

Personal Narrative Essay

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Before Cybersecurity

I never planned on going down the cybersecurity career path. When I first enrolled at Old Dominion University, my major was computer engineering, and my minor was computer science. Growing up, I was a big fan of Transformers. Looking back at it, I'm not entirely sure why, but watching Transformers is what started my interest in computers and other electronic devices. This interest only strengthened as I grew up. I began taking electronics apart to study how they were put together. My high school did not have many courses to help prepare me for a major in computer engineering, so I was not sure what to expect once I went to college. I believe that this, along with my lack of self-education, is what led to me moving way from computer engineering.

For the first few semesters of my college career, I still was not fully aware of what being a computer engineering major really entailed since I was just taking general education courses and pre-requisites. I had to get through my math courses before I could really get into the computer engineering courses. I planned to select a focus in computer hardware systems, but I still had to complete many other courses before I could declare a focus. This meant that I was stuck taking general engineering courses. When it came to programming, my class was the last class that was required to learn the C++ coding language. These courses are where I began to turn away from computer engineering. Taking these courses also made me regret not educating myself more about programming before coming to college. While the overall learning of C++ was not all that bad, the professor of the courses did not help make it better. The way they taught was as if we already had an understanding of the programming language before taking the course. Luckily, the teaching assistants for the courses helped me better understand the parts that confused me. Unfortunately, they were not able to the doubts I had about completing my major

in computer engineering. After being a computer engineer for 2 and a half years, I finally decided that I would change my major.

Choosing Cybersecurity

Once I decided to change my major, I then had to choose what major I would be switching to. My plan was to pick a major that had similar requirements to computer engineering to minimize the amount of extra time I would have to spend at ODU. Many of my friends at ODU were cybersecurity majors. I had heard them talk about the cybersecurity program many times. This meant that I already had a good idea of what to expect if I were to switch to cybersecurity. All I had to do was look through the course requirements for cybersecurity to make sure that I would be able to transition over smoothly. After viewing the requirements for cybersecurity, I was happy to see that many of the courses that I had already taken would transfer over. This meant that I would not have to worry about having to take many more pre-requisites to fill any gaps. After meeting with an advisor, I was able to put together a plan that would only see me at ODU for an extra semester. All that was left was to complete my degree in cybersecurity.

The Field of Cybersecurity

After switching to cybersecurity, I decided to keep my minor in computer science since I only had a few classes left to complete it. The first thing I did after switching was talk to my friends that were cybersecurity majors. I talked to them about what to expect in the classes they had already taken as well as any advice they might have for completing the major. My first semester as a cybersecurity major entailed knocking out my new general education requirements as well as a couple of pre-requisite courses. Luckily for me, the information literacy requirement had a 1-credit course specifically for people who switch from engineering to cybersecurity. I

ended up taking this course last summer. After the first semester, it was smooth sailing. To me, the cybersecurity courses did not hold a candle to the courses I had to complete for computer engineering. My next big obstacle would be finding a cybersecurity internship so that I could complete the corresponding internship course.

Internship

I struggled to find a suitable internship for a while. Most internships that I could find required certificates that I did not have and could not afford to acquire. I spent most of the semester searching Indeed and other sites for any internships that did not require certifications. I had begun losing hope that I would be able to find an internship in time to take the corresponding course over the summer. It was then that the perfect opportunity was presented to me. One of my friends that was a cybersecurity major who worked at the IT Help Desk informed me that they were looking to hire new workers. While not exactly a cybersecurity internship, working at the IT Help Desk would help me get some good cybersecurity experience as well as good experience in related fields. I immediately sent him my resume to send to his supervisor. A few days later, I received an email from his supervisor about scheduling an interview. At the end of my interview, I was offered the job. I was informed that I would start training at the beginning of the next pay period since I already had an on-campus job and only had to get my budget code switched over.

Training to work at the IT Help Desk was simple and straightforward. The majority of the training was going over Canvas modules and taking quizzes at the end of each module. After completing the modules, we completed some test scenarios to see how we would handle solving them. The final part of the training was handling real incidents at the IT Help Desk. My supervisor ended up telling me I was done with the training before the other student that was

hired at the same time as me. This filled me with more confidence going into working at the IT Help Desk.

I was able to gain a lot of good experience while working at the IT Help Desk. I learned about how certain cybersecurity threats are prevented and dealt with. The main cybersecurity threat faced by ODU being phishing attacks. They usually come in the form of emails telling users that their ODU accounts are going to expire. They then ask the users for their login information to verify their accounts. The gathered information is then used to send out more emails to hopefully get more information. I also learned helpful troubleshooting skills, which are very important in the field of cybersecurity. I am still currently working at the IT Help Desk and hope to learn a lot more before I graduate.

Career Plan

I am still not one hundred percent sure about what I plan to do when I graduate. I am leaning more towards a job dealing with cybersecurity awareness. I think that it is really important to educate people about cybersecurity so that they can better protect themselves and others. Working at the IT Help Desk has shown me just how important this is. We have seen many people fall for phishing attacks. I have also seen people close to me fall for other cybersecurity attacks. I want to be able to inform people about good cybersecurity practices and how to spot possible cybersecurity attacks. If I can, I would like to find a job that allows me to do this.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I did not always plan to go down the path of cybersecurity. Nor did I know that I would enjoy it this much. I used to think that cybersecurity was a boring field that I would

not be interested in. After completing most of the degrees, I can proudly say that I could not have been more wrong. I always find myself intrigued by the things that I am learning in the cybersecurity courses, and I want to learn more. I can't wait to complete my degree in cybersecurity. I hope that I am able to find a job that allows me to pursue the career path that I want.