaped these core competencies and prepared me for the challenges ahead. Throughout my interdisciplinary program, I've had the opportunity to develop skills in creativity, organization, and cyber/physical security awareness—each of which plays a pivotal role in my growth as a professional. This reflection essay will explore how these skills, along with the artifacts I've created, demonstrate my ability to apply interdisciplinary knowledge and prepare me for a successful career. By analyzing each skill and the lessons learned during the creation of my artifacts, I will assess how my academic experiences have not only contributed to my career readiness but also broadened my perspective across disciplines. I chose this job posting for my reflective essay because it closely aligns with both my academic background and my career aspirations in the IT field. What helped me most to choose this job posting was to remember that “some job postings will phrase the responsibilities in sprawling terms.” (Burry, 2022) The IT Specialist role at Customs and Border Protection (CBP) offers an excellent opportunity to apply the skills I've developed in cybersecurity, organization, and creativity, all of which are reflected in the artifacts included in my e-portfolio. The position's focus on protecting critical IT infrastructure, managing security systems, and ensuring smooth operations perfectly complements my experiences and long-term career goals in the field of IT security.

## **Creativity**

Creativity is a vital skill for IT Specialists at Customs and Border Protection (CBP), allowing them to address unique challenges, enhance system efficiency, and adapt to rapidly evolving technologies. In a field where technical problems can be unpredictable, thinking outside the box is essential for designing innovative solutions. While creativity is considered a soft skill, “it was determined: creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability, and time management were the 5 most in-demand soft skills sought by companies.” (Henry, 2019) For example, IT Specialists may need to develop customized security protocols or optimize existing

systems to support CBP's operational needs. Creativity also comes into play when integrating new technologies into legacy systems while maintaining seamless functionality.

My creativity is evident in various personal artifacts that reflect how I approach problem-solving. A photo of me with headphones illustrates the role of music as a tool for fostering focus and innovation, much like finding fresh approaches to IT issues. The sunset photograph I captured symbolizes my ability to perceive unique perspectives and identify details that others might overlook, skills essential for troubleshooting complex system challenges or spotting vulnerabilities in IT infrastructure. Additionally, the photo of me participating in a "paint and sip" event highlights my hands-on creativity and willingness to experiment. These qualities parallel the innovative mindset required to test new IT solutions or adapt processes to align with CBP's evolving security mission.

In the IT Specialist role, creativity is not only about technical innovation but also about fostering collaboration and effective communication within teams. Whether brainstorming ideas for system upgrades or presenting complex technical concepts to non-technical stakeholders, creativity enhances problem-solving and fosters adaptability. My experiences and artifacts demonstrate my ability to bring this creative mindset to the diverse challenges of IT systems management at CBP.

### **Organization**

Strong organizational skills are fundamental to the role of an IT Specialist at Customs and Border Protection (CBP), ensuring that technical systems are efficiently managed and mission-critical operations run smoothly. This includes handling large volumes of system data, troubleshooting technical issues, and coordinating system updates—all while adhering to stringent cybersecurity and compliance standards. Effective organization allows IT Specialists to prioritize tasks, streamline workflows, and support the seamless operation of CBP's IT infrastructure. As IT systems grow in complexity and scale, being able to maintain clear

documentation, track system updates, and organize incident response plans becomes crucial to ensuring minimal downtime and maximal security.

My organizational skills are demonstrated through various artifacts. For instance, my case analysis paper from a forensic analysis class highlights my ability to structure complex information, analyze details systematically, and present findings clearly—an approach that aligns with diagnosing IT issues and implementing structured solutions. This skill is essential when managing multiple projects, coordinating across teams, and ensuring that all technical components align to achieve overall IT goals. A photo of my clean and organized cubicle reflects my commitment to maintaining a workspace that promotes efficiency and focus, a critical aspect of managing technical tasks and troubleshooting under pressure. The organizational practices I cultivated in this setting, such as having designated spaces for specific tools and resources, mirror the meticulous organization needed to manage CBP's IT operations. As noted in the job posting, IT Specialists must manage data flows, coordinate system updates, and troubleshoot issues with precision, all of which require strong organizational abilities. (USAJOBS, 2024).

Finally, a picture of the mobility cabinet I managed during my internship showcases my ability to organize resources effectively, ensuring equipment readiness and streamlined processes—skills directly applicable to managing IT inventories and configurations. My attention to detail in organizing this equipment ensured that devices and hardware were always readily available for deployments, much like ensuring that servers, network hardware, and cybersecurity protocols are maintained and updated in an IT role. These examples underscore my ability to approach the diverse challenges of the IT Specialist role with precision and reliability, ensuring that CBP's IT systems remain effective and secure.

### **Cyber and Physical Security Awareness**

Cyber and physical security awareness is paramount for an IT Specialist at Customs and

Border Protection (CBP), where the safety of sensitive data and technology is a constant concern. This role involves securing networks, databases, and other critical IT systems from cyber threats while ensuring the integrity of physical security measures like access controls and equipment used for screening and inspection. IT Specialists must implement best practices for cybersecurity, monitoring systems for vulnerabilities, and responding to security incidents in real-time to prevent breaches and support CBP's mission to protect the nation. Awareness of emerging security risks and the ability to quickly adapt is essential for safeguarding the organization's infrastructure and operations.

In the IT Specialist role at Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the integration of both cyber and physical security is paramount for the protection of CBP's technological infrastructure. The photo of the badge reader illustrates my understanding of the importance of physical security, where secure access controls are necessary to protect both personnel and critical IT systems. This ensures unauthorized individuals are prevented from accessing sensitive areas, which is vital in maintaining the security of data and devices. It was a bit mind-boggling to know that before I started my job, the technician's office had no type of physical security implemented, especially with thousands of dollars' worth of assets sitting in the room.

The phone update photo emphasizes my hands-on experience with ensuring devices are secure by applying the latest patches and security settings. This is essential in maintaining the integrity of CBP's mobile devices and systems, ensuring that they are not vulnerable to cyberattacks. The ability to manage software updates and monitor device security settings demonstrates my competency in handling cybersecurity tasks, such as protecting devices from malware and unauthorized access.

Lastly, my internship reflection paper not only illustrates my ability to implement physical security protocols but also highlights my role in identifying and addressing potential vulnerabilities. Through tasks such as conducting security assessments, developing risk

mitigation strategies, and ensuring compliance with established security guidelines, I gained experience in both proactive and reactive security measures. During this time, my emotions transitioned from concerned to prepared, and this was due to multiple reasons. I was concerned at the lack of obvious security measures that should've been implemented before I started; however, I was pretty impressed by how quickly we were able to get the security team to work with us on getting things done to protect our assets. These experiences directly translate to the IT Specialist role, where the ability to assess both digital and physical threats and respond accordingly is crucial in protecting CBP's IT infrastructure and supporting the agency's overall mission of security and safety.

### **Conclusion**

In reflecting on my academic journey, I recognize that my ePortfolio not only serves as a showcase of my skills but also as a means to demonstrate my growth and development as a student and professional. As Nguyen explains, "The ePortfolio serves as a living portal—a medium for student learning and identity" (Nguyen, 2013). My cybersecurity degree has equipped me with the skills necessary to understand and implement both cybersecurity and physical security protocols, ensuring the integrity of critical systems and data. The skills of creativity, organization, and cyber/physical security awareness, reflected in my artifacts, align with the core outcomes of my program. For example, my ability to creatively solve security challenges and organize resources efficiently is demonstrated through my case analysis paper and organized mobility cabinet. My internship reflection and photos also showcase my hands-on experience in securing both physical and digital environments, confirming my readiness for real-world cybersecurity roles.

Interdisciplinary methods and theories played a significant role in shaping my understanding of coursework throughout my program. By integrating knowledge from different fields—such as cybersecurity, organizational management, and physical security—I developed a holistic view of

how these areas complement each other. For example, applying interdisciplinary thinking allowed me to approach problems from various angles, ensuring I could devise creative solutions while maintaining strong organizational practices. Courses like IDS 300W helped me sharpen my ability to engage with interdisciplinary concepts by teaching me how to draw connections between seemingly disparate subjects and apply them in real-world contexts. This approach has been invaluable in my understanding of how to tackle complex issues in the cybersecurity and IT fields, where both technical and strategic perspectives are essential.

Engaging in my various courses required me to adapt my learning approach based on the subject matter at hand. Whether analyzing a forensic case, troubleshooting a technical issue, or planning security protocols, I learned to approach assignments with an open mind, drawing on knowledge from different disciplines to form a well-rounded solution. For instance, when I worked on organizing a mobility cabinet during my internship, I not only applied my organizational skills but also integrated knowledge from my cybersecurity coursework to ensure that the devices were properly secured. As Harris and Clayton (2019) discuss in their editorial, "The importance of skills – but which skills?", the identification and development of key skills is crucial in preparing students for the workforce, especially in dynamic fields like IT and cybersecurity. This idea highlights the importance of the interdisciplinary skills I have developed throughout my coursework and internship, as they are essential for effectively addressing the challenges of an IT Specialist role, from managing technical systems to ensuring robust security measures. This ability to synthesize different theories and methods from various disciplines allowed me to complete my assignments effectively and thoroughly.

IDS 300W, in particular, prepared me for more specialized coursework by teaching me how to analyze problems from an interdisciplinary perspective and approach solutions with a broad view. This foundation was crucial when I later delved deeper into subjects such as cybersecurity, where understanding both technical skills and their real-world applications was

essential. The course also helped me develop the writing and research skills necessary to reflect on my experiences and connect them with academic theories, an ability that was vital when crafting my portfolio.

Being an interdisciplinary thinker is crucial in my field of study, especially in roles such as IT Specialist, where the ability to integrate diverse skills—from cybersecurity and data management to physical security and organizational systems—is essential. The IT landscape is constantly evolving, and the ability to combine knowledge from different fields allows me to be more adaptable and innovative in solving problems. Moreover, working in a dynamic environment like Customs and Border Protection requires a holistic approach to security, where understanding both the technical and physical aspects is vital for success. Interdisciplinary thinking enables me to approach these challenges from multiple angles, ensuring that I can provide effective, well-rounded solutions in my career.



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