

Writing Assignment 2:

ePortfolio Narrative Essay

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IDS 493: Electronic Portfolio Project

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04 April 2025

Introduction

My name is Jasmyn Wilhelm, and I'm currently a senior at Old Dominion University (ODU) majoring in Cybersecurity with a minor in Cybercrime. Reflecting on my journey, I can see that my path to finding the right career wasn't as simple as I initially thought. Like many of my peers, I started college with one vision of success but eventually discovered a direction that resonated more deeply with me. According to McAdams (2008), narrative identity is about constructing a personal story that gives life coherence and purpose over time. My experience exemplifies this, as I transitioned from engineering to cybersecurity and discovered a field that truly matches my skills, interests, and ambitions.

Early Academic Journey

Like many students, I found myself uncertain about my path after high school, even though I was doing well academically. I had taken dual-enrollment classes to get a head start, but the electives available in high school didn't really expose me to potential careers that might spark my interest. This led me to choose mechanical engineering based more on what seemed practical than on what I was truly passionate about. I felt pressured to make a decision quickly and stick to it, not realizing that exploring different options was a crucial part of the journey. This uncertainty made my early college days more about meeting expectations than discovering what truly inspired me.

After graduating from high school, I enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte with plans to major in mechanical engineering. I'd always had a penchant for technology and problem-solving, so I thought engineering would be a great fit. But soon I discovered that the program focused more on design and theoretical modeling than on the hands-

on experiences I had hoped for. This gap between what I expected and what was real led to increasing dissatisfaction and uncertainty about my future.

Deciding to leave UNC Charlotte wasn't easy, but deep down, I knew it was the right move. I returned to my home in Eastern North Carolina to reassess my academic interests and enrolled at the College of the Albemarle (COA). This change gave me the chance to explore new subjects and rebuild my confidence in my studies. I completed my associate's degree while keeping my options open for various career paths that would involve both technical challenges and hands-on work. This exploratory phase was key in reshaping my academic identity and setting me up for what came next.

At COA, I began looking into programs related to technology, crime, and digital systems. I stumbled upon the Cybersecurity program at Old Dominion University and was instantly drawn to its interdisciplinary approach. The blend of technical skills and legal knowledge really struck a chord with my interests in both technology and justice. The more I learned about the field, the clearer it became that this was the type of career I had been looking for—one that demanded precision, critical thinking, and adaptability. This newfound interest prompted me to apply to ODU and officially shift my academic direction.

Discovering Cybersecurity

Once enrolled at Old Dominion University, I declared my major in Cybersecurity and selected a minor in Cybercrime to complement my coursework. This new path quickly proved to be the right fit as I found myself engaged in subjects such as Cyb Once I started at Old Dominion University, I chose to major in Cybersecurity and picked up a minor in Cybercrime to enhance my studies. This new direction turned out to be exactly what I needed, as I became deeply

engaged in classes like Cyber Ethics, Digital Forensics, and Cyber Law. These topics let me dive into the fascinating overlap of technology, investigation, and policy, igniting a genuine passion within me. This excitement was a world away from my previous program; I was truly motivated by what I was learning and the career options that lay ahead. My academic enthusiasm returned, and I began to envision myself not just as a student, but as a future professional in the field.

One essential course was Cyber Ethics, which helped me understand the ethical responsibilities that cybersecurity professionals have when it comes to protecting data, systems, and users. Through various case studies and rich classroom discussions, I gained insights into how digital security impacts individuals, organizations, and society at large. As Nguyen (2013) points out, our narrative identities are shaped by the values we adopt over time. This course helped me recognize that my values resonated strongly with the principles behind ethical cybersecurity, making the field feel incredibly personal and meaningful to me.

Digital Forensics was another significant course that introduced me to the investigative methods used to recover and analyze digital evidence. I especially appreciated the hands-on learning, something I felt was lacking in my mechanical engineering studies. Applying theoretical concepts to practical exercises opened my eyes to my strong interest in investigative processes and digital analysis. This experience motivated me to pursue a Digital Forensics certification, allowing me to deepen my knowledge and prepare for a career in this area. For the first time in college, I felt truly connected to my major and confident about my future.

In contrast to my earlier academic challenges, I've excelled in my cybersecurity courses, currently holding a 3.88 GPA while working full-time. This balancing act has demanded effective time management and resilience. Stepping away from engineering has led me to a fulfilling path

that truly aligns with who I am. I now see my past struggles as vital to discovering my authentic academic identity. er Ethics, Digital Forensics, and Cyber Law. These courses allowed me to explore the intersection of technology, investigation, and policy, which sparked a deep and genuine interest. Unlike in my previous program, I felt excited by what I was learning and motivated by the career possibilities ahead. My academic motivation returned, and I began to see myself not just as a student, but as a future professional in the field.

One course that significantly impacted my academic journey was Cyber Ethics. It provided a framework for understanding the moral responsibilities that cybersecurity professionals face when protecting data, systems, and users. Through case studies and classroom discussion, I gained a broader understanding of how digital security affects individuals, organizations, and society. Nguyen (2013) explains that our narrative identities are influenced by values we internalize over time, and this course helped me realize that my own values aligned strongly with the principles of ethical cybersecurity. This connection made the field feel even more personal and meaningful.

Another important course was Digital Forensics, which introduced me to investigative techniques used to recover and analyze digital evidence. This course was especially impactful because it allowed for hands-on learning, which I had previously felt was missing from my mechanical engineering studies. I enjoyed applying theoretical concepts to practical exercises, and I realized I had a strong interest in investigative processes and digital analysis. This experience led me to pursue a certification in Digital Forensics to deepen my knowledge and improve my career readiness. For the first time in my college career, I felt aligned with my major and confident about my future.

In contrast to earlier academic struggles, my performance in cybersecurity courses has been strong. I currently maintain a 3.88 GPA while working full-time, which has required careful time management and persistence. McAdams (2001) talks about “redemptive stories,” where people go through hard times and come out stronger. My experience aligns with this model, as leaving engineering and starting over allowed me to discover a more fulfilling and sustainable path. I now view my earlier struggles as necessary steps in the process of finding my true academic identity.

Work-Life Balance and Academic Discipline

Balancing a full-time job with a packed course load at Old Dominion University has definitely been one of the toughest challenges I’ve faced during my academic journey. Right now, I’m working 40 hours each week while keeping my GPA at an impressive 3.88. This experience has really honed my time management skills and commitment to my goals. Throughout this time, I’ve learned the value of resilience and structure—qualities that are essential in the cybersecurity field. These challenges have become a key part of my story as a student and someone looking to build a career in this dynamic industry.

My success in this environment stems from establishing a solid routine and utilizing digital tools for organization. I count on calendars, task lists, and time-blocking to manage my coursework and deadlines while balancing job responsibilities. This structure reflects the systematic problem-solving needed in cybersecurity roles, where attention to detail and precise execution are crucial. I've also recognized the value of adaptability, as both academic and work settings often demand quick thinking and flexibility. These habits and skills are now a fundamental part of who I am, gearing me up for future achievements in the field.

Professional Goals and Looking Ahead

As I approach graduation in Spring 2025, I am working toward obtaining a certification in Digital Forensics to strengthen my credentials. This certification will supplement the knowledge gained through my Cybercrime minor and prepare me for roles that involve investigative analysis and evidence management. I am particularly interested in positions that focus on threat detection, incident response, or forensic analysis within government or private sectors. McAdams (2001) says that people with strong future goals tend to live more meaningful lives. I've found that having clear goals has helped me stay motivated and focused on the future. This concept aligns with my outlook, as my goals are now based on a clear understanding of my values, interests, and long-term aspirations.

In addition to honing my technical skills, I'm focused on enhancing my leadership and communication abilities. As cybersecurity becomes more collaborative, it's essential to work seamlessly across teams and departments, particularly in threat response and risk education. My experiences juggling work, school, and personal aspirations have positioned me well for future leadership opportunities. I'm also dedicated to lifelong learning, keeping myself updated on emerging threats, tools, and technologies. This commitment to growth not only aligns with the dynamic nature of the cybersecurity field but also shapes the trajectory of my career.

Redefining Success

Looking back, I realize that every step I took, even the confusing ones, brought me to where I'm meant to be. I began in engineering, tried to navigate my path, and ultimately discovered a field that truly suits me. McAdams (2001) talks about redemptive life stories—those in which people face challenges and emerge stronger—and that resonates with my own

experience. I don't regret the changes I made along the way; they helped me gain a clearer understanding of myself. As Nguyen (2013) notes, reflecting on our stories reveals their meaning, and now I feel a sense of pride in the narrative I've crafted.

References

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