

Why Cyber?

Why Cyber?: A Personal Narrative Essay

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## Why Cyber?

### Abstract

I am currently a senior at Old Dominion University on track to graduate this semester with a bachelor's degree in cybersecurity, and while that has not always been my major, I have always been enthusiastic about my use and knowledge of technology. My path to getting to ODU was winding and ever so slightly confusing, but I am glad to have ended up here studying under several amazing professors about this ever-changing field we are all constant students of. I hope through this essay you can get to know me a little bit more than you may already.

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### High School

My journey begins where most people's stories do, sophomore year of high school. I was a player on the football team at Kempsville High, and within its Entrepreneurship and Business Academy. This academy track was a brand-new academy within the Virginia Beach public school system, and I was part of the second class since its founding. I began laser focused on getting into the business sector due to my belief that I was a particularly innovative idea maker, in hindsight, not the best decision. As part of the graduation requirements for the EBA, students had to pick a specialty for the business school, be it financial, entrepreneurial, or technical. As part of my knowledge of computers, I chose to go within the technical track, which led me to the Advanced Technology Center, a college level campus at Tidewater Community College. At the ATC, I began taking engineering courses, thinking I would invent new solutions to problems that didn't exist yet. Even though I eventually became disillusioned with the Engineering track, I fell in love with TCC, though I'll detail that later.

### The Advanced Technology Center

The engineering course within ATC was my first exposure to what would eventually become my passion for cybersecurity. Ironically enough, this came through an as-then innocuous incident where the CAD software within the design lab stopped working for some reason. I ended up fixing this issue through digging through files, partly out of boredom, partly out of curiosity. This digging found that someone had accidentally moved some of the important files that allowed the software to function into a different folder, and due to the odd networking structure of the computers (you could access folders from another computer), this wasn't just isolated to that one user's computer. I cross referenced the file structure of these bugged systems

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with the ones that were working and brought this to the professor who then went on to fix the issue.

## The Pandemic

Unfortunately, in the sophomore year of high school the Covid-19 pandemic began, shutting down the entire country, and of course, my school. We moved onto online learning which is when my passion for computers formed. During the shutdown, one class type was unaffected. Coding. In the first semester of the pandemic year, I took an elective course in an Alice coding class, I was terrible at it, but that was not why I list it here. This was my first exposure to the sheer power and capacity of computers to do...whatever you want it to do, frankly. I began begging my parents to get me an actual computer rather than the old laptop I had been using so that I could better do the work in these classes without having to wait several minutes for each compilation of the code. This gave me the first taste of what it was like to work with computers beyond being an end user.

## Graduation

In 2021 I graduated from Kempsville and had grown quite dissatisfied with the entrepreneurial track and especially engineering. I was not good at either of them and honestly had no real passion for either, so when it came time to apply for TCC, I felt I wanted to do something different after my core classes. I had a few semesters to think about it while I got my basic requirements done, but eventually, I settled on something. After two semesters of deliberation, I eventually chose my major, cybersecurity. This was due in part to my mother inspiring me to take this path as she herself took it, but also because I found that, in an elective I

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took, I was very proficient with the use of a Linux backend virtual environment and wished to develop that skill even further.

## ODU

In 2023, I graduated from TCC with my associate's in applied science, with a specialty in cybersecurity. Thanks to this, and the deal between TCC and ODU, I was able to transfer all my credits to the ODU cybersecurity program, therefore beginning as a junior. So, I hit the ground running with the interdisciplinary studies of cybersecurity. I very quickly learned that cybersecurity is not just about hacking, counter hacking, and securing infrastructure from social engineering, but also has a lot of ethical quandaries, historical contexts, and even the role psychology plays in how, what, and why people do what they do when it comes to cybercrime.

## The Role of Psychology

In my time at ODU, I have taken several classes related to cybersecurity. Some expected, but some not. And the ones that were not expected happened to be the most intriguing to me. For example, the course on the ways in which psychology affects cybercriminals and their motivations for what they do. A very notable lesson from that course that I still remember vividly is that money is often not the primary motivator for cybercriminals. It is without a doubt one of the most important ones, but the number one reason was described by my professor as "because they can." Being on the internet offers a degree of anonymity masked bank robbers in the west wished they possessed during their heists. It is nearly impossible to positively identify a cybercriminal off IP alone, and even harder still if that individual is not from your country of origin. If a cybercriminal notices a vulnerability that is web accessible on a platform hosted in

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the US, and they themselves are not a resident, they will most likely exploit that vulnerability, even if there is nothing to be gained from doing so.

#### Senior Year

This brings us to the present. Right now, I am finishing up my coursework for my degree and will hopefully graduate this very semester. Thank you so much for taking the time to read this rather rambling paper, and I hope I at least got a chuckle out of you, if not some insight into myself.