

Ethan Link

I want a career at the NSA because of the fascinating work that the Agency regularly does. Cybersecurity has increasingly stood out to me as my field of choice, and there is no organization that can rival the work that the NSA does daily. This decision has been years in the making and started very early on in middle school.

I first became familiar with the computer science profession in 8th grade, when I took an 8-week class on mobile applications. At this time I was still unsure about my future career; I already knew about my passion for STEM, but knew nothing about my specific place with the field. But this class inspired a passion for computer programming that I still have today. Shortly after taking this class, which mainly used Scratch and MIT app builder, I taught myself my first programming language, Java. I spent the next year teaching myself computer science principles, and building applications. Self-teaching is a skill that would prove invaluable to me over the rest of my high school career, and a theme that played a major role during 9th grade.

In 9th grade, I decided to compete in C#/.NET competitions. After several months of studying, I received first place during the regional competition and broke the record for the highest score. Ever since then, I have continued to compete in various technologies, and have learned many useful skills. This far my highest place during these competitions was 3rd on the national level, competing with the top five students from each state.

Following my competitions, I was granted a position in Northrop Grumman's HIP (High school Involvement Partnership) program. The HIP program is an outreach program that brings students in from the region and pairs them with engineering mentors. During my sophomore year, I was encouraged to apply for the program, and I was one of six students from the region chosen to be a part of the program. Northrop Grumman has been very influential for my continuing development with computers. Through my mentors, I have been introduced to embedded devices, embedded security Linux, and more importantly, Cyber@UC, the main reason for my desire for a career at the NSA.

Cyber@UC is a student-run Cybersecurity organization at the University of Cincinnati, that helped spark my interest in the Cybersecurity aspect of computer science. As a result of my involvement with Cyber@UC, I have been introduced to concepts and technologies that I never would have thought existed. From software reverse engineering to security CTFS, and assisting the creation of an open-source cyber-range management application, Cyber@UC has been essential to my ongoing learning, and has prompted me to want to help the organization succeed. Recently, I was elected as the Head of Recruitment and Retention of Cyber@UC. It is definitively one of the most interesting organizations that I have had the pleasure of being a part of. The club also introduced me to the possibility of working at the NSA by showing me Ghidra (the NSA's SRE suite), and by bringing in a guest speaker from the NSA, who made me aware of this scholarship.

It would be an honor and an enormous achievement to work in such a challenging and fascinating work environment that plays such a critical role in national security. Military/Government careers are common in my family, including my late Father who served on a nuclear submarine in the US navy. My family understands the commitment to our nation through military/government service. As I reach the beginning of my career, I feel that a career at the NSA is the best way to carry on my father's legacy.