Starting Point

I'm not sure where to begin, as this ride will soon come to an end in Spring 2027. My time at Old Dominion University has been eventful, and it has taught me more than I expected. I never looked at school as some big holy grail. Honestly, I viewed it as part of the politics of the working world. It was a way to show what you've been through, whether you could weather the storm, and eventually earn that expensive piece of paper called a bachelor's degree.

Coming into ODU, I was already in my career field, but I wasn't at the level I wanted to be. I came in with a lot of prerequisites under my belt and was looking forward to jumping into the technology courses. I already had some technical skills, mainly at the Tier 1 and Tier 2 support levels, along with a little networking experience. My goal was to build on what I already knew while learning new things. At the same time, I wanted to strengthen my understanding of concepts I thought I had mastered. One of my biggest uncertainties was whether I could keep up and bridge the gap between my current IT experience and the cybersecurity side of the field.

The Journey

I was in for a lot more fun than I anticipated. I learned so much about things I thought I already knew like a pro. Courses covering Windows system management, cybersecurity, programming, and networking helped me take a deeper dive into familiar topics. For example, I had been working with Active Directory for about four years, but my coursework gave me a better understanding of what goes on behind the scenes. I also learned about tools and concepts I had never touched before and found ways to apply that knowledge to my current IT role.

Honestly, one of my biggest challenges was staying engaged when covering material I thought I already knew. At first, I didn't always see the need to read everything because I had already been using certain technologies for two or more years. As I continued through the

courses and completed the assignments, I realized there was still value in reviewing those concepts. Sometimes, I knew how to do something without fully understanding why it worked. I had to get out of my own way and put in the work.

My Python and Linux courses were probably the most challenging because I had little to no experience with either one. It was a humbling experience, but it made me better in the end. Python especially pushed me outside my comfort zone. Eventually, I was able to create my own working program that combined my love for sports with IT. The project focused on two powerhouse Division I basketball programs and used programming to analyze their rivalry. Going from barely understanding the code to building something of my own was rewarding. It showed me that I could learn unfamiliar skills and apply them to something I genuinely enjoy.

Meaning-Making

Looking back at the artifacts across my portfolio, the biggest pattern I see is perseverance. No matter how heavy the workload became or how difficult an assignment was, I stayed with it and pushed through. That connects directly to one of my personal values and a saying I always use: “gots to see it through.” To me, that means no matter how tough, boring, or frustrating things get, you have to keep going. There is always light at the end of the tunnel, and not every day is going to be rainbows and sunshine.

The Python project stands out as one of the biggest moments in my journey. It was one of the first times I had to start almost completely from scratch with a technical skill. There were definitely frustrating moments when the code wouldn’t work because of one small mistake. However, working through those problems taught me patience, critical thinking, and the importance of troubleshooting. I also learned that connecting something challenging to my personal interests can make the learning experience more meaningful.

These experiences have helped shape my professional identity. I came to ODU with hands-on IT experience, but I'm leaving with a broader understanding of technology and a stronger foundation for cybersecurity. My coursework and portfolio artifacts show that I'm not just interested in fixing problems. I also want to understand how systems work, where weaknesses exist, and how technology can be used more securely.

Looking Forward

Although I'm already applying what I've learned in my current role, I plan to keep building on that knowledge as I move forward. My goal is to transition into cybersecurity and continue developing the skills needed to succeed in that field. I also want to share what I learn with others because it does me no justice to gain knowledge and never spread the wealth. As they say, "each one teach one."

I know there are still areas where I can improve. Linux is one example because I don't use it as much in my current position. I plan to keep practicing and make sure I understand the fundamentals well. As I gain more experience, I want to add new projects, certifications, and professional accomplishments to my portfolio. I see it as something that should continue to grow with me, rather than something I complete once and leave behind.

The ePortfolio Experience

IDS 493 helped me narrow down what I wanted my portfolio to communicate. Before this class, I felt like the portfolio created for my major contained too much information, which made it harder to focus on what mattered most. I wanted something that showcased my skills and experience while allowing my personality to come through. This class helped me understand that a portfolio is more than a place to store assignments. It should tell a story about who you are, what you can do, and where you want to go.

One of the biggest things I worked on was organizing my information so visitors could find what they needed without feeling overwhelmed. I wanted the site to look professional and consistent while still feeling like me. My About Me, Skills, and Experience sections each serve a purpose, whether that means introducing myself, highlighting my technical abilities, or showing how I've applied what I've learned. Including projects like my Python sports analytics program also gives visitors something concrete to look at instead of simply telling them what I can do.

Working on the portfolio also caused me to take my professional presentation seriously. Although a resume is significant, it may not tell a whole story about a person. With a portfolio, I can describe my experience, add examples of my work and link my educational background to my career aspirations.

As for those students who choose to make their portfolios on their own, I would recommend keeping them neat, easy to follow and concentrated on quality, not quantity. There is no need to put all assignments one has made into the portfolio. One should simply choose the best pieces that illustrate his/her development, capabilities and future plans. In the future, I am going to continue developing my portfolio as I will be gaining more experience and learning new things. It will be growing along with me and illustrating the current level of my career development. In general, IDS 493 has been helpful in creating something useful that will be of value outside the class.