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Capstone Reflection

ePortfolio link: https://sites.wp.odu.edu/jjcybersec/

Starting Point:

When I began my journey at Old Dominion University in the Fall of 2023, I was a complete beginner in Cybersecurity. At the time I chose it because of its rising popularity. I knew the field was important, but it was so broad that I had no idea which niche resonated with me the most. I was also nervous and uncertain that cybersecurity was the right career for me. Throughout the next four years of my college career, my primary goal was to gain enough experience to confirm that I would enjoy the work I was preparing to do post graduation. What I did bring with me, however, was a strong sense of purpose. I grew up a Navy child, and I watched my father deploy overseas for years. At a young age this showed me what it means to give yourself to something greater than you. Ever since then, I knew I wanted a career that carried the same purpose. When I found out about cybersecurity, I saw it as a way to serve our nation, and it's how I came up with my tagline: “Service Through Security”.

The Journey:

The courses that shaped me the most are three that are required for ODU’s Digital Forensics Certificate. These are Crime and Computer Applications (CRJS409), Digital Forensics (CYSE407), and Cybercrime: Foundations (CRJS310). Together, they changed me from a student who studied cybersecurity into one that also thinks like an investigator. In CRJS409, I utilized tools that actual professionals in the field use everyday. In CYSE407, I designed a forensics lab and carried out a mock investigation. Here, I learned that the evidence is only as

strong as the process and documentation behind it. In CRJS310, I learned to explain complex cases to people outside the field through my presentations.The moment I knew digital forensics was my path came to me during my darknet investigation. I accessed the darknet (darkweb) through Tor and examined Dread, a forum notorious for selling blackmarket products. I studied its structure, and decided whether or not it functions as a space for criminal behavior.

My greatest challenge these past few years was gaining hands-on experience. I dealt with this by creating my own opportunities. I completed a remote externship with Hydroficient, where I helped secure an IoT pipeline and presented the work to industry partners. I also built home labs, including an automated SOC lab using Splunk and n8n, and competed in a hackathon hosted by CACI and COVA CCI. Together, these experiences strengthened my problem-solving, technical communication, and ability to work under pressure.

Meaning-Making

Looking back at my artifacts, I can see two patterns that stand out. The first is that cybersecurity is about people as much as systems. I noticed that whether it was checking my own email for breaches, studying how scammers use deepfake technology to clone voices, or explaining technical projects to a non-technical audience, there is always a human element involved. The second theme is that trust is earned through evidence. For example, in digital forensics, a finding can only be supported if every step is well documented. In AI410, I learned to question an AI's output after my classifier mistook information I plugged in. I believe these patterns reflect the values I described in the start of my journey. If my goal is to serve and protect the people who rely on our systems, I have to be accurate and accountable, because careless work puts them all at risk. I can think of two moments that stand out as turning points according to my reflections. In CRJS409, I moved from thinking as a defender to understanding how

attackers think in cybersecurity. In AI410, I changed my perspective on AI, questioning how it works and where it fails.

Looking Forward

Moving forward, I want to emphasize the importance of service through my work, whether that means searching for a federal job in cybersecurity, or serving as an officer in the Navy. I am still deciding on the exact path, but the purpose behind it won't change. The skills I have developed over the course of my college years will apply to these roles. My biggest remaining gap is professional experience. Although I have built my own labs, completed an externship, and participated in a hackathon, I want to work in a real cyber environment and I will gladly take any opportunity that allows me to do so. I am also on track to sit for my Security+ certification at the end of this month, and I plan to pursue more certifications afterward. Because cybersecurity is a large field that can be learned on your own time, I plan to keep learning well beyond graduation. My ePortfolio will still grow with me, and I will add new experiences as I earn them.

The ePortfolio Experience

Building my ePorfolio during this course taught me to revisit the work I had completed in the past and clarify for myself what I had actually learned from it. I've grown to appreciate those courses. Writing each reflection let me explain how the material in that course changed my way of thinking. The process also strengthened my storytelling and organization. In response to peer feedback, I added images to my skills page to give viewers a stronger visual cue, and I also plan to add a professional headshot after next week's career fair. In my midterm progress report, I stated that I might be switching to Wix to satisfy my design preferences. While I did not follow through with that for time reasons, there is still a chance for me to switch to a different website

builder service. With that being said, for anyone beginning their own portfolio, I would strongly recommend them to compare different website builders and decide, very clearly, which one they want at the beginning of the course. Especially if it's an 8-week term, because transferring all your content later costs significant time. Another recommendation would be to keep your audience in mind with every decision you make while building your portfolio. This keeps the overall tone of your content professional and consistent, and it keeps every page focused on what your viewers actually need to see.