Personal Narrative

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Abstract

My name is Marshall Brown and I'm currently in my last semester at Old Dominion University studying Cyber Security. I've been there for 2 years and have enjoyed and learned a lot while attending. I love the diversity and the professors, it's truly a great university to not only get a great education but to get a great foundation of life and how to truly live on your own. However, before I even got accepted into ODU, I was at my local community college and before that it was high school where I didn't even have plans to go to college.

Introduction

To start my story, we go back to when I was in middle school. During my time at that age, I wanted to become an Architect. My father planned on attending the University of Tennessee for Architecture, but he met my mother and never attended. My father always pushed me to learn something I love. At the time it was Architecture, and I also wanted to follow his footsteps and attend the University of Tennessee. He didn't mind that, but he felt like I was just doing that because he was never able to, so he never truly pushed me to follow that.

Early Aspirations

When my freshman year in high school started, I still had the Architecture idea in my head. I even took gym over the summer so I could have an extra class so I can take an engineering drawing class to learn more about Architecture. There were only about 3 others in that class with me, but they only took it because the teacher is super relaxed and didn't care too much about how you completed the work, they just knew if they did something they would pass. I was the only one who truly tried, and I became one of the teacher aids within a couple months to help others. I'm saying all this because it just showed how much I truly loved Architecture and the aspects of it.

Challenges in High School

You may be wondering, "If I loved Architecture so much, then why am I graduating at ODU with a bachelor's degree in cyber security?" Well, once 11th grade hit came along, I had a one-on-one with my teacher and spoke about how college is when I take Architecture and what the field is truly like when I work as one. She told me the hard truth that day of how much work and dedication needed to get put into it and how it was one of the most difficult degrees in

college. That day going home I couldn't stop thinking because I was just barely getting along in high school with my general education studies. The only course I was doing good in was my engineering drawing course. I was frightened, worried, and disappointed with the steps I've been taking my whole life after hearing that information on Architecture.

I spoke more about it with her and decided not to give up yet. About a month later she came to me with an internship opportunity. It was an architect internship position within an electrical engineering company for that upcoming summer. I was stoked to have that opportunity while only being 17 years old and in 11th grade. My passion for Architecture lit back up and I dedicated my studies to being better in school and getting my grades up.

The Impact of COVID-19

A couple months come along and now we are in the start of 2020. Nothing could've prepared me or anyone else for what was to come. It was around March when we all got the news that something called Covid-19 has hit the United States, and we were taking a 2 week break from school. In my mind I was happy to get this break and play more games and hang out with friends. What we all didn't know is that school never went back into session and everything got shut down. I lost my internship, I couldn't finish my engineering drawing course, and I lost in life at the point.

I felt like I just took a punch in the gut and got kicked back down when I tried to get up. My dream of doing all things Architecture went down the drain. I was lost and confused on what to do next. I was rebounding on that internship to truly see if I would like the job or not. But since I couldn't do that anymore, I wasn't going to take the risk and waste all that money in

college and not like it. After that I decided to just go blue collar and get into a trade like construction.

Pivot to Cyber Security

Eventually, senior year rolled around a couple months later and I had my own mowing business setup and going. I was working with my friend's dad laying bricks and sod down at new buildings. I realized eventually that I would never love this and would hate my job within a year and my mental health would take a terrible toll on this. Once, December rolled around I was able to graduate early so I did that.

Community College Experience

I went to my local community college right after I did that and decided that I needed to pick something I will enjoy and not sit around wasting money on classes I don't care about. I eventually did some research and studying and went with a couple Cyber Security classes there and immediately fell in love with it. I've always been intrigued by computers and the way they worked when I was young, but finally studying how they operated just opened my mind up to so many things I loved.

I did some more classes and spoke to a career coach there and decided that getting a certificate in Cyber Security from there really wouldn't cut it. Most jobs required that I needed a bachelor's degree in that relative field. After hearing that I changed everything up and went for my associate's degree in general education at the community college.

Transition to Old Dominion University

That took about 2 years, and the year is now 2022 where I'm now looking for universities that have a good Cyber Security program but is still in my home state and not far from me. I saw most universities don't have a degree in that and I wasn't interested in Computer Science either. I then saw Old Dominion University and the reviews for their Cyber Security program. I knew that college would be perfect for what I want. I decided to then apply and start taking classes online at ODU while still attending the community college. After that spring semester of 2023 I graduated from the community college and started full time at ODU in the Fall of 2023. Right after my Fall semester I got an Application Security Specialist Internship at Custom Truck One Source and have been working there since and have loved every day.

Now, it's only been a whole year being full time at ODU and I'm already graduating because when I applied for ODU I spoke with the dean of my community college and he agreed to transfer over not only my associates degree and those class credits, but also the class credits I had when I took Cyber Security and my engineering drawing class I took in high school also counted towards my 120 credit hour requirement. So, I was able to just only take Cyber Security classes and not have to worry about any electives or other classes.

Reflection and Gratitude

In the end, I'm happy with the route I took and how everything played out. I love the degree I'm getting and the job I have. Everyday I try to better myself in this field with the number of threats that grow everyday you cannot slow down. Soon, I'm going to get my CompTIA Security + certification and CISSP after that to expand my knowledge in the field. My goal is to become a director or Vice President in a company somewhere. I want to lead a team

and give them hope and allow them to enjoy their daily job and not tread it every day. I feel like with the experience in life that I've had I would be an amazing leader and would love to prove it someday.