

**IDS 493 Narrative Essay**

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### **Abstract**

My life is a reflection of the people and experiences that made the greatest impact on me in my most formative years. From elementary school to high school, I have developed an identity that has withstood the ups and downs I have had in my academic career and that has shaped me into the person I am today; I believe that it is important to show not only what I have learned and achieved, but also how I struggled and tried to overcome adversity to paint an accurate depiction of how I became the woman I am today (Smith, 2017;Nguyen, 2013, 143-144). Learning to program at a young age, being taught by influential women and understanding men, and persevering through adversity has not only built my personality, but also my future (McAdams, 2001, 100).

## **Introduction**

I was born and raised in a town called Franklin, Tennessee; Franklin is just south of Nashville and is the perfect mix of rural and urban. My parents moved to Franklin because of the amazing school system, and while that was not really something that I appreciated until after I graduated high school, I can definitely say that my academic experience in high school is what led me to choose to study cybersecurity and political science in university. While I have had a rollercoaster of experiences while in school in Williamson County Tennessee, I can definitely say that those experiences have shaped who I am personally, academically, and professionally.

## **Elementary School**

I am extremely lucky to be able to acknowledge that my career path really started when I was in elementary school. During my time in elementary school, I had access to a variety of different clubs. My school's librarian at the time had started an after school coding club. I had begged my mom to let me join this club, and admittedly, it was mostly because I adored our school's librarian and I wanted to hang out with my friends after school; however, this is where I was introduced to low level coding. We were using a site called [Code.org](https://www.code.org/), and we essentially placed blocks of code to complete adventures. I remember the one that particularly piqued my interest at the time was the Minecraft game because I loved watching gameplays when I was younger, but I didn't have access to the game at that time; being able to learn to code using the Minecraft characters held my attention and eventually my attention shifted from loving to play the game to loving to solve the coding problems.

Another reason why I believe my educational experience really travels back to elementary school is because of the person who was teaching me how to code. I mentioned before that I adored my school's librarian, and I didn't realize when I was younger, but she was a

wonderful representation of women having a place in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). When I was younger, it did not occur to me that careers could be dominated by a certain demographic; I thought that people grew up and pursued careers in fields that they learned to love regardless of race or gender. Now that I'm older, and understand that my utopian perspective is not a reality, having my school's librarian be the person who introduced me to technology really normalized women being in traditionally male-dominated spaces. I have never really been afraid or felt intimidated being in these spaces, and that is because of my elementary school librarian!

### **High School**

Junior and senior year of high school is when I truly found my passion for cybersecurity without really knowing what cybersecurity entailed. By this time, I knew that I could try for a future career in computer science. I had transferred schools after the Covid-19 lockdown specifically to be able to take the programming classes that were offered at that school, and I figured that I would pursue a career in computer science because programming had already been a major part of my life. In my junior year of high school, I took programming in Python among various advanced placement (AP) courses. Two of those AP courses that I would say shaped how I learn are Chemistry and United States History. AP Chemistry was a very humbling experience for me, but it definitely shaped my learning style and work ethic. I used the techniques that I picked up on in middle school teaching myself Python to help me through AP Chemistry, and although I struggled a lot during that class, I still passed the final! I consider this class to be a pivotal point in my life because it was the first time I truly struggled in a class that I put a lot of effort into, and while it was the source of most of my stress that year, after passing that final I realized that my effort does truly matter. AP United States History introduced me to another very

influential woman in life who is ultimately the reason I decided to minor in political science. My programming class was the confidence boost that I needed that year because I had been studying Python on my own since elementary school; it really confirmed that the time I spent learning on my own actually paid off and that I can teach myself in a meaningful way.

My senior year of high school was again defined by three influential classes: AP Computer Science Principles, AP United States Government and Politics, and programming in JavaScript. I had the same teacher for AP Computer Science Principles and programming in JavaScript; in my previous year, he was a really helpful and inviting figure for me, especially being new to the school, and I feel like I learned a lot from him. My programming classes in junior and senior year of high school were the first time I realized that women are not prominent in technological fields, but my teacher never made me feel like I didn't belong there even when I did struggle. While JavaScript wasn't too hard because I knew how to learn programming languages by this point, AP Computer Science Principles was the first time that something technology-related felt hard to learn. Reflecting back, this class was what helped to narrow down the path I decided to take in college because I found out that while I may have wanted to do something computer science related, I was not really passionate about computer science. AP United States History was a different story. That class was taught by a teacher I had also already had, and I had found out that I really enjoyed learning about policy and how it's implemented. By this point, my family had decided to move to Virginia after graduation and I was applying for colleges; Old Dominion University had a growing cybersecurity program that had various classes that intersected with political science and enough time for me to pursue a minor. The interdisciplinary nature of the cybersecurity program is also what interests me; I believe that it is

important to learn about how disciplines that are seemingly the antithesis of each other are interconnected because as a society we are all interconnected.

### **Conclusion**

While I would consider academics to be a “smaller story” in relation to the rest of my life, I would say that the people who I met through my years of school helped to shape me into who I am today (Smith, 2017; McAdams, 2001, 118). Being able to reflect on how privileged and uplifting my life has been to this point helps to put into perspective my ideologies and drive which bleeds into my academic and professional careers. My life is truly a reflection of the people who have impacted me the most.

### References

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