Narrative Essay

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Abstract

I am a Senior at Old Dominion University (ODU) graduating with a bachelor's degree in Cybersecurity. Within this paper, I will discuss my journey to school and the decision for cybersecurity. While gaining perspective and being pushed away from my comfort zone, I began to understand how to become the person I was meant to be. With each class, I became more comfortable with my career choice. After I graduate from ODU, I am ready to take on the next journey, as my past years have taught me to be inquisitive. With each new adventure comes a new limit and boundary, and I am ready for the challenge.

How My Curiosity Started

My name is Jarrell Jackson. I am a senior at ODU, and I'm on my way to graduating. Throughout my academic years, I have faced many challenges and been placed in environments that push me to grow past my comfort zone. I realized early on in my academics at Brightpoint and ODU that I needed to be willing to learn and adapt. Going in person to Brightpoint would be the first time since, in 6th grade, I would be in person at school. It was no surprise I felt anxious and out of place when I first attended Brightpoint Community College. Still, over time I adjusted and gained the confidence I needed to continue my education.

When I had my first laptop as a kid, the first thing I wanted to do was try to install Kali Linux because I had seen some YouTube tutorials. After struggling, I was able to download it onto my laptop. This little experiment unlocked the interest that I had in cybersecurity, and it made me realize it was something I could do. That passion has stayed with me ever since.

Curiosity and Interest

My first real experience with any sort of technology began when I was around 12 years old, spending hours trying to jailbreak a PlayStation 3. Trying to learn how to do this challenged me, and that demanded persistence with problem-solving. I remember moments of frustration when I wanted to quit, but the adrenaline from testing, failing, and trying again allowed me to continue going until I succeeded.

Looking back, I see how this moment allowed me to gain a deeper connection with technology. From my perspective, jailbreaking the PS3 was an exciting way for me to explore the technology around me and gain a deeper understanding. The rush I felt during the PlayStation

experience planted the seeds for my current passion for cybersecurity. The challenges of figuring things out through trial and error still motivate me today.

Academic Pursuit

I began my college experience at Brightpoint Community College. It was there that I took most of the prerequisites for my major, which was undecided at the time. I chose Brightpoint because it was affordable, close to home, and as my first experience with in-person college classes, it gave me a comfortable environment where I could just adjust at my own pace. One class that stood out to me from that experience at Brightpoint was Psychology 101. The professor constantly wanted us to participate and think critically, providing us with fun challenges. This allowed me to improve my critical thinking and conversation skills.

Having to adjust to college life was challenging, and I quickly realized the responsibilities were far greater than anything I had experienced in high school or middle school. Having to balance coursework with personal obligations and the new expectations of college required me to adapt. Over time, I learned that coming into class with an open mind and ready to learn allowed the transition from online to in-person to be much smoother.

I decided after my first year at Brightpoint to transfer to ODU because of its strong cybersecurity program and the opportunities it offered to explore the field of cybersecurity. I was super excited to meet other like-minded students, talk amongst my peers about cybersecurity, and their reasons for choosing it as a major.

Although starting at ODU was fun and exciting, it came with its own challenges. The campus was much larger, and finding my classes while trying to adapt to new professors required

me to stay patient. Yet, like my experiences trying to jailbreak the PlayStation years ago, I found these challenges stimulating. Each of these obstacles brought an opportunity to adapt, solve problems, and grow. With the new courses came the Interdisciplinary Studies, which encouraged me to think beyond just technical skills; they also showed me how server security connects with other fields and the importance of analyzing problems from different perspectives. Different courses taught me to evaluate sources critically, recognize that information, more often than not, comes with bias, and that my perspective is only one of many out there.

What made my time at ODU memorable was the different hands-on projects that we had. Two of the projects that come to mind were a network design assignment and one where we used Wireshark to capture packets from the website. For the first project, we were tasked with wiring Constant Hall using switches, routers, and Ethernet cables. This project stood out to me because it allowed me to have freedom in designing the network. I was able to choose the location of the network closets, select the switches and routers that I used, and even manage the budget for the project. The flexibility allowed me to think creatively while also applying technical knowledge, which made it one of my favorite assignments to do.

The second project involved using Wireshark to capture packets on a website that used HTTP. We first started capturing packets in Wireshark; after logging in, I was able to capture the username and password that I had put in. This hands-on project allowed me to understand the importance of using HTTPS and encrypted networks.

These types of assignments showed me we're not only learning theories but actively observing and experimenting with the real systems in our practice lab. Using these hands-on experiences showed me the importance of cybersecurity and confirmed that the career path I have chosen is both relevant and impactful.

Career Goals and Personal Mission

Looking towards my career goals after college, I see myself working in roles that focus on protection and defense within cybersecurity. Positions like ethical hacking and penetration testing especially interest me because they align with the kind of course material I found most interesting at ODU.

My IDs coursework has also played a role in shaping these goals as it taught me that problem-solving is not just about technical knowledge, but it's also about understanding the social and ethical dimensions of cybersecurity. This perspective has helped me realize that cybersecurity is not simply a cool title as I once thought; it's about protecting organizations and defending their integrity. Making technology safer for both businesses and the communities that rely on it every day also folds into what cybersecurity is all about. When I graduate, I will not just be leaving ODU with a degree; I will also be leaving with a foundation that has prepared me to adapt to new challenges and approach cybersecurity with more than one idea or view.

Writing this paper has made me realize that the curiosity I once had as a kid has grown into a career that I can truly pursue. Today, I see cybersecurity not just as a major, but as a responsibility to protect the integrity of users - whether that is organizations, end users, or any community that depends on technology. My curiosity with Kali Linux and the challenges I faced in college have shaped me in ways I do not fully understand. Together, these experiences have sparked my passion for cybersecurity and set me on the academic path I follow today.