

Narrative Story: Upon Choosing Cybersecurity

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Introduction

My academic journey has never been a straight path but rather a winding road marked by dead ends and unexpected detours that ultimately converged to shape my current trajectory. My experiences were both positive and negative, but they helped shape my academic pursuits, ultimately choosing Cybersecurity as my projected profession.

Early Academic and Career Exploration

Choosing Cybersecurity as my major can be understood through a thematic coherence lens, or the "Overarching values," which aligns with McAdams' theory. I found that Cybersecurity encapsulated the core principles of being within a technology-related field, helping people, and learning valuable skills that are in demand in society (McAdams, 2001, p. 105).

From the beginning, there were expectations that I must pursue a particular course that fit a conventional career path that would preclude future stability. As stated in McAdams, *"Western Societies "expect" adolescents and young adults to begin exploring the occupational, interpersonal, and ideological offerings."* Like many students, the first step was to pick a course based on marketability and earning potential. My family always touted healthcare as the stable and well-respected path I should pursue; it is also a path my family members had chosen, so I felt pressure to adhere to these expectations. However, due to the growing digital landscape, my curiosity lies within technology-related fields (McAdams, 2001, p. 103).

However, these overarching expectations were present. My family instilled in me the notion that I should pursue a career in healthcare, a path I initially embarked upon through my first primary — Physical Therapy. The transition into college life was overwhelming. I had challenges juggling demanding coursework and extracurricular activities that were expected of a pre-health

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major despite the constant barrage of biology and chemistry. Despite trying to maintain a strong academic standing, the coursework never aligned with my true interests or academic strengths. My interest in the medical field was little to none as I became increasingly fascinated by the notion of learning within the tech field.

Dead End

I didn't want to follow my family's footsteps into the medical field, so I switched from Physical Therapy to Computer Engineering to be different from what my family had pursued. The transition to a different field focused on systems rather than the complexities of the human body. With different expectations, I approached the coursework with renewed interest, eager to immerse myself in my second major. Unfortunately, this enthusiasm was short-lived as I realized my major was far more challenging than I had anticipated.

Despite my earnest efforts, I encountered various obstacles that impeded my progress and dampened my spirits, struggling to grasp fundamental concepts and keep pace with the rigorous curriculum. The heavy reliance on mathematics and coding concepts proved a significant hurdle as it was not my strong suit, ultimately causing my grades to decline and further eroding my confidence in succeeding in this field. What initially felt like a promising change of direction after leaving my first major became a source of frustration and anxiety as the potential disappointment weighed heavy on my shoulders.

It doesn't help that my confidence steadily declines each time I'm stuck on assignments that remain difficult despite extensive studying. My family's expectations now loomed large over me, casting a shadow of uncertainty on my choice. The fear of disappointing my family members and failing to meet their expectations weighed heavily on my mind since I had already switched

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majors once against their advice. Another change would be deemed irresponsible on my part, compounding the stress and anxiety already stemming from my academic struggles.

New Path

From the point where I thought I was stuck at my current major, I had no other thought of what type of study I should pursue; already experiencing two significant changes in a considerable amount of time, I was not sure if I was cut out for a tech-related major and would have to either resume back into a medical-related major to complete my degree or choose another major that would cause my family even more disappointment. During the lowest point of my academics, I reached out to my older sister, who understood what I was going through, assisting me in sorting through my internal conflicts and, in turn, seeking out my advisor to discuss how I was feeling and to suggest some potential majors and career paths that are available for me to study.

I assume I have to choose something outside the technology field due to my attempt at Computer Engineering. However, after speaking with my advisor, they recommended Cybersecurity since I was close to completing the degree, and Computer Engineering and Cybersecurity share similar lower-division courses. It was a course I wasn't familiar with until I was told this was an option. My advisor thoroughly explained what I could do within Cybersecurity and what skills I would need to hone to become successful in this career path.

I was already apprehensive about switching to my third major at this point. However, I had little to lose since Computer Engineering was proving to be an unsuitable path for me, so I regarded the major as an opportunity to dive into the new field with some knowledge I had gained while redirecting my focus toward a more specialized and fulfilling area within the technology sector. But after switching to Cybersecurity, I found myself drawn to its dynamic nature and real-world

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applications that quickly rekindled my interest in the technology sector I had when I first entered college. The classes were much more interesting, and the concepts were easier to grasp due to my previous knowledge of Computer Engineering, laying the groundwork for understanding Cybersecurity concepts. I became increasingly captivated by the course material, readily recognizing the tangible implications of principles in safeguarding digital assets and infrastructure, allowing me to make more informed decisions.

Conclusion

As Nguyen mentioned, thinking about my path has helped me see how my varied experiences have molded who I am today and who I want to be. Instead of viewing my significant changes as setbacks, I now see them as vital steps in developing a more informed and purposeful identity in Cybersecurity (Nguyen, 2013, p. 136).

I am now in my senior year with a clearer vision for my future. The twists and turns I faced reinforced my resolve to pursue a vocation that aligns with my values and aspirations and not merely fulfills familial expectations but the hope of "living more purposefully." (Smith, 2017). I was able to find a balance between my interests and my family's concerns as I approached my final year of college. The synthesis of my experiences, mainly in computer engineering, has equipped me with a unique perspective. I am eager to contribute what I have learned as I transition into the professional realm.

Citations

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