

**Personal Narrative Essay**

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## **Abstract**

I started college as a computer science major due to past hobbies and interests which guided my decision. Though I was passionate about computer science, the heavy mathematical requirements proved to be incompatible with my study habits and knowledge at the time, so I switched to cybersecurity. I've seen some struggles with internship hours, but I have no regrets as to my decision and I am confident that I will see success in and beyond college.

## **Introduction**

I am a senior studying for a bachelor's in cybersecurity. I originally came to college as a computer science major, but eventually ended up switching for reasons which I will explain later. My choice of school was mostly determined based on who would offer me a spot on a swimming roster, but many more factors led to my choice of major. In this essay I will highlight the skills and features of my life which led me to become a cybersecurity major and my experience before and during college.

## **Early Life**

Although I have been a high level athlete in swimming from a very young age, I never considered myself to be a jock type. I wasn't the fastest at developing social skills - I even had to do speech therapy early on. I was also considered to be a gifted student. They tested me and put me into a program called GATE, where every Thursday at school a group of around ten or eleven students would spend all day in a room with a specialized teacher who gave us classwork and activities borrowed from higher level teachers. This all occurred between fourth and fifth grade, and the teacher would bring us math and reading work from middle school curriculums. While this may seem like a great way to allow for "gifted" kids to get ahead of their peers, I feel it also led to a detriment: I was good at rote memorization, but when it came to study skills, I was

lacking severely. My idea of effective studying was simply being quizzed over and over on important information, rather than learning the concepts as a whole.

### **Technology Hobbies**

I became a gamer at a very young age, when I had to get my tonsils removed. I was nervous about the procedure, as most young kids would be, but my parents gave me a Nintendo DS which kept me distracted until I was put under. I'd continue to game on that device as well as a GameCube and a Wii, eventually moving to an Xbox 360, my mom's laptop, and more. I was always interested in the software and hardware of these devices, looking into modding games and finding tweaks to make things more interesting. I eventually set my eyes on PC gaming, but my parents' desktop wasn't powerful enough for the newest, most interesting games at the time, so I started saving holiday and birthday money to build my own. This was when I was 9 or 10, so I don't fully recall what parts were in the PC I ended up building, but I do know that I had an AMD r9 270 gpu and an fx 6300 cpu. This wasn't exactly a high-end computer, but it worked fine for my needs at the time. A few years down the line I got more interested in keeping up with new developments in PC hardware, namely new GPU releases by Nvidia and CPUs from Intel. I would spend my time in online forums discussing PC building, a niche which held my interest for a long time. I've built a few more PCs for myself since then, with my most recent one being a 13900k + 4090 combo which will likely last me several more years, considering that the 4090 graphics card is still the #2 consumer card despite a whole new generation being released.

### **Late High School**

In the latter years of high school we had the choice between taking calculus or statistics. I had never been great at more theoretical or complex math, so I opted for statistics. This ended up being a mistake I would regret a few years later. I had continued swimming through high school,

getting recruited to Old Dominion midway through my senior year. I traveled from Ohio to Virginia for orientation and got signed up for computer science classes, but I had to take pre-calculus due to my low score on the placement test ODU had me take. I still lacked study skills when it came to math, so this ended up being a struggle for me.

## **College**

Freshman year of college had its ups and downs. In classes like English, Sociology, or my programming classes, I excelled - I'd always been good at writing, and programming is mostly trial and error in the first stages. Math, on the other hand, was not going according to plan. I was barely passing pre-calc 2, earning a C+, which I was not proud of. The next semester I had to take calculus 1, which I only achieved a D grade in. This was not the end of the world, as I retook the class over the summer, but it did put a lot of extra pressure on me academically. That summer, I took the class again remotely, driving to proctored tests every few weeks, and earned a B- without much effort - it seemed like I was learning the material well, just slightly too late every time.

## **Switching to Cybersecurity**

It was between summer of 2024 and that fall semester that I talked with my advisor and we came to a decision that a change needed to be made. Cybersecurity is, at its core, an offshoot of computer science. As far as ODU's curriculum is concerned, cybersecurity is computer science without the focus on math. This was perfect for me. Immediately after switching majors, my grades took an upward turn: where I'd previously been getting majority B's with a few sparse A's, now I was achieving a majority of A grades. This very much reassured me that I had made the right decision, and on top of that, I was enjoying the courses I was taking. I had also developed the relevant study skills which allow me to absorb academic information and not only

pass my classes, but excel in them as well. This continued through all of Junior year and into Senior year, although there has been one final struggle during senior year.

### **Athletics and Internship Struggle**

Senior year has provided one final hurdle: ODU requires cybersecurity students to work an internship for 150 hours and provide written reflections. With the swim team taking up around 20 hours a week of practice alone, and practices being on a rigid schedule, the times that I could work my internship have been limited. I had practice every day from 6-9 and from 1-3, so I could only feasibly do 2-3 hour shifts between 10 and noon. This was exacerbated by the thirty minute commute to and from the Virginia Air and Space Science Center where I'd been placed for my internship. Luckily, my professor and the TA for the class are flexible enough to grant me extensions, and now that my swimming career is over I can cram a lot more hours without needing to be back on campus at such specific times.

### **Conclusion**

My path from youth to becoming a cybersecurity graduate has had some twists and turns, and is not over yet. That being said, I am very confident that I will continue to excel in my classes and that I will have a successful career in cybersecurity. I have no regret on my decision to switch majors, and I am grateful for my teachers and advisors who have helped me through college and also grateful to my own personal adaptability and dedication.