

Individual Reflection

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One of the biggest hurdles through my project was the discovery that our client wasn't happy with the level of communication that we had throughout the project. They would've preferred us to communicate more often and to have a deeper level of involvement with the organization. This issue was one that my team and I didn't realize until the end of the project, meaning that, unfortunately, we weren't able to resolve it as quickly as we would've preferred. This conflict mainly occurred because we didn't set our expectations with the client as clearly as we could've in the beginning of the project, which would've given us greater insight into what exactly the client wanted from the project. Doing this could've also given the client a clearer picture of what they would get from the report and how everything would work, which could've made them more comfortable with the project and with communicating openly to our team about their concerns. Another initial conflict in the internship was our team roles, since, initially, I planned to be research lead. Although I was willing to take on the team lead role, I wasn't very confident in my abilities to take charge of a team or handle the bulk of communication with a client, since it's not something I'm very experienced with. However, due to scheduling conflicts, it ended up being necessary for me to be the main person attending meetings, meaning it made more sense for me to switch to the team lead role. Being more prepared to take this role as we started the project and forming a better plan of how to communicate could've also helped that part of the project go smoother and have better outcomes for the client.

If I could do this project over again, there are definitely things I would change, especially regarding communication with our client and with my teammates. The main thing I would want to do differently is ensure that we set out a specific communication plan as early as possible, and check how everyone involved, including the client, feels about the communication level. This would give an opportunity for the client to be able to say that they would like more

communication or to express more detailed desires for the project. I would also do things like email the client after meetings to talk about what we discussed and check in with them, and give them a clearer outline of what exactly I'm working on throughout the project. These kinds of professional and communication skills were definitely something that I learned more about through this experience and that I definitely plan to take with me in my career.

My first outcome from the Memorandum of Agreement was to grow technical knowledge and understanding of cybersecurity topics. The internship didn't necessarily help me to grow my technical skills, since I didn't end up working in the Suffolk group, which could've focused on more technical topics. However, I did have the opportunity to practice my research, writing, and soft skills, especially in conjunction with cybersecurity knowledge. My next goals were to collaborate in a professional business setting and to practice applying learned concepts and techniques to real world applications. These goals ended up being fulfilled similarly, since I definitely gained experience collaborating in a professional setting through working with clients, other businesses, and teammates throughout the semester and the project. This allowed me to practice using cybersecurity concepts in real world applications, since I was able to practice explaining and presenting these topics to clients, both quickly through Valor, and in depth with our full client risk assessment. I also wanted to make an impact on an actual local business, which we were able to do, again, through the Valor assessments, since we were able to drop off our risk recommendations to them, and through our assessment for our local business client. My last goal was to learn about new cybersecurity fields, which I also believe I achieved, since I learned a lot more about how risk assessments are done and what goes into managing cybersecurity plans for an actual small business through this project.

One thing that future interns should take care to do is ensure that they communicate frequently, both with their teammates and with clients, once they begin working together. Opening that line of communication and creating an expectation of that amount of communication as quickly as possible will make gathering information and planning much easier, especially once interns get deeper into the project. Another similar thing future interns should know is not to be afraid to ask questions, whether that is to their TA, professors, client, or teammates.

Although I had enjoyed the cybersecurity topics and skills that I had learned throughout my time at ODU and in my free time, I still had no real expectation of what exactly a career in cybersecurity would involve on a day-to-day basis. Even at the beginning of this internship, although I knew we would be doing risk assessment for local businesses, I was nervous because I didn't have a good understanding of how to accomplish this or what that would entail. I really enjoyed how this internship had multiple different parts that simulated things one might need to do in an actual risk assessment career. This included the main project, where we met with a client, researched their needs, created a report, and presented it to them. However, this also included things such as reaching out to potential clients through the Valor assessments and presenting to internal leadership, such as in our reflections. Having a better understanding of how this kind of cybersecurity career works in practice will make me more confident in my future projects at ODU, as well as more confident when applying for similar roles in the future. This experience has also made me more open to the idea of a risk assessment- type role, since I had mainly considered more technical roles involving penetration testing or network administration up to this point.

One change that could improve this internship is having the TAs contact the clients throughout the semester (such as weekly) and check-in with how they're feeling about the project. This can help prevent clients from having concerns about the project that don't get addressed, such as not understanding what results they will get or what the level of communication is, especially if they feel like they can't communicate those concerns to the interns. Similarly, another addition could be to have stricter, more standardized requirements regarding how the interns meet with the clients. Although allowing variability between groups is good to allow for the differences between clients and their needs, having some set requirements, such as requiring meetings at least once a week and having interns send emails to the clients afterwards discussing what was learned, could be helpful towards giving a starting point for how meetings with the clients should look and help the clients to feel like all their concerns are being addressed adequately.

I really enjoyed hearing from the speakers throughout the course, such as Professor Duvall, Mr. Tomchick, and the other guest speakers, since I felt like they provided a lot of additional insight that was outside of the typical cybersecurity education of many students. I also enjoyed the ability to work on the Valor Risk Assessments, since I felt they gave a great opportunity to begin collaborating in teams and to practice breaking the ice and explaining cyber topics when meeting with clients. Overall, this internship is a very valuable experience for students who are hoping to gain real-world experience in the cybersecurity field, and, even with the hurdles my team faced throughout the project, I felt like I learned a lot and had a very positive experience with the clinic.