

Narrative Essay

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I am a senior at Old Dominion University, graduating a semester early, this Fall of 2025. Although I plan to graduate early with a few certifications, such as CompTIA Security+ and AWS Certified Cloud Practitioner, I don't plan on stopping there. I plan on graduating again in May of 2026, this time with my Masters in Cybersecurity, and a sufficient background in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and an understanding of how Cybersecurity is intertwined into the AI domain. I am a student in the linked Bachelor's and Master's programs which has allowed me to take graduate courses as an undergraduate student and count 12 of those credits towards both degrees.

Reflecting on my journey through college and the Old Dominion Cybersecurity program reminds me of a variety of experiences. I also recall the vast amount of work and many sleepless nights I've put into acquiring the knowledge to propel me into a successful career, not only in Cybersecurity, but every other domain I happen to encounter and leave my impact on. There are many aspects of my college career that were extremely influential on me and my development as a man that also aided my preparedness for a career in Cybersecurity.

What Led Me to Cybersecurity

My early development in Cybersecurity and IT may be what sparked my interest in the Cybersecurity field, and ultimately led to my decision to come to Old Dominion University, and begin my preparation for the field. My earliest memory of my introduction to the tech world is when I was about 10 years old and my father was taking online courses at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. He already struggled in his classes, but to add to his barriers to succeed in his classes, he was not very technologically inclined. I tried to help him as much as I could, even though my access to technology was limited to the days we would get laptop carts in

school. However, my grandpa sent me a Computer for D.U.M.M.I.E.S book, that allowed me to learn more about the industry, and help my father eliminate a barrier to his learning. “Like myths, our narrative identity contains heroes and villains that help us or hold us back, major events that determine the plot, challenges overcome and suffering we have endured, (Smith, 2017). This describes my early development very well, as I had many challenges that I overcame to learn about Cybersecurity. I also had many heroes that aided my growth, as well as villains, such as a lack of access to computers.

I always had a propensity to experiment with technology and help anyone I could along the way. I would assemble computers, attend every tech camp, take apart tablets to see what makes them run, experiment on code.org on New Year’s Eve, and learn as much as I could from every source I had access to. This experimentation would occasionally get me into trouble, as adults didn’t know what I was doing, since I wasn’t working on what we were assigned. However, this exploration lead by my curiosity may have been the most beneficial thing I did as a young child that led to where I am today. This curiosity ended up benefiting my family in my older years. My brother was using the only computer in the household, and out of negligence he spilled juice on it. Out of necessity, I fixed it, because we didn’t have the money for a new computer or to take it to the repair shop. It was pertinent that we had a computer, as my mother took online classes at the time and she had to pay bills only a couple days after the incident.

Although I had many factors that could have influenced my early decision to pursue Cybersecurity, it would be improper of me to try to label a specific reason moment or reason that

sparked my interest in the field. I have always felt attracted towards a career in Cybersecurity as far back as I can remember, it always felt like that was my destiny.

Impact of ODU on My Story

Just as Cybersecurity felt like the proper path for me, ODU had me hooked from the beginning. I had to pick between multiple colleges that are highly revered but it didn't seem like there was really choice to make. I felt that there was something great for me there and it turns out I was right. Upon my arrival to ODU I immediately got immersed with other Cybersecurity majors and like-minded individuals that wanted to grow and succeed. I joined the Impact Learning Community and started the semester taking Cybersecurity classes and learning from those, such as my professor, that had taken the path I wanted to go down.

At Old Dominion I had a lot of experiences and extracurriculars that I was involved in that heavily added my development professionally and lead me to becoming an extremely well-rounded individual that possess exceptional leadership skills. This has given me a propensity to handle large projects and ensure that every aspect is exceptional and completed to utmost perfection. I joined a fraternity, Sigma Phi Epsilon, based upon its values, such as becoming a balanced man. Meaning being academically sound in college was not enough, they taught me many professional and communication skills I never could have learned in classes. I've always been inclined to give back and support in whatever way I can. This led to me taking multiple leadership positions and eventually becoming the President of IFC (Inter-Fraternity Council). This was a completely different experience for me as I was presiding over the majority of fraternities at Old Dominion and represented an entire community- an entire community counted on me. This organization had essentially died out during Covid and I took it at as my

responsibility to build it from the ground up. While juggling work and schoolwork, I orchestrated a multitude of teams to complete a variety of projects and improve operations on every level to make us a national marvel.

Cybersecurity Projects and Internships

Throughout my college career I have had the opportunity to do many hands-on projects and labs in class that I have applied to the real world in the form of projects and my internship. One of the first projects I ever worked on was a secure password manager in Python. I learned many ethical hacking and reconnaissance skills such as Nmap, Wireshark, and how to perform and Eternal Blue attack. However, beyond the technical skills one of the most crucial things I've learned is that Cybersecurity is interdisciplinary, which made me pursue knowledge in multiple fields and domains, instead of merely focusing on technical skills. I learned how Cyber law applies to the field and daily tasks I will perform in the workplace. I learned computer science and programming principles, engineering and the basics of critical thinking processes, such as DESIGN thinking, and how social sciences apply to my career.

I was able to apply all of this in my internship and understand how to use my theory in practice. I interned with Virginia's Commonwealth Cyber Initiative. I got to partake in a program where we developed a comprehensive Cybersecurity risk analysis for local businesses. I worked with Omnicruit, an international recruiting firm. I lead a team to analyze their systems and assets and recommend security solutions. I met with the president regularly, facilitating communication between him and my team, briefing him on our report at the end of the internship.

Conclusion

Most importantly, I think that my coursework taught me that I need to think of everything as interdisciplinary. I won't be successful and valuable with just coursework knowledge, but combined with strong leadership, professional skills, and a deep technical background I will be able to make motions in the workplace and in Cyberspace. Over my college career, I demonstrated my innate values and curiosity to learn and grow in every way possible. I made a deep impact on the university and surrounding community and it had an immense impact on me, leading me to become an extremely educated individual, well-versed in many domains surrounding Cybersecurity and all professional and leadership skills anyone would want in their workplace.

References

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