

**Writing Assignment 2: Personal Narrative**

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## **Writing Assignment 2: Start at ODU and Work Background**

I am a returning student at Old Dominion University and wish to finish my bachelor's of science degree in cybersecurity at the first university I attended in the fall of 2007. I was born and raised in Jacksonville, Florida, to an immigrant mother from the Philippines and a Navy veteran, Irish American father from New York City. My mother and father did not stay married for long, and they divorced while my younger sister and I were still children. My parents tried their best to raise us both right and they also tried to instill in us a love of country and appreciation for hard work. I like to think they mostly succeeded, but my own personal journey required me to grow and learn without their help as a young adult, as a soldier, as a husband, and now as a full-time Department of Defense (DoD) civilian.

In the spirit of transparency, I also want to address my experience attending ODU the first time in 2007 as well as the events in my life since then. Back in 2007, I was fresh out of high school and a smart student, but I was not mature enough to take my core requisite courses. I did not fully appreciate the opportunity given to me to earn my education, and instead I focused on having fun and attending parties. Due to my lack of academic interest, I received an F grade for two courses and even lost an Army ROTC scholarship. It was my dream at the time to become an officer in the US Army and serve my country.

Instead of trying to pay for ODU and continue with classes in 2008, I dropped out and enlisted in the US Army in the summer of 2008 to salvage my chances of serving my country. I realized that I lacked the work ethic and discipline needed to succeed in college at the time. Thankfully I was able to complete my Army training without compromising my integrity and served a full term with no further issues. I was honorably discharged after an overseas deployment to Afghanistan in 2011 and became a private defense contractor shortly afterwards

in 2012. I married my wife of after that first deployment in 2011, and we are going on 15 years of marriage. Leah has been the bedrock of my life since then, and my biggest source of motivation. I would deploy to Afghanistan four more times in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2021, and it instilled a deep appreciation for discipline and the need for due diligence in my work to successfully complete my team's mission. It also reminded me how much I need to cherish the time I have back home with Leah and not get distracted by the little things.

After my latest deployment overseas in 2021, my wife politely (forcefully) requested that I no longer deploy overseas and find a stable, full-time job back home in Hampton Roads. I obliged her and applied for multiple jobs opening in the area. However, after several interviews I was told that I was not the chosen candidate due to my lack of a college degree. This was very eye-opening for me since my extensive work experience has usually made me a strong candidate for nearly every position I've applied for. I have lived in the Hampton Roads area since 2015, and during that time my wife also attended ODU and earned her Bachelor of Science in Medical Laboratory Technology in 2022. Seeing all her hard work and countless hours of studying pay off also reignited a spark in me to continue my own education. Instead of staying bitter and disillusioned with my prospects, I buckled down and investigated returning to college after so many years and maybe even returning to ODU.

My current role as an intelligence analyst supporting the Department of Defense (DoD) requires I conduct in-depth and analytically rigorous research into various adversaries across the globe and the potential threat systems they could use against the US armed forces (DoD, 2018). This position requires that I maintain the proper balance of resource allocation to assign research priorities, ensure proper judgement when gathering information, and presenting my findings to our customers in the DoD (US Air Force, 2021). My current position also requires me to

regularly conduct analytic exchanges with external agencies to compare our findings and better understand research priorities. All these traits combined with the cybersecurity transfer program offered at Tidewater Community College to ODU seem like the best degree program for me to pursue starting in 2022.

### **Continuing Education: TCC to ODU – Cybersecurity Major**

I obtained my AAS in Cybersecurity from TCC at the end of the spring 2024 semester, and I've following through on my plan to transfer to ODU's BS in Cybersecurity program. The last four years have been very challenging, but it has made my work that much more rewarding. I am still working for the Department of Defense (DoD) as a government civilian, and I hope my education at ODU will help me to better support the military as the country faces new threats from state and non-state actors in the cyber realm.

### **Internship and Hardship – US Air Force and Finishing at ODU**

My bachelor's degree in cybersecurity from ODU is exactly the type of degree that has enhanced my abilities in my current position in the DoD. I am constantly trying to learn how to use different databases and technical tools. My current degree program has required me to learn many new research tools and methods, from cybersecurity for Linux systems, to the laws of cyber warfare, and the many ethical dilemmas I may have to consider while working on cybersecurity related projects. There are many different databases and research tools exclusive to the cybersecurity field that I must utilize, especially during open-source research in support of the DoD. My prior positions supporting the US overseas have demanded that I adapt to ever changing circumstances and learn how to use different technologies in a short amount of time, so I thankfully have not been overwhelmed by all the different learning opportunities with the ODU.

I was fortunate to use my current role within the DoD for a cybersecurity internship in the spring semester of 2026. It was also during this time that events overseas caused me to align with a new mission and area of responsibility (AOR) that I was not familiar with. For operational security reasons, I will not delve into specifics of my role and mission. However, I can say that I directly supported ongoing efforts in support of the US military during a large-scale operation (DoD, 2018; US Air Force, 2024). The tools and techniques I've learned during my rigorous coursework at TCC and ODU have helped me to think critically and to consider multiple ways of solving challenges in unique ways. My cybersecurity coursework and internship with the US Air Force have provided me with valuable artifacts to showcase in my senior ePortfolio, as suggested by Celeste Nguyen in 2013 (Nguyen, 2013). I am particularly proud of my coursework in Cyber War (CYSE 426) and Cybersecurity Ethics (PHIL 355E), and will highlight some of my best work from these course in my ePortfolio.

### **Conclusion**

The US armed forces have a very different set of priorities and parameters from the private sector cybersecurity firms in terms of cybersecurity when it comes to completing their mission. The goal of the private firms is to secure their clients' networks, systems, and people from cybercriminals, while the goal of the US armed forces is to fight and win in armed conflict. However, both the private firms and the DoD share the goal of protecting US national interests. The Air Force core values are integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do. Integrity first means doing the right thing, even when no one is looking and taking accountability for your actions. Service before self means that professional duties come before personal desires, and this leads to discipline and self-control. Excellence in all we do means that members of the Air Force strive to improve in their capabilities to be prepared to meet any challenge or complete

any mission. These are all values that I think cross over well with the private sector. However, for now I will remain within the DoD, as the nation is currently facing several adversaries overseas that need to be addressed.

## References

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