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Georgia Southern graduate finds career at top cybersecurity consulting firm

December 16, 2022

Before even having her diploma in hand, graduating senior Grace “Gracie” McMillan had secured a position with one of the top cybersecurity consulting firms in the world, Deloitte. On Tuesday, Dec. 13, she will cross the stage at Allen E. Paulson Stadium with a bachelor’s degree in information technology, a minor in criminal justice and criminology, and a specialization in cybersecurity.



Gracie McMillan

The motivation to go into cybersecurity was simple for McMillan. She loved STEM and wanted to find a career where she could help people.

“One of my biggest passions is helping people,” McMillan said. “But I’m not going to be a nurse. I’m not good with blood. I’m not that kind of person. I found that through cybersecurity, I could protect people in a way that suits my strengths.”

When she began in cybersecurity, she hoped to one day work for the FBI, inspired by the character of Penelope Garcia on the TV series “Criminal Minds.” McMillan did earn an internship at the FBI this past summer with the support of her professors.

“I had a professor who really mentored me through the whole interview process, which was a year long, and is not an easy process,” McMillan said. “Over the summer I got to work in Quantico (FBI Academy in northern Virginia) in the heart of the FBI and I was doing digital forensics, information security and working on real cases. This semester I worked in their Savannah office to maintain my security clearance.”

McMillan believes there is a major reason why she gained the FBI internship. Georgia Southern’s Center for Applied Cyber Education (CACE) holds two important designations. CACE is one of only 14 schools in the country with both a National Security Agency (NSA)/Department of Homeland Security Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education designation and a Center of Digital Forensics Academic Excellence designation from the Department of Defense Cyber Crime Center (DC3). The joint NSA/DC3 designations open the doors to collaborations for students in the program.

“I noticed on my FBI application that there was a question about the NSA and DC3 designations,” McMillan said. “It was a really cool experience to see that little button and be able to say yes to it. I feel like being a part of this school really helped bump me to the top of the interview list.”

Her FBI internship granted her top secret security clearance. This clearance level was a significant factor in receiving a job offer from Deloitte, as was her leadership experience through Kappa Kappa Gamma. From December 2020 through December 2021, McMillan served as the youngest elected president in her sorority’s history.

“My sorority was genuinely one of the best experiences of my life,” McMillan said. “They really pushed me to be the best person I could be and to keep working toward my goals even when things were difficult and I didn’t know if I could do it. I became president my sophomore year and it was extremely difficult, but incredibly rewarding. It taught me so many leadership skills and I gained so much because of it.”

McMillan credits her time at Georgia Southern with teaching her the confidence to reach out and fight for her goals.

“I couldn’t have done what I’m doing now without Georgia Southern,” McMillan said. “I would never have had the confidence to reach out to someone I didn’t know on LinkedIn to talk to them about the company they worked for. That got my foot in the door at Deloitte. And, as difficult as my professors could be, they pushed us to do projects that were going to challenge us and ultimately increase our confidence in our abilities with our work and to go out and get what we want. I wouldn’t have been able to get this job without that.”

McMillan believes that every experience she had at Georgia Southern worked together to get her where she is now.

“My professors challenged me and built my confidence,” McMillan said. “I wouldn’t have built the leadership skills Deloitte was looking for without my experience with Greek life. Without my FBI internship, I wouldn’t have had the right security clearance. It genuinely all feeds straight into it, literally every experience I’ve had here, and I wouldn’t trade it for the world.”

McMillan wants other women looking to go into cybersecurity to know that they should dive in and try.

“I want women to know that it’s possible and that there is so much room for you,” McMillan said. “Right now one in four people in this field are women. It should be more. It should be filled with women who want to make a difference and help change the world. I want women in this field to know they are not alone. There are women and men already in this field who are fighting for you to be here too. Don’t be discouraged and try as hard as you can.”

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