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Abstract

It is almost April of 2024, and I am getting very close to finishing my Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity at Old Dominion University. My academic journey over these last four years have really flown by, even when it feels like so much has happened. While this journey was not always easy, I am still extremely grateful that I went through it. As I now enter the next chapter of my life in the professional world, it seems like a good time to reflect on my academic journey. My name is Joey Navarrete, a senior at Old Dominion University, and this is how my last five years have gone.

Before ODU

A year before I decided to take my academic career to Old Dominion University, I was very noncommittal about what exactly I wanted to do after high school. I had plenty of interests like sports, music, and video games, but I could not see myself starting a full-time career in any of those aspects. When I first got accepted to ODU and decided to spend my next four years there, I was still uncertain about what I wanted to do. So, like many other people who go to college, I decided to go the undecided route, with a slight interest in Business. After finally deciding to put some thought into it, I recalled how interested I was in technology. Not only was I interested in the technology itself, but also how this technology is protected. That is when I landed on Cybersecurity. With the rapid advancement of technology and computer and network systems, as well as cyber attackers becoming more intelligent with their methods of breaking into systems, I thought that maybe I should pursue a career in protecting these systems. I then committed to the Cybersecurity field and was ready to finish my high school career.

COVID-19

That same year that I was getting ready to finish high school, the world completely turned on its head. In March of 2020, there was a widespread virus known as COVID-19, which was quickly making its way around the world, affecting hundreds of millions of people. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, almost everything was closed down, including schools, work, and upcoming public events, leaving everyone at home. This prevented many high school seniors, including me, from properly finishing high school. For most people, work and school were moved to completely online. This obviously caused a massive increase in people who were using technology online. Once that happened, I came to the realization that Cybersecurity is what I want to do for my career.

The demand for jobs related to Cybersecurity has significantly increased over the last five years, so I am willing to fill a role in that field.

Start of College

Still in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, I began my collegiate career, commuting from my home, which was only 30 minutes away. As for my expectations of what college would be like, I did not know what to expect. I was nervous that I would not be able to find my way around the campus, and if the classes would be challenging. I took a hybrid of in-person classes, classes over Zoom, as well as asynchronous online classes. Overall, I would say that my first two semesters at ODU went fairly well. I had no problems with finding my way around classes, and I maintained a solid grade point average. Also, my first year at ODU helped me develop a basic understanding of Cybersecurity, since I did not have any prior knowledge or experience with it beforehand. After getting the hang of things in my first year, I was ready to march on to my sophomore year at ODU.

Sophomore Slump

Prior to starting my sophomore year, I had agreed with a couple of friends to move into an apartment much closer to ODU's campus. This would be my first time living on my own. I was expecting my sophomore year to be a little similar to my freshman year, except with a little more responsibility since I was living by myself. Let's just say that this upcoming year did not go how I anticipated. I had what I would say were my two absolute worst semesters while at ODU. I grew extremely lethargic, I would skip out on classes from time to time without reason, and I would pass on many assignments, which obviously resulted in poor grades in both semesters. I have never failed a class before, but I got quite close in this year. Once the spring semester ended, my roommates agreed to stop living in the apartment, and we all went our own ways. I would go back to living at home, looking to improve on my disastrous sophomore year.

Bouncing Back

Even being back at home, I felt just as much responsibility as I did when I was living on my own on campus. I knew that what occurred the previous year was absolutely unacceptable, so I gave myself a pep talk, promising myself that it would never happen again. In my junior year, I put in the effort to show up to all my classes and finish all my work in a timely manner. After doing this, I could immediately see the results. My grades were significantly better than the previous year, putting me back on the right track. During my time at ODU, I took many courses related to Criminal Justice, since that and Cybersecurity are related disciplines. I feel that I learned a lot from those classes, so I decided, why not minor in Criminal Justice? Taking these courses also gave me a potential idea of what to do with my career in the form of cyber law enforcement. I was able to keep up my diligence in my senior year, in which I posted my best semester while at ODU with straight A's. As I am writing this, I am working harder than ever towards my goal of graduation. Also, since my first semester at ODU, I have been working on an ePortfolio, which contains some of the academic work I have done, as well as knowledge that I have obtained and skills that I have developed. This ePortfolio can be used as a self-evaluation, or it can also be used for someone to present this information to others (Nguyen, 2013).

Professional Experience & What Comes Next

The one last requirement that I need to check off so that I can graduate from ODU is to complete an internship. As easy as it sounds, I have had a little bit of trouble in securing an internship. Part of that is my own doing because I did not apply for enough internships, and as for the few that I did apply for, I did not get accepted. The summer is the perfect time to complete an internship for a college student, and this time around, I have applied for much more of them. I expect to hear back from them very soon. While completing my degree at ODU, I have been

consistently working part-time as a soccer referee in the Hampton Roads area. This was another challenge for me during my collegiate career, as it would leave me very busy on the weekends, which made it more of a challenge to complete my schoolwork. Even with that, I was still able to get to the point that I am currently at. As for what happens after I graduate, that is still yet to be determined, but I will absolutely pursue a job in the Cybersecurity field. Like for everyone, the future is full of unknowns, and I will see how it plays out. The one big thing that I learned while at ODU is that if I put in effort, then I can do almost anything.

References

Nguyen, C.F. (2013). The ePortfolio as a living portal: a medium for student learning, identity, and assessment. *International Journal of ePortfolio*, 3(2), Retrieved from <https://www.theijep.com/pdf/IJEP116.pdf>