Personal Narrative Essay

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IDS 493: Electronic Portfolio Project

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September 13, 2025

Introduction

My name is Miles Anderson, and I'm a senior Cybersecurity major and Criminal Justice minor. I'm expected to graduate with a Bachelor's degree in Cybersecurity this upcoming spring. This personal narrative essay will cover my academic career at Old Dominion University and my journey towards a career in Cybersecurity. My personal narrative essay will follow a redemptive style, covering my hardships and struggles while highlighting my achievements and how I came out stronger (Smith, 2017). From the trials and tribulations of adapting to a new environment as a freshman to the challenges of securing my first internship, I will share my story while weaving in interdisciplinary concepts drawn from my coursework and assigned readings. This reflection on my academic journey will provide insight into who I am, the type of career I aspire to build, and the goals I intend to pursue in the future. Additionally, it will explain my ways of thinking, the perspectives I have developed, and how those viewpoints have evolved as I matured both as a student and as an adult.

A New Beginning at ODU

Old Dominion University, founded in 1930, is located in Norfolk, Virginia. It is a prestigious institution, recognized for its rigorous academics, public doctoral research, social mobility, and entrepreneurial developments (Old Dominion University, 2025). As a young man entering his freshman year of college, I originally didn't know if I could live up to these high standards. However, I was determined to not only make a name for myself, but also to do it my own way. Finding the best path for me was the most difficult task, but also the task I prioritized the most. In the beginning, I entered ODU as a Computer Science major. From a young age, I was always taught that a job you loved wouldn't feel like a job at all. This served as my

motivation to pursue a career in something I'm passionate about. For as long as I can remember,
I've been in love with technology. Whether it was phones, gaming consoles, computers, or other
hardware, I've always had a strong fascination with how electronics work and the ways they
shape our lives. Therefore, I chose to integrate that love into building a career for myself. As a
Computer Science major, I encountered a variety of daunting challenges at the start of my
college journey. The professors in the department were so knowledgeable that their brilliance felt
almost intimidating. My introduction to coding was like stepping into an entirely new academic
world, and I have to admit, adapting to the unfamiliar concepts and overcoming the steep
learning curve was disheartening at first. Thankfully, I've been a straight A student my whole
life, and I'm always able to catch up and perform well on assignments no matter the difficulty.

However, despite earning good grades, I couldn't shake the feeling that something was
off. I began to question whether Computer Science was truly the path I was meant to follow.
Over time, the field of Cybersecurity grew increasingly appealing, sparking a stronger sense of
purpose and direction in me. I spent time with upperclassmen during onboarding and orientation
events that explained to me the benefits and joys of having Cybersecurity as a major. I was
particularly interested in social engineering, policy building, and hands-on learning experiences I
could undertake with such a major. The wide variety of jobs was also appealing. From
penetration testing to data analytics to security specialists, I felt as if the opportunities for
Cybersecurity at the time were far greater compared to Computer Science. At this point, I began
to seriously question whether Computer Science was truly the path I was meant to follow. Unlike
traditional programming, Cybersecurity seemed to combine technical skills with critical thinking,
problem-solving, and a sense of real-world impact. The idea of protecting systems, safeguarding
information, and staying one step ahead of emerging threats gave me a stronger sense of purpose

and direction in my academic journey. Thus, at the end of my first semester of college, I officially changed my major and began to pursue a career in Cybersecurity. Today, I am confident that choosing this path was the correct decision, and I continue forward with no regrets.

Finding My Way

Becoming a Cybersecurity major was everything I thought it would be. My classes were extremely interactive, which greatly supported my learning process. As a hands-on learner, the virtual environments offered by the School of Cybersecurity made me feel as if I was already working as a professional in the field. My classes were going excellent, but I was ready to start making strides in my career. I was determined to gain major-related work experience, but at the time I had no prior jobs in the technology field. My leadership roles in the food industry demonstrated professionalism, critical thinking, and composure under pressure, yet the lack of technical experience made it difficult to break into Cybersecurity or IT positions. Applications on Handshake, a platform widely used for applying to on-campus jobs, often had few openings or went entirely unnoticed. The search was grueling, but I knew the importance of building connections and planned to rely on networking to reach my goals.

In the summer of 2024, I spent time working as an assistant teacher for the Children's Learning and Research Center at Old Dominion University while I continued to apply to technology related jobs. One of my student's fathers, an ODU alumnus with a degree in Computer Science, became a valuable connection. Through him, I was able to engage with the Computer Science department and apply for a potential IT position. Ironically, after switching my major from Computer Science to Cybersecurity, I found myself preparing for my first interview to join the IT team for the Computer Science department.

My First Internship

The CS (Computer Science) Systems group: a team of talented undergraduate and graduate students that manage the Computer Science department's IT infrastructure, including Windows environments, Linux servers, and troubleshooting for both students and faculty (CS Systems Group, 2025). I was genuinely impressed by the skills demonstrated by the members of this team. Although they were entirely made up of students, their experience and depth of knowledge exceeded my own at the time, which motivated me to keep developing my abilities. My interview with one of the fulltime System Engineers, Dakota Dunn, was by far the most challenging interview I've ever had. Instead of the typical 'tell me about yourself' style interview, I was immediately quizzed on technical concepts so Mr. Dunn could assess my knowledge on the spot. This caught me off guard, and I blanked on material I normally knew well. While my performance in that moment may have made my knowledge seem lacking, I was able to demonstrate my skills and abilities through the hiring project that followed. The project involved completing a series of hands-on tasks in an Ubuntu virtual machine, including creating groups, setting permissions, configuring databases, and deploying those databases to run on a fully functional website. This experience not only allowed me to prove my technical capabilities but also highlighted my resilience and ability to learn under pressure. By demonstrating my skills and eagerness to learn through the hiring project, I earned a position as an IT Consultant for the Computer Science Department. This not only served as my first technology related job, but also my first internship opportunity.

Conclusion

As I approach the end of my college career, reflecting on my journey up to this point has truly made me appreciate the time I've spent at ODU, the people I've met, socialized, and networked with along the way, and the important lessons taught to me by this institution's brilliant professors. I view my academic career as a kind of cycle. First, beginning as a Computer Science major, then transitioning my major to Cybersecurity, and ultimately returning to Computer Science for work experience in order to further strengthen my technical skills. My work as an IT Consultant has solidified my understanding of Cybersecurity concepts, and in turn, my knowledge of Cybersecurity has enhanced my effectiveness as an IT Consultant. Along the way, I've learned the importance of tenacity, even when faced with unexpected challenges. Every day presents a new opportunity for growth and progress. After all, I landed my first IT position by working as an assistant teacher for 3-5 year olds! This proved to me that I can continue to adapt, push forward, and achieve my goals in both academics and my career. For my remaining semesters at ODU as a Cybersecurity major and IT Consultant for the Computer Science Department, I plan to continue upholding the values of perseverance, discipline, and adaptability.

Works Cited

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