Individual Reflective Piece

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# Introduction

Throughout the Network Security course at the University of Essex Online, I have completed two projects that challenged my abilities in a field that I comparatively know little about. My field of work is in systems administration, which overlaps in several key areas but is disparate enough to reveal that network security is somewhat of a black box to me. I have brief hobbyist experience in network security from many years ago, and my work has given me intermediate knowledge of networks and cyber security, but prying open this black box at this moment in my career has proven to be a challenge. The vulnerability assessment and executive summary projects for this course aimed to address complex issues with succinct, elegant plans and solutions. I feel that I did not excel in these aspects, and I believe that I can attribute this to my available time and current level of knowledge. Finally, I suspect that was the course length to be extended, this would allow for additional learning opportunities. In this reflective essay, I will do a deep dive into the impact this course has had on my personal and professional development, both current and future.

# Reflection

As I previously mentioned, this course has challenged my abilities in the fields of network and cybersecurity and has significantly contributed to my personal and professional development. It provided a valuable opportunity to utilize tools that I rarely, if ever, use otherwise, such as sqlmap, snort, sublist3r, and Burp Suite. Additionally, I have real-world experience with nmap and Wireshark, which I commonly employ in a professional capacity. I anticipate further exploration of these tools and expanding my skillset into network and cybersecurity, as these topics greatly interest me and are relevant to my professional aspirations.

During the course, I had very little time to spend on learning, necessitating a focus on the key requirements of the assignments. This limitation was primarily due to the demands of my career. Stress has been a commonly recurring factor throughout my degree program; however, it has lessened as I have progressed. I attribute this reduction in stress largely in part to becoming a better writer and the development of my reflective skills, enabling me to effectively draw on past experiences in the course, in my professional work, and in my personal experiences.

Undertaking the activities in the course initially brought about a sense of stress, but it also imparted a curiosity to explore concepts that I was familiar with in theory but relatively unfamiliar with in practice. While writing the initial vulnerability assessment, I believed that I had fulfilled all the requirements for the essay. However, it turned out to be one of the lowest-graded assignments I have completed thus far in the program. On my review of the grading of the assignment, I recognize that I had not fully met the requirements in a few sections of my essay. This realization caused some frustration, as I believe that the word count requirement significantly limits the ability to produce a competent and thorough product. I experienced a similar feeling with the second assignment as well and, although I am yet to receive a grade, I suspect a similar outcome with an undesirable grade. The limitation of engagement parameters was particularly frustrating, and I truly believe that a capture-the-flag type lab would be a much more effective and rewarding educational target. Reflecting on these frustrations and stress, I have come to appreciate the importance of channelling them into productivity, as I believe it to be a crucial skill, and possibly even a requirement.

Drawing on my personal and professional experiences has allowed me to gain a larger understanding than what I initially possessed. I have found this to be an important tool throughout my coursework and my career. The ability to critically and deeply analyze a problem and arrive at a logical conclusion, correct or otherwise, is extremely important in my opinion, especially in an industry as vast and rapidly evolving as the information technology industry. Developing this skill, along with conducting quick but thorough research and arriving at a factual conclusion is something that I prioritize above nearly everything else. This enables me to be exceedingly effective in a field that is seemingly boundless in terms of specialization and potential problems.

In summary, throughout the process of writing this reflective piece, I have come to a deeper understanding of the impact my emotions and the coursework have had on my personal and professional growth. Initially, I was of the idea that the course would not significantly challenge my growth but has had an oddly profound impact on my idea of what my near-immediate future would look like. Taking what I have learned here and applying it to my solid foundation of expertise is leading me back to a more hacker-centric path of learning. Moving forward, I appreciate the significance of attention to detail and the continuous pursuit of knowledge in the field of network security, and this course has surpassed my initial expectations by providing a solid foundation for future endeavours.