

Personal Narrative Essay:

My Time at Old Dominion University

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Abstract

My name is Erica Nickolaus and I am a senior at Old Dominion University. This paper will go over my experience and academic journey while at ODU and the challenges and positives that I have faced. I will look back at my entire academic life, from picking the right college, to struggling academically and leaving school, to making the decision to come back, and finally succeeding and reaching my goals. I will also go over the skills that I gained in my chosen major and how I will apply them to my career goals.

My name is Erica Nickolaus, and I am in my last semester at Old Dominion University. My college journey has been a long process and more of an untraditional route. I have been through many ups and downs through the entire process, and I am proud of the work that I have put in. I will be graduating in December with a bachelor's in science in Leadership from ODU's online campus. While currently, I am finishing my degree online, I started in person at their main campus in Norfolk, Virginia. While completing my degree online, I have also been working full time as a restaurant manager. This has also taught me many things that I have used in my degree, as well as helped to shape what I want my future career to be. This paper will go over my college journey, along with my future career path and goals.

I graduated high school in 2014 and immediately went off to college. My top choice, and what I ultimately chose, was Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. Being from Maryland, it was exciting to go out of state and start my new chapter. Going into school, I was going in a science major. I have always loved science and was something that I was good at. I wanted to go in to be a middle school science teacher. I chose ODU because they had a good program called MonarchTeach, where you could gain your teaching certificate on top of the major in a more efficient way. I quickly realized though that this was not something that I wanted to do and was not quite for me. My second semester of my sophomore year I changed my major to Exercise Physiology with the intention of going into some sort of physical therapy or assistant.

My initial years at ODU were a bit of a struggle. My grades declined as I got further into my studies, and I was not really sure what I wanted to do. At that point it felt more like I was forcing myself to be there and to stay with the current major and not what I actually wanted to do. I think that one of the major reasons that I stayed as long as I did was because I was an

active member of the Monarch Marching Band at the time, something that I was very passionate about. Band was always something in my school career, high school as well, that kept me interested and active. It was something that I was passionate about, and I wanted to see it through. My decking grades and other outside factors would eventually lead me to dropping out in the summer of 2018. With the credits that I had I would have needed about one year left of school, but at the motivation and academic level that I was at it was not feasible. I was not in the correct headspace to finish, and I was wasting both my time and money.

I moved back to Maryland and honestly, I was not in a good place. I started working in a restaurant as a server and went from there. I knew at the back of my mind that I wanted to go back to school and finish. Not finishing the first time was always something that I regretted. Although I know that leaving the was the right decision, and something that I should have done sooner, it was still hard. I threw myself into work and moved my way up from a server to a General Manager. I am currently working at a steakhouse where I am the Assistant General Manager. I started here back in 2020. I was at a different restaurant working as a server and then COVID hit. Unfortunately, the closures and other factors eventually forced that restaurant to close. At the same time, we were closing, the restaurant that I currently work at was just about to open and was hiring. I applied for the job and started at one of their other locations before working at the newly opened location in October 2020. I then worked my way up, gaining experience as I went, and was promoted to full time manager by the end of 2021.

After four years off from school, I decided that it was time to go back and finish. I knew that I wanted to go back and finish, but I did not know where, how, or what I was going to study. I then learned about ODU's online school, ODU Global, and everything fell into place. I was able

to keep all my credits and take my classes online, I started in January of 2024 and will finish in December of this year. This time I am in school purely for me. I wanted to be here, and I was ready to be here. Coming in, I was still not entirely sure what I wanted to do, but I was going back more out of the want to finish, and I knew that I wanted to do something leadership based. Making that decision to go back and know that it is just for me has really made a huge decision. The first time around I really forced myself to be there and there was a lot of outside pressure. Now, it just feels different, and it has made a huge difference in my GPA.

When picking my major, I knew that I wanted to do something to strengthen my leadership and managerial skills. Although at the time I was doing well in my position, I felt overwhelmed with the amount that I did not know. I wanted to pick a major that complemented what I was doing but was still broad enough to apply to other things. One thing that really appealed to me about the leadership program at ODU was that it was an interdisciplinary study. That means that it focuses on a variety of different studies and disciplines. In my course study we picked two different classes from for disciplines in addition to other core classes. This included disciplines such as legal and ethics. I think that this gave me a wide variety of knowledge and will help me in whatever career I wanted to pursue.

Prior to my work experience and my major, I have had other opportunities with leadership at ODU. My first major experience in a leadership role was with the Monarch Marching band as a section leader and also as the Uniform Manager. I learned many lessons while being in these two roles that I still carry with me. One of the biggest skills that I learned from this experience was communication. While working with the group, I really needed to have strong communication and time management skills to really get the most out of our practice

and game experiences. In addition to the hands-on experience, I also gained many skills and knowledge in my classes. Some of the highlights, and my favorites, of my course work include my classes on ethical leadership and my law classes. I think that ethical leadership is extremely important and something that we should always be mindful of. Being an ethical leader is a responsibility that all leaders should take seriously. I also think that the classes that I took about leadership and law were very insightful. It is also something that leaders need to be aware of, but I do not have as much practice with.

Overall, I think that my time at ODU has been extremely valuable, and I am proud of the work that I have accomplished. Although I may have taken a different path than others, I still put the work in and will finally have my degree. I know that I have gained valuable skills that I will use in my future career as a leader. I not only gained knowledge in the classroom, but also hands on experience. Having both in person and online classes has also given me a larger variety in my learning styles and I was able to test myself in different situations. Making the decision to go back to school was a difficult one, but it taught me some valuable lessons. I know that I am prepared to take on challenges that come my way.