

Dhikshaa Arunsundar

Year 9, Westview High School, Oregon

What Drives Me

Growing up in an Indian immigrant household, I was surrounded by the world of technology. My community consisted of those like us, people who moved in search of better opportunities that all linked back to the same place: information technologies. As a child, I'd remember my dad typing away on his keyboard, sitting through meeting after meeting for what seemed to be hours on end. To me, the field lacked creativity.

That is, until I grew older and realized my ignorance. I started noticing how much technology allowed humans to foster their inherent creativity. It's used as a medium for human

innovation, pushing the boundaries of what's possible. Anything as big as an application to something as small as a button was brought to life by hundreds of people dedicating countless hours of their time. From designing to coding to testing every step of the process blended harmoniously to create something wonderful.

The first coding course that I took was about Python - and I was instantly hooked. Each program forced me to think outside the box and approach issues in different ways, and the pride I felt when tackling them had me craving more. It drove me to spend hours studying different topics, and I even ended up joining my school's computer science club.

The deeper I dug into the field, I found that the perks of technology came with unpleasant counterparts. Technology is developing at a rapid pace, especially with advancements in artificial intelligence. Though this tech drives significant development online, it also poses dangerous risks to digital privacy. According to the Identity Theft Resource Center, 3,205 data compromises were publicly reported in 2023, impacting 353 million individuals. Those abusing technology for selfish gains prey upon individuals and take advantage of them. This often leaves them in a state of emotional and financial distress because the very systems they trust can be majorly exploited. Cybersecurity is a shield, protecting us from such dangers we didn't even know existed. Gaining more knowledge about these threats sparked my interest in cybersecurity. To me, cybersecurity is not only a possible future career - but a calling. A life goal. A passion fueled by the desire to make the digital world a safer place by preventing and protecting against these threats.

I look forward to making a meaningful impact with my knowledge and skills. Striving to protect against vulnerabilities in our systems so that individuals can use them safely, I aim to attend university and pursue computer science. The world of technology is always evolving and

will invite me to grow alongside it, challenging me to push my boundaries.

As a child, I overlooked the impacts of technology in our society and was quick to judge the field. Now, I drive to step up and protect from vulnerabilities in our systems - so that people like you and me can use digital platforms without worrying about our privacy. I want to make a difference using this path - one piece of data at a time.