Writing Assignment 2: Personal Narrative Essay

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Abstract

In this paper, I will be using narration to depict how I came to my choice of major and future

career in cybersecurity. While I enjoy this field now, I was not always keen on the tech field and

I didn't start showing interest in it until later on in my high school during junior and senior year.

This paper will show the evolution of my interests from a medical field to engineering and then

finally landing upon information technology before narrowing that down further to cyber

security. There are various events and people that shaped my desires and how I went about

achieving those.

Diagnosis with Diabetes

When I was just nine years old, I was diagnosed with Type I Diabetes and have had to deal with that as an obstacle in my life for over thirteen years now. As I got to be a little older, I began to think about perhaps pursuing a career helping other people with diabetes as an endocrinologist or a dietician. That was one of the interests I threw around throughout my middle school years at the gifted school in Virginia Beach, Kemps Landing Magnet School. They pushed us to think about our futures as young students so that we might be able to make plans and change them as we got older, so that was my initial thought. But once I got to high school and began to really think about what my future would hold after graduation, medical school to become an endocrinologist did not sound so enthralling.

High School

When I was looking through which high school programs seemed most enticing to me, I was between Landstown's STEM academy and Ocean Lakes' Math and Science Academy, which also happened to be the school I was zoned for. In the end, it was an easy choice, I wanted to go to Ocean Lakes and I would whether it was in the academy or in the normal enrollment. As a freshman, I took chemistry and immediately enjoyed the class more than any science I had previously taken. As I said before, I was already turned off of the prospect of going through medical school, so I settled on the career parents dream of their children going into: engineering, chemical engineering to be specific. And for three years it was the goal I was moving towards steadily until the summer before my senior year when me and my friends got into flying drones and programming them to do different things. As I began to learn Python at a basic level, I realized that this was also a thing I enjoyed and I wondered how I might be able to combine my two interests of coding and chemistry. As I mulled it over, the time to apply for

colleges grew nearer and nearer and I ultimately ran out of time to make a decision about how to combine them, and I applied to colleges seeking a major in chemical engineering.

The end of high school and choosing my college

As I looked at different colleges to apply to, I wanted to get away from Virginia Beach but I didn't want to go too far from home. I applied to Old Dominion University as my backup plan since it was close by and I knew with my credentials that I would have an almost certain chance at being accepted. I also applied to North Carolina State, Virginia Tech, and Penn State, all for chemical engineering. The only reason I applied to Penn State initially was because I have had an uncle and two cousins who went there for their college experiences and we all just wanted to see if a fourth member of the family would also have been accepted. Well as fate would have it, I ended up at Penn State for a combination of reasons. The main reason I was going to go was because that was the only university that accepted me for chemical engineering. NC State outright rejected me, Virginia Tech accepted me as an undecided undergraduate rather than for chemical engineering, and ODU accepted me into their chemistry undergraduate program, as we do not have a chemical engineering program here at ODU. So, the choice was between ODU, my mother's alma mater and a much cheaper option, or Penn State, a six-hour drive away and out-of-state tuition to pay, or Virginia Tech and find a new major to pursue. I was leaning heavily towards Virginia Tech. The college was beautiful, I had multiple good friends going there, and it would be a far enough to have my own college experience while still being close enough to home in case I wanted to come home for a weekend. My father encouraged me not to rule out Penn State so quickly and that we could figure out payment through student loans if we needed to. So we took a visit to the campus in April of 2018, a few weeks before I was to make a decision on where the next chapter of my life would take place.

When we got there, it was snowing, not a great first impression. Snow? In April? My dad again

told me to give it a chance. We went to an open house where the dean of the chemical

engineering department at the university spoke with prospective students and their parents. As

he spoke, he made the program seem more enticing the more I listened. After his talk was over,

me and my father went up to talk to him just to get a little more insight into the school. That is

when he invited us to his office to talk in a more private and quiet setting to answer any

questions we had. Everything I asked, he answered quickly and sharply. And when we voiced

my uncertainty with leaving behind home and not really knowing anybody, he made the offer

that sealed the deal for me committing to Penn State: he explained that in addition to being the

dean for the college of engineering, he was also an advisor and he said that he would make sure

that when I made my commitment, he would assign me as his advisee. That day at lunch with

my cousin Alexa, who was going to be graduating in a month's time, I informed everyone that I

wanted to go to Penn State and become a Nittany Lion.

Freshman Year to Covid

My first semester at Penn State was a great semester for me socially, but quite a poor one

academically. In high school, I barely studied and was able to get by on my excellent memory

and my improvisation skills and make my way to a 4.2 GPA. Little did I know that chemical

engineering would be more physics than anything else, and my least favorite subject I ever took

in school was, you guessed it, physics. So, my chemical engineering career did not last past the

first semester when I decided to switch over to the cybersecurity major in the school of IST or

Information Sciences and Technology. After my freshman year, I looked to be getting back on

track academically and into the first semester of my sophomore year. But during that semester, I

started to have a downturn in my mental health, and for precautionary reasons, I decided to come

home for the second semester to take classes at TCC and reevaluate what I wanted to do. Again, as fate would have it, this turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as the world shutdown that March and everybody had to go home to do their university classes online anyways and I already seemed to be ahead of the game.

Covid to Present Day

Throughout covid, I was actually thriving in online classes while others struggled with online learning. With my chosen field being a tech field, it was actually good practice in remoting in to the resources available to students both at TCC and here at ODU to do my homework and extra practice. I ended up getting my Associate's Degree of Applied Sciences in Cybersecurity from TCC and using that to get into the head start program that ODU offers for cybersecurity majors. Since then, I have not looked back and I have tried to continue building a good portfolio by getting my CompTIA A+, Network+, and Security+ certifications. My fiancée, Haley, is a nurse at Norfolk General and has connected me with their IT department and I have applied to work as a help desk technician while I finish my degree up and graduate in December of this year. My mental health has improved drastically, my drive for success has continued to grow, and my interest in cybersecurity has not waned since I have started down this path. While I have not had the most linear and adversity-free path, everything that has happened has gotten me to where I am today, and ultimately I am happy with my final choice of career, even though I know there is potential for more change later on down the road. It is unfortunate that the internships I have done were not related to the field of cybersecurity, so I have no real experience working in this career, but I know that I will get there eventually and that not everyone has the same path.