

IDS Writing Assignment 2: Personal Narrative Essay

Kristofer R. Vargas

Old Dominion University

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Abstract

For this paper, I will delve into my personal academic journey leading up to university and my plans for the future. My upbringing and family environment set the standard for what I considered to be the path to success, but these values were challenged once I started my time in university. The unique hybrid learning situation sprung on all students due to the pandemic led to pitfalls in my start to college, and a time of deep self-reflection commenced. Through this period of self-reflection, I was able to recognize the fault of my ways as a student and rehabilitated myself to where I currently stand. Besides turning around my academic woes, I also had to tackle the issue of being one of many students that is not too sure about a future path and plan. As things turn out, the smallest coincidence can spark a long-winding path that leads to you finding the field that is the perfect fit for you, even if it is something that you may have never realistically considered as a potential career. I am truly thankful for finding the field of Cybersecurity and my future plans now revolve around getting involved in the field and hopefully helping to contribute to it continuing to rise in the near future.

From an early age, the importance of diligence and hard work were preached throughout the confines of the Vargas household. My parents were both immigrants from the Philippines and found themselves working hard every day to support myself and my sister. They left behind careers that they had built up in their country to start new in America in hopes that the American dream would be realized by their future children. By coming to America before deciding to start a family, they hoped to give me and my sister a wealth of opportunities that coincided with living in the land of the free. Growing up, my parents went out of their way to ensure that our childhood was enjoyable and fun, but also made sure that we abided by the standards that they set when it came to academics. In the classroom, we were expected to go above and beyond, earning high marks in every possible subject. This early emphasis on academics set the foundation of me to expect honors achievements or above for the rest of my school career. Outside of the classroom, my father was very encouraging towards our participation in sports, as he was a former college athlete in the Philippines. Because of this, I played multiple sports in school growing up, which I think further instilled discipline into my brain and helped me learn to follow a regular routine. In totality, I am extremely thankful for the upbringing that I had, and I feel that I was truly blessed with a happy home and family that wanted me to be successful without putting much pressure on me.

When choosing to attend Old Dominion, the choice was mostly dependent upon the vicinity of the school to my home. I had good enough grades that I considered a few other schools, but ODU being a mere 15 commute was too good of a situation to pass up. This allowed me to avoid moving into a dormitory, having to share a room with a complete stranger and having to pay room and board costs. In addition to this, my close relationship with my family meant that I would be able to lean on my support system throughout the trials of earning my

bachelor's degree. As I went through college, that support system would be something that I went to multiple times. My college experience started off in an unorthodox manner, as 2021 was when the coronavirus pandemic was still in full effect. This meant that just like the end of my high school time, everyone was still confined to their homes and classes were to be conducted in a fully-online format. Though it was convenient in some ways, I ran into some trouble fully adapting to all of the changes and did not get off to a good start with my classes. The format of online classes made it harder for me to fully absorb information, as I preferred being front and center in the classroom and being able to interact with classmates and teachers face to face. Having excelled in previous academic settings, this newfound experience of failure forced me to self-reflect on flaws and what kind of motivation I had for the future. After taking a closer look at myself, I realized that I had always gotten by in school with good grades through a bit of natural talent and innate intelligence. The actual act of studying hard and preparing for exams was more foreign to me than I had previously thought, my ability for time management was quite poor, and to top it all off, I realized that I did not truly know what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. So, after taking the time to think about these issues and gaining newfound resolve, I began the process of rebuilding myself as a student. I became conscientious regarding notetaking, utilized professor office hours (via zoom), bought a planner to organize my time more effectively, and began dedicating certain amounts of hours towards each class every day. Though process proved to be arduous, I managed to pull myself back towards the level of academic achievement that I knew I was capable of deep down and ended up laying the foundation for the model that I would continue to follow in the rest of my time in college. Though the academic side of things improved substantially, I still had the lingering issue of not knowing the

field that I was going to try my hand at and what I was going to major in. However, I would soon stumble upon a news story that would provide inspiration towards my current trajectory.

In the year 2022, Microsoft was the victim of a cyberattack that caused a large leak of sensitive information to be gained by hackers. Though the situation was eventually resolved, I distinctly remember reading about the story in the news and how cybersecurity professionals factored into the recovery process. This piqued my interest, as I had always been relatively good with computers and thought that the notion of hackers via movies and tv shows was interesting. I began reading more into cybersecurity and the different jobs that were offered. Cybersecurity was and is a field on the upswing, with it gaining notoriety and importance given the digitization of the modern world. In addition to this newfound interest in the field, I met a coworker of my dad's, who worked as the cybersecurity specialist for their company. I was able to ask him questions directly about his everyday work and gain some valuable insight regarding the ins and outs of a cybersecurity career. After researching the field more and interacting with the gentleman working in the field, I decided to give Cybersecurity a try and messaged my advisor regarding the steps to take toward pursuing this degree. Many exams, projects and essays later, I am now on the cusp of earning that very degree in a few weeks. From the learning the technical aspects, to writing lengthy papers tackling the policy side of Cybersecurity, my time studying the field has been challenging in its own right, but extremely enjoyable and rewarding. My time of struggle and the newfound drive that I discovered to dedicate myself to my studies have paid off tenfold and allowed me to fully dive into Cybersecurity without thinking twice. Looking forward, I hope to be able to immediately secure a position after graduating and begin my time working in Cybersecurity. The field is always advancing, and new technology is being integrated into the standards of security practices seemingly daily, so I think my time working will allow

me to continue the process of self-development that I started in my first-year of college and will keep me on my toes. After once being down on myself and feeling like I had no direction, the path forward has never been clearer for myself than today. Being able to work in Cybersecurity will give me a means of supporting myself, having a purpose every day, and being able to pay back my parents tenfold for all of their hard work and support throughout my upbringing and my time of need in college. Without the struggle that I experienced earlier, I most likely would have never improve myself as a student and consequently would not have been able to transition and do well in Cybersecurity like I have up to this point.

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