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OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY ITS DESKTOP SUPPORT TECHNICIAN

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1. Introduction

Working as a Desktop Support technician at Old Dominion University has provided me with an excellent experience for enterprise-level IT operations that occur on large campuses or universities. Old Dominion University's Information Technology Services (ITS) serves as the technological backbone of the university, which provides the essential infrastructure, support, and resource management for a massive demographic of students, faculty, and administrators across not only our main campus, but also satellite campuses and remote online networks. I chose to pursue an internship with them because it offered me an opportunity to utilize some of the theoretical cybersecurity and IT concepts that we have learned in class, or I have taught myself, in a live environment.

At the onset of this internship, I established specific learning outcomes and objectives that I would have hoped to achieve by the end of the internship. Looking back at the objectives that I first set in my reflection, my primary goal was to dive deeper into the backend operations, techniques, and policies that are in our device management platforms and ticket handling applications. I made great strides in my learning objectives, particularly in the areas of dealing with cross-platform management device management, which we use a variety of applications for, like Azure, and JAMF PRO (used for MAC devices). Finally, to round out my technical skills, I planned to focus more on the policies of both of these programs, a deeper understanding of various commands and shortcuts, and getting better at remote management of systems, as I had no clue how to do that yet.

My initial orientation and training at the university were defined by rapid immersion because of all the ongoing tasks that needed to be handled early on in the semester. During the initial period of working, I mainly tried to focus on acclimating to the job role and understanding my duties fully, and the work objectives set by my supervisor. The scale of all the different technologies and resources that we provide to both students and staff was immense, and navigating it requires practice and focus.

2. Management Environment

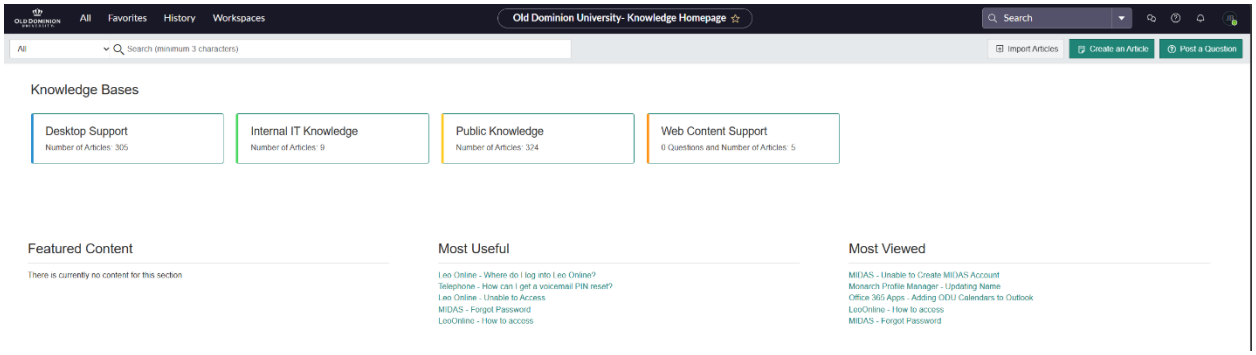
The management environment within ODUs ITS is based on self-reliance on meticulous documentation so that others may know how you handled a problem in case they come across it as well later on, and also focuses on structured team communication, as well as the ability to become self-sufficient. The way our team thoroughly communicates is through Microsoft Teams because they are able to label out tasks to people independently, as well as store information in files on things that are important to the organization. We mainly use ServiceNow for our ticketing software, and it is stressed upon users that leaving information in the notes tag is extremely important because if it's not documented, then it did not happen. This strict adherence to both of these communication platforms allows everything to flow

efficiently without many issues across our campuses and technicians working on cases.

Supervision in this environment is supportive but highly autonomous. Due to the large number of tools that are in our inventory, there simply isn't enough staff to dedicate to training you on the specifics of each application one by one. As a result of this, the sheer amount of information and the different abilities of the applications become overwhelming.

However, I learned to overcome this sense of feelings and relied on my military training to be able to compartmentalize information and decide what is the most important or not, and train myself independently using other sources like our knowledge base and even YouTube at times. Rather than waiting and relying just on my supervisor to hold my hand through every process, I would read the manuals of the programs when I had time, and then I would find things I didn't understand the most and use YouTube or coworkers to fill in the gaps.

Despite this autonomy, observing my leadership in action has been incredibly educational. Watching my supervisors handle complex and complicated tickets that they even sometimes couldn't figure out easily demonstrated to me that communication is the best skill to improve, no matter what level you are at. By applying basic routine troubleshooting along with insights learned from upper-level management and lastly observing them in crisis situations.



(Here is a snippet from our ITS Knowledge base with 3 sections only being able to be accessed by workers and not students or faculty. These sections have helped me tremendously over the semester to be able to understand topics that are alien to me or to be able to find manuals for software that I have never seen in any of my training environments for classes or even self-teaching throughout the years. It is extremely handy to have, and I make sure that I have it bookmarked as we add new articles weekly, if not even sooner if deemed necessary.)

3. Major Work Duties, Assignments, and Projects

My core responsibilities as a desktop support technician have evolved significantly since my first day here. When I first started my work here, I expected to just work on basic hardware repairs because of the title of my job, but I learned that a title doesn’t mean everything, as you can be doing much more than that. My roles ended up including complex endpoint management and data security protocols.

This current phase has been dedicated to executing tasks given to me by my supervisors while growing my confidence and knowledge. Some of my daily responsibilities might just appear low-level, such as physically destroying our hard drives that can't be magnetized, configuring remote desktop situations, or managing different user access controls, but they are in reality, extremely necessary in the real world for defense and offensive situations.

I have even started to get into the “fun” work, which includes data destruction by physical means or a large magnet and remote management of computers to push software updates or fix any issues that arise. This is even ignored in some companies, as there have been many examples out there of even the government not correctly wiping or destroying hard drives, and then the data is still able to be recovered by hackers or nation-states.

In addition to active ticket handling, my duties involve strategic planning during downtime. Currently, in the last hours of the internship, the tempo has noticeably slowed down in demand from the customers, which at first I wasn’t excited about because It felt like I would learn less in this time period. However, I have learned from my colleagues that in the technology sector, quiet periods are not really meant for one to be idle but are critical downtime periods where you can focus on building a strategy for when the tempo picks back up, because it always will, whether you are prepared for it or not.

I did not get the chance to work on any heavy projects while during this internship, but I did get the chance to get involved in some experiences, like going down to other satellite facilities and setting up the classrooms there, as well as several labs, so that students could conduct experiments and work on projects. This was one of the best experiences because it allowed me to be surrounded by more senior staff that I don’t usually see around campus, and others from different sections of our university, like with the Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS).

(This ticket here is an example of some of the tickets that we get in ServiceNow. On this specific ticket, we were upgrading and transferring two computers to a physics lab here at ODU. The professor wanted us to upgrade the memory and the hard drive in both computers, so we had to tear apart and can two other desktops of the same model so that we could achieve that and add in new memory as well as install another NVME drive into the slots on the motherboard. This is how meticulous you need to be in the notes section so that everyone knows what you're doing and what you did in case there are issues that occur later on during the semester.)

4. Cybersecurity Skills and Knowledge

Cybersecurity principles are deeply embedded in every action taken within ODU ITS. Before beginning this internship, my cybersecurity skills were largely theoretical, built upon the foundations of my academic coursework. Things like Labs, TryHackMe, assignments, and sometimes discussion board posts allow me to work on my skills across the board and develop a better understanding of different principles. However, my on-the-job experience has fundamentally shifted my understanding of how these principles are applied practically.

Over the last several weeks, my practical proficiency with Microsoft Intune and Azure has grown substantially. I have been able to move devices, delete them out of inventory, assign them to specific groups, and label them for the distribution of new software or tests more efficiently and without having to go to a supervisor for help. I

have moved past the steep learning curve of just simply understanding how these tools function, and now I am able to leverage them more actively to have the ability to deploy software, manage remote endpoints, and enforce university compliance on machines around campus.

Working with various operating systems has also expanded my security knowledge. My exposure to JAMF Pro has been able to broaden my perspective on the few MacOS items that we have in stock at this university, since we mainly rely on Windows products and Linux for labs. Furthermore, we also have some Linux devices now on campus, which gets tricky when dealing with a triple ecosystem on several networks. Ensuring compliance, secure access, and data protection across Windows, macOS, and Linux demands a rigorous and adaptable security posture.

My military background has proven invaluable in applying these cybersecurity skills. Thankfully, my background continues to influence my approach to my current position and other positions that I will fill in the future. I am now finding that the discipline I developed easily translates into the usage of our enterprise infrastructure due to the resilience it builds. Rather than only replying to a ticket that has a broken device and not being able to offer anything else other than a solution, I am able to apply a systematic and diagnostic process to uncover the root cause of the issue so that it does not happen again across all of our devices. This not only is able to be a teaching moment to myself and others that will inherit this job later on, but also reduces the hours we need to spend on labor for recurring issues, and we can use that energy and hours elsewhere.

I am learning to treat all of the problems that I encounter in my work field with the same resourcefulness as a physical system that I treated during my military time, when working on military aircraft. My military experience also plays a role in how I handle stress in an environment that can become latent and “boring” to extremely stressful and demanding at a moments notice as sometimes the entire internet goes down or recently when AWS went down and told everyone privately that they were working on it but had no concept of when it would be finished which caused ODU Online, Canvas, and other very important university sites to go down in the morning.

Some classes were even cancelled because there was nothing for the teacher to do, as they could not log into Canvas to get the PowerPoint. This goes to highlight why cybersecurity and IT are so important because we rely on it for almost everyday usage of applications and software that, without it we come to a halt. This especially holds true when we look at cyber attacks or errors that cause critical systems to go down in the United States or in critical areas like hospitals, where people's lives are on the line based on your response time.

5. Curriculum Preparation

The ODU CYSE curriculum laid an essential theoretical framework, providing the foundational knowledge required to understand networking, system administration, and security fundamentals. However, the internship served as the critical bridge to practical application. This position has allowed me to practice theoretical concepts that is analyzed across multiple classes here on campus. You can only put so much into a class vs having the students continuously have to practice it or make projects which cannot always be implemented into a school schedule.

While the curriculum introduced me to concepts like access control and endpoint management, the internship revealed the scale and complexity of implementing these concepts across an enterprise network. Just like before I am able to implement these concepts and witness them in real-time operations that show that not everything is like our books or presentations, and many factors can change the outcome of the operation at hand. Ultimately, the end of this internship has shown me many things that will become useful no matter where I go, and has solidified my assumption that you need to know the fundamentals and basics extremely well to be successful in this career field.

6. Fulfillment of Objectives

Looking back at the objectives that I first set in my first reflection, my primary goal was to dive deeper into the backend operations and policies of our device management platforms. Over the course of the 150 hours, I successfully achieved this outcome. During the initial period, I focused heavily on acclimating to the software stack, but over the last several weeks, my practical proficiency with Microsoft Intune and Azure has grown substantially. I have moved past the steep learning curve of just simply understanding how these tools function and now I am able to leverage them more actively to have the ability to deploy software, manage remote endpoints, and enforce university compliance on machines around campus.

My second objective centered around mastering cross-platform device management with our Azure platforms and occasionally JAMF. This goal was not only met but expanded upon. My exposure to JAMF Pro has been able to broaden my perspective on the few MacOS items that we have in stock in this university. Furthermore, the complexity of this goal increased when I realized we also have some Linux devices now on campus, which gets tricky when dealing with a triple ecosystem on several networks. Operating from my ThinkPad T15 I learned how to seamlessly pivot between these environments, configuring policies that respected the unique architecture of each operating system while maintaining the university’s overarching security posture.

My final objective was getting better at the remote management of systems and deeper operations. I was able to achieve this objective by testing out applications that we have to external and remote access with a supervisor guiding me in the steps needed to get onto another user's device, operate it, and also the process of how to document everything in real time using various tools. I learned how to

efficiently and correctly push software updates, manage different user access controls, and handle complex remote desktop situations, for example a researcher believing that their device had a virus on it and was not nearby for a physical look at the device.

7. Most Motivating and Exciting Aspects

One of the most motivating aspects of the internship has been the realization of how effectively my past experiences map onto enterprise IT. Thankfully my background in the military service continues to influence my approach to my current positions and others as well for the future. I am now finding that this discipline I developed easily translates into the usage of our enterprise infrastructure. I am learning to treat all of my problems that I encounter in my work field with the same resourcefulness as a physical system that I treated during my military time.

Additionally, the ability to engage in high-level strategic observation has been incredibly exciting. For example, being able to watch the coordination to plan the movement of physical and digital assets under extreme pressure highlighted the immense responsibility that is often overlooked by IT teams. Finally, taking the initiative to study our Internal Knowledge Base and analyzing older ServiceNow reports allowed me to build a sort of mental playbook in my head.

8. Most Discouraging Aspects

The most discouraging aspect of the internship occurred at the very beginning of my tenure. The initial overwhelm that I felt from the first 50 hours was a significant hurdle. The sheer amount of tools and software stacks to learn became intimidating at times, and the steep learning curve required a massive amount of cognitive effort.

Another mildly discouraging aspect has been the administrative hurdles associated with professional development. I took some proactive steps to broaden my professional scope by requesting to shadow other security teams and departments across ODU and the peninsula. However, I am still waiting for confirmation to be able to take on these opportunities. While understandable, given the bureaucratic nature of a large university, the waiting process can stall momentum when you are eager to learn.

Lastly the most discouraging aspects is that some places like my office here at ODU are sow moving and like explained before there are periods of downtime where you have an extreme amount of downtime with nothing to do for days because everything is being worked on and doesn’t need to be analyzed by other people or frankly there is no more active and pressing matters to be handled at the university for that day other making articles for the knowledge base or reporting back what you figured out from a ticket. This can definitely have an effect on someone who comes from a military background where every minute of you day sometimes felt like it needed to be

accounted for and that you were staying busy doing tasks. I have learned to adapt to this and also be thankful because not every field is like this, and even in cybersecurity some positions, like being a SOC Analyst for example, can become extremely stressful.

9. Most Challenging Aspects

The most challenging aspect of this internship was navigating the unprecedented event on campus. Following a tragic shooting on campus, we had to shut down one of our buildings that not only houses a lot of classes but also houses a fair amount of IT infrastructure as well. The logistics of this crisis were incredibly complex. Since the building was shut down and access was severely limited, this resulted in the IT department having to find alternate locations for teaching students, setting up the infrastructure, and modifying access to teachers and students so they were not heavily impacted. Observing management operate during crisis situations proved to be a highly intense but realistic skill set that is very hard to teach in a classroom setting.

On a day-to-day basis, the lack of formalized, hand-holding training was also a major challenge. Due to the large number of tools in our inventory, there simply isn't enough staff to dedicate to training you on the specifics of each one. Learning to navigate these systems by using a combination of efficient self-teaching, military training, and IT training required immense discipline. I would read the manuals for the programs, and when I did not understand systems enough, I would then utilize YouTube to fill in these gaps of knowledge.

10. Recommendation for Future Interns

For any future intern stepping into the Desktop Support Technician role at ODU ITS or any related position, comprehensive preparation is non-negotiable. My first recommendation is to abandon the idea that quiet periods are meant for one to be idle; rather, they are critical downtime periods where you can focus on building a strategy for when the tempo picks back up or using that time to become familiar with your leadership at your workspace so that if you ever need anyone that maybe specializes in a certain area or trains better than another you know where to go to in times of need rather than panicking. Future interns should immediately dive into the Internal Knowledge Base rather than waiting for a broken device or other issues to arise at their desk. This will allow you to shape your mindset to "what do I do now?" to one of "I've seen this before; let me review this article and get started."

Secondly, an intern must realize the absolute necessity of documentation. Without proper documentation, no one will be able to replicate what you have done in case the problem you had happens again, and also if your office uses tickets for workforce analysis, they wont be able to prove that you handled anything during your day, which will only look bad on you.

The way our team thoroughly communicates tasks in Microsoft Teams creates detailed notes that anyone is allowed to view in ServiceNow. This may not be the same later on down the road, or you may use another application like Slack, but the point is the same. Make sure that you understand what is expected of you, how you are to communicate with others, and most importantly, the clients.

I cannot stress enough that, specifically in the usage of ServiceNow, if it is not documented, then it frankly did not happen because everyone uses it for tasks. Finally, interns should prepare to be entirely resourceful and self-taught, bringing a high degree of adaptability to the table. In a professional IT environment, such as one that ODU encompasses, technical skills must be paired with the ability to self-teach yourself and to be able to communicate effectively that you are proficient in a certain skill area.

11. Conclusion

Reaching the 150-hour mark has shifted my focus from learning individual tools to understanding the broader mechanics of an enterprise environment that has a lot of moving parts and operations going on behind the scenes. My main takeaway from this experience is that working in enterprise IT isn't just about the "mission" or "task" itself but about the proper documentation, communication, and teamwork that goes into the work that we do. Most of my observations are helping me shape my professional identity as well as allowing me to integrate my military identity into this field so that I fit in better.

Moving forward, this internship experience will deeply influence the remainder of my college time at ODU. The technical proficiency and curiosity I developed early on have now become the foundation that I will use to build upon to be able to improve my work and experiences for the future. It will allow me to approach my final cybersecurity and networking classes with a practical framework that will allow me to bridge the gap between complex concepts that classes struggle to teach efficiently to students.

This role, while not always glamorous or busy, is still an important one, as was highlighted earlier on in this essay about the AWS outage and how even roles that most people would consider as hidden or minor are always involved in almost any process or crises, and I have grown fond of it. I hope it allows me to transition into a more senior role someday. The hours spent with ODU Information Technology Services have been transformative, equipping me with a realistic skill set that I will take with me in the future when I apply this back to governmental roles or corporate roles. This has also allowed me to expand my horizons and do some testing of my own to be able to shadow some staff in different departments for a very short time, coupled with my own research to try to narrow down which specialty of cybersecurity I would like to get into.