

Devonie Nelson

University Frames Scholarship Submission

I began my journey into cybersecurity in August of 2022. This was prompted by my life unexpectedly changing, when I separated from my husband and moved back home with my mother with a 3-month-old baby in tow. I knew I needed a change, as my ex was the breadwinner of our household, and I was unable to afford my expenses on my customer service income. A week after moving to my mother's house, while still on maternity leave, I received a call informing me that my department was being laid off and I would not have a job to return to.

I was inspired by a friend to explore cybersecurity as a new and more stable career option. I enrolled in the Master of Security Management program at the University of Houston-Downtown and have met so many amazing people along the way. I've found a passion in not only the field, but in assisting others who may not have felt like a career in tech was feasible.

Last year, I launched the inaugural student chapter of Women in Cybersecurity (WiCyS) at my university. My primary goal is to use this platform to provide access to resources from WiCyS and other sources. I attend a school that is considered the most diverse in my city, and our students are primarily made up of working minority students from low-income backgrounds. What I've learned from exploring this field thus far is that outside of a college education, the additional steps to make it in this industry can be costly. Because many students are in a position where we cannot afford extra costs, I've made it a priority to share what I can to lighten the load, whether that be through sharing information on scholarships, coaching on networking, resume building, etc.

In addition to resources that I can share for breaking into IT, I know there must be a financial literacy aspect involved as well. With students like me who come from backgrounds where we have not had much money to manage, I want to develop financial literacy programs. I'd like to grow these programs to expose other low-income minorities outside of my university to the field of technology coupled with financial literacy to know how to manage the salary that they will have access to.

Being able to continue my own education, I can see my mission expanding beyond the walls of my school and one day developing my own nonprofit to provide others the opportunity to get into tech and make a living for themselves beyond what they ever could have dreamed of, plus the knowledge of how to manage the income that they will acquire. I am so grateful to the people who have taken a chance on me, to invest in me and help me grow, and I cannot wait to be able to make that sort of impact in my community on a much larger scale.