

Reflection Essay

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As my time at Old Dominion University comes to an end I would like to just look back on what it has taught me. As a double degree seeking student, I have unexpectedly had more time to learn and develop skills that I know will translate to post graduate. As someone who has graduated before I can speak and reflect on things that I think that worked and things that I needed more time learning or developing. First I will describe a brief history of what I have done to this point. Second I will highlight some of the skills that I want to highlight are my improved academic writing, my ethical hacking and my coding skills. Then I will outline where I would like to go in my future and how my undergraduate time has helped me become a more competitive applicant in the job market.

History

As a second degree seeking student, I have already graduated with my first bachelors from Old Dominion University back in 2018. I majored in criminal justice and kept my gpa above a 3.0. Some of my achievements from my first undergraduate was being on the dean's list consecutively during my last two years, became the head of recruitment in my organization and hosted philanthropy events every semester for the ability experience, which serves people with disabilities.

After my time at Old Dominion University I was accepted into the United States Navy Officer Candidate School. According to Naval Education and Training Command (2025), "Navy Officer Candidate School (OCS), is one of four officer training schools designed to prepare future naval leaders. This rigorous 13-week program equips candidates with the skills and knowledge necessary for leadership at sea and ashore,

aligning with the Navy's mission to promote national security and sustain combat readiness". After my time there I was stationed on the LSD 50 Carter Hall, here in Virginia Beach where I was one of the officers in charge of the deck division. I was also appointed forty plus sailors to help serve the duties and missions of the department which includes being in charge of amphibious operations (launching amphibious craft from the well deck), supporting helo operations and maintaining all machinery located on both well decks and helo pads. During my time with the Navy I was awarded, Junior Officer of the Deck, Officer of the Deck In Port, General Damage Control and Engineering Officer of the Watch.

After my time with the Navy was done I decided to come back to Old Dominion University to pursue a degree in cyber security. While pursuing my second degree I also worked as an information technology specialist intern for Fairfax County. During my time here I was tasked with reimaging computers that needed updating, working on employees' workstations to get them back up and functioning, guiding new employees through the software that we used and also collecting equipment from employees leaving the department.

Skills

According to Kaufhold (2025), "Becoming expert academic writers requires students to develop understanding, awareness and skills with regards to discipline-specific discourses". The importance of academic writing post graduation can not be understated. Most students may think that the only time this skill is valuable is during their university years but the longer you are in your field of choice, the more likely you are going to run into the need for this skill. For me, after my first underway on the

ship, my department head demanded that we give bi weekly briefs on weapons systems that we were not knowledgeable in. The skills that I was able to learn during my undergraduate years became vital once again and now that I have the ability to pursue another degree, my appreciation for this skill has become more profound.

The second skill that I had no idea about was ethical hacking. Growing up I've seen movies like the Ocean's trilogy and television shows like leverage that showing hacking as just someone getting passcode entry into a system but I thought that it would be too difficult to learn. Fortunately I had the opportunity to develop those skills here at Old Dominion University. According to Bozzini (2025), "Ethical hacking refers to the act of searching for and reporting vulnerabilities to organizations in order to improve the security of their infrastructure or products. Vulnerability disclosure has become a crucial mechanism in cybersecurity, as it enables organizations to learn about existing flaws in their digital systems that could be maliciously exploited". As someone who decided to choose cyber security as my second career path, it has become apparent that learning how to hack and the nuance behind how to do it can be very important in my future endeavors. The best way to defeat an enemy is to think like your enemy. So I am thankful to learn multiple ways of how to scan for open ports inside a network, how to intercept files from a user's computer and even how to decrypt hidden messages on a computer.

The final skill that I was actually most interested to learn was how to code and create programs. According to Mills et al. (2024), "Teaching coding and computational thinking is an emerging educational imperative, now embedded in compulsory curriculum in the United States, Finland, the UK, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands,

New Zealand, and Australia". During my first bachelors at Old Dominion University, the cyber security degree program was just starting up. Many including me have not heard of that field and very few students were pursuing that major. Now after coming back to chase a different career path, having the ability to stumble on something that I was truly interested in has been a game changer. Programming has not played a critical role in my cyber security journey yet but I know where I can go with just the skill of being proficient in one programming language and it is exciting. Learning how to create programs of tracking weight loss plans or learning how to write code of how to encrypt and decrypt plain text can become very handy when I progress further into my field.

Future Priorities and Obstacles

I think that my first priority would be to secure another internship in my job field before I graduate. I think it's normal for a college graduate to have one internship but just adding another one to my resume will make me more competitive. Ideally I would like to find an internship that utilizes my secret security clearance. I think that a possible obstacle that I would be facing is comparing my resume to the rest of the field. I am not just competing with others in my area but also other students from more prestigious schools. I don't really have many connections in this area and the places where I know people that work in that field are back in northern Virginia.

I think another priority other than internships that would make me competitive would be cyber security certifications like security plus. From the professionals that I have spoken with, this is a big certification and many employers are either looking for this already or are expecting you to attain this soon after hiring. I think the obstacle for

me is just making time to do my school work, while working part time and also setting time aside to study for this exam.

Career Aspirations

Career wise short term, I want to work in an environment that inspires me and also challenges me. Currently my major is in cyber security but I do plan on applying to master's programs after graduation as well. Most jobs in my field are more abundant in the northern Virginia area so I can see myself working and moving up there. I also plan on getting my security plus certification by at least my first year out of college. Long term, I want to eventually move to a manager type of position by my 40's. I want to run my own department and be a major player in whatever company I decide to work with. I see myself settling back in my hometown of Fairfax and growing roots.

Conclusion

Objectively, I think where I am right now is middle of the pack. I have job experience working with Fairfax county government and being a part of the Department of Defense. I have held a secret security security clearance and I know what it takes to be successful in high stressful situations. I have been able to develop and learn skills like academic writing, ethical hacking and even coding. Knowing that these skills will eventually become vital to my career progression is very motivating. The things I do need to improve on are more hard skills. For my age, I don't hold any cyber security certifications or even hold a graduate degree. I am behind my age group peers in both experience and certifications which is where my short term goals need to go for me to become more valuable.

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