

A narration About my Educational Journey

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Hi! My name is Ryan Woodard and throughout this paper, I will be describing the story of my academic journey. I will go into detail about how I found my passion for Criminal Justice as well as IT and how I was able to combine my two passions into one major. I have had an amazing but yet complicated experience in college so far but I hope that my story can inspire others and help those who are in the same position that I was once in. All of these experiences I will describe have shaped me into who I am today. So, if you are considering pursuing higher education, then remember that each step you take forward is another step towards success!

FINDING MY PASSION

Growing up, I've always dreamed of working in the Criminal Justice System as I was always fascinated with TV shows like Law & Order, Criminal Minds and documentaries that were centered around resolving missing person cases. Being that I was so captivated by this industry, I did not want to wait until college to begin learning about the ins and outs of Criminal

Justice. So, while in High School, I made the decision of going to a Trade School during my senior year in High School to get a head start on learning and preparing for this profession.

This one-year program exposed me to a high energy and high-tech environment filled with constant challenges and service commitments. Additionally, it helped prepare me for the exciting, challenging and rewarding career field that is Criminal Justice. After completing the course, I did some self-reflection so I could come to a decision on what particular career I wanted to pursue in the Criminal Justice Field. I decided that I wanted to become a Prosecutor as I was attracted to the challenge of courtrooms and I was also drawn to the idea of making a difference in my community.

START OF MY COLLEGIATE JOURNEY

When I finally moved on campus, I went through lots of mixed emotions. I felt excited and anxious at the same time. There were so many different questions crossing my mind. Was I ready? Was I fully prepared? Am I going to fit in with the culture here? Will I make friends here? At that time, I knew that change was necessary for growth, but I was not the best at dealing with it. I was constantly trying to reassure myself that everything was going to be ok and work out for the best. To my surprise, I made a couple friends within my first few days of being on campus and we even went to a couple of events together. One of the most memorable events we went to was Tayari Jones' book signing for her Academy Award winning book, "An American Marriage." We were all able to meet and talk to her about her inspiration behind writing this book. After going to different events with the friends I attained, I was able to find new hobbies and activities that I was interested in that I wanted to explore further.

HITTING A CROSSROAD

After going through my first year in college, my anxiousness started to subside and I adjusted pretty well to my new environment. However, I had an epiphany because I started to fall in love with technology. It all started when I began working at Bayport Credit Union as a teller, so that I could support myself while I was in school. While talking to a coworker about how college was going, they mentioned that BayPort offers a program called the “Lead Program” which is an intern-like program. I talked to a couple of people in HR about this program and they explained to me that there were only specific departments that I could “Intern” with. One of those departments was IT. Now, although that did not pertain to my major, I thought it was something that I could do just to get a glimpse of how this department contributes to the Credit Union.

So, I finally joined the lead program and it was decided that I would shadow people on the Help Desk and Field Support team within IT. Now, this was a three month program but after a week of shadowing Help Desk and Field Support, I was sold. The reason I knew IT was something I liked, is because the days I was set to oversee the IT department, I got up in the morning super excited to learn! I was not this excited to learn unless I was headed to my criminology class. This is when I knew that I had to make a decision.

After three months passed, I learned more about troubleshooting different software applications, performing user administration, evaluating documents, working with third party vendors and completing different projects to improve process improvements. I straddled the fence about changing my major from Criminal Justice to Cybersecurity as I have always had a passion for Criminal Justice but I have a new found passion for IT. I also took into consideration that I was almost done with my sophomore year and I felt like I would be starting all over again

if I changed my major. So, I had lots of different things to consider and I wanted to make the best decision for my future.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE VS. IT

Sophomore year ended and I still did not make a final decision on whether I wanted to continue majoring in Criminal Justice. I continued to ponder on the idea of switching my major the entire Summer before junior year and finally made up my mind the first month of my junior year. I searched through the different programs of study that ODU has and I found the perfect one for my situation. I found Cybercrime, which I believe is a great mix between Criminal Justice and IT. So, I was able to consolidate both of my passions into one major. Being that I had already completed a majority of my required Criminal Justice courses, it did not set me back too much. Shortly after changing my major, I applied for the “Field Support Analyst” position that opened up at my job. I thought this was a perfect fit for me as I had already overseen this department during my “internship” and my major now entails IT. I went through a two part interview and got the job!

LIFE NOW

Now, I have been working as a Field Support Analyst for a little over six months and I love the job. I have also had the opportunity to work hand in hand with the Chief Information Security Officer of IT who has given me more of an inside scoop of the depths that they go to protecting members and staff's information and how we prevent unauthorized access in an effort to mitigate information risks. My academic journey will soon come to an end but I am grateful for the risks and challenges that I have faced along the way as they have shaped me into the person that I have become today. I am very excited to see what the future holds for me and I hope that my educational journey will be an inspiration for others.

