OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

IDS 493

Writing Assignment #2

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Growing up I always knew I wanted to help people. Though I did not know how to help people or rather I did not know what it was that I could do in order to help people. My inspiration to help people was seeded by shows that I enjoyed watching such as detective films and other form of police media. This pattern staying true up to when I enrolled in community college where I pursed my degree in Criminal Justice with a minor in Forensic Science. This degree provided me with many great experiences and opened my eyes to the true field I felt a calling to, my current degree at Old Dominion University, Cybersecurity.

I began my higher education journey at my local community college studying Criminal Justice with a focus in forensic science. While I held a great passion within that field and during my time at the community college, I felt there was something more to learn about. It was not until I met a certain professor at the community college that I discovered what was missing. The professor taught me in my final semester at the community college and the course was covering all of forensic science in a broad range. Through the course the professor was brutal honest about what life was like as a forensic investigator. From the tasking hours, the tough life changing events that would unfold every day in front of you, and how competitive the field had become after the mediatization of police genre shows. She would phrase the career path of a forensic scientist as "someone that really needs to love what they do for a living" and those words spoke to me in a questioning way. Where the remainder of the course I would find myself visiting the thought of if I truly felt as though this field was the right one for me or was there something else out there that was better suited for who I wanted to see myself grow into after I graduated.

I was fascinated by the material that was being taught to the class and the lesson that spoke the most to me was regarding digital forensics. Focusing on digital forensics led me down a rabbit hole of the digital world of crime. I learned a lot about the dark web and the crimes

being committed in the clear net even. The more I researched the more questions I had regarding the cyber crimes that were being committed every single day. A certain topic of interest was that of an aspect of the dark web that deals with human trafficking and the exploitation of children. I found myself wondering how anything like this could be happening on the internet and how people were getting away with it. This curiosity lit the spark of what exactly encryption and cryptography were and how they are implemented in systems to keep them hidden.

As I researched the 'how' mechanisms that allow for these illicit activities to take place I moved up to the aspect of efforts that were in place to help prevent and stop the exploitation of children through the means of the internet. That is where I found an organization by the name of THORN. THORN is a non-profit organization that builds technology that helps aid in the safety, recovery, and the effort to put a stop to the trafficking of children through the dark web. Through the technology that the THORN organization creates children have a higher likelihood of being identified and once a child is identified the likelihood of recovery is higher. Along with being a reactive influence, THORN also develops proactive methods to aid in the fight against these illegal rings. Proactive methods such as providing education and support for those that are looking to engage in the illicit activities urging those on the consumer level to seek help and deter the client side.

The more I learned about the THORN organization the more I was drawn into the idea of doing something similar. Though I doubted my ability because I thought I would not be technically minded enough to make an effort. That's when the former CEO of THORN, Ashton Kutcher, took part in an interview where he gave a passionate talk about how he faced doubts concerning him and his efforts because he was looked at as 'just an actor'. This interview was the push I needed at the time to at least give the world of cybersecurity a shot.

After my time at my local community college was finished, I made the decision to continue my education into Old Dominion University where I switched my major from criminal justice to cybersecurity. I remember my first semester I was nervous about all the material that I would have to intake in a short amount of time and the questions my peers had continue to fuel my doubt because of my inability to understand the technical rhetoric that was being spoken about. Though I stayed strong and continued my studies. Along with my course work I incorporated areas of cybersecurity and information technology learning media into my everyday life. Including material that helped me achieve my CompTIA A+ certification. I found everything that I was learning to be interesting and a whole new world in comparison to my criminal justice studies. Then as the semesters passed and I watched my GPA grow and semester after semester of getting placed on the president's honor roll. I knew that I had found my path in life. Knowledge about cybersecurity felt empowering to me and gave me a clear outlook on what I wanted to achieve after my time within Old Dominion University.

Now I found myself in my final semester at Old Dominion University studying concepts that I never thought I would be able to grasp, and interviews lined up from employers I never thought I would have a chance to speak with. I could not be happier with the major that I chose and the knowledge about cybersecurity that I have gained. My higher education journey started with my desire to help those in need but not knowing the avenue I should venture down. That is when my love for police genre media guided me down a path that had me influenced to pursue criminal justice after I had graduated from my high school. While I feel it is important to remind myself that the time at my local community college was not at all wasted it was a steppingstone in order for myself to figure out what career path truly aligned with my goals, wants, needs, and aspirations.

This career path is one within the tech field which alone was an umbrella I never thought I would be apart of when I started higher education. I find the field rewarding from the compensation to the knowledge gained and the people that the field gives me the opportunity to help. Along with the field of cybersecurity being every growing adventure that I look forward to everyday. Finding cybersecurity as my major at Old Dominion University was very unexpected, but I have never been happier learning and succeeding in both my academics as well as my self-worth.