



Massachusetts Student and Graduate Profile

As a high school student in Morocco, Hafid Benamara knew he wanted to move to the United States to attend college and pursue his passion for a career in information technology (IT). After graduating from high school in 1995, Hafid worked several years teaching French, Arabic, math, and science and eventually applied for lawful permanent residence (or a “green card”) in the United States. Once his application was approved, Hafid moved to the U.S. and, today, works at one of the fastest growing IT companies in the country.

Hafid learned about the Cisco® Networking Academy® while attending an information session for incoming students at Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC), located in the historic Charlestown neighborhood of Boston. Although he knew he wanted a career in IT, Hafid wasn’t sure “which way to go, or which field to specialize in.” After further investigation, Hafid concluded that Cisco certifications would be valuable in the job market and enrolled in the academy as part of his studies toward an associate’s degree in network technology. Looking back, Hafid says “The Networking Academy helped me decide where to go and what to study, as I was hesitating too much on what to choose.”

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Drew Phelps, Hafid’s supervisor at NWN

Hafid was constantly busy, working full-time at multiple jobs and carrying a full course load at the same time. In addition, based on a high GPA and desire to challenge himself further, Hafid applied to the Commonwealth Honors Program at BHCC, an elite program offering a select group of students the opportunity to develop an honors research project and present the results at the annual statewide conference. Hafid was one of only a handful of students in his graduating class selected to participate in the honors program.

Reflecting upon his experience with the Networking Academy, Hafid says “Everything was great. The labs were very challenging and a good test of your ability to apply your knowledge. You could evaluate yourself to see if you were learning the material. I loved working with the Cisco equipment and the instructors were great, too.”

Hafid attributes part of his success to an internship at NWN Corporation, to which he was referred by academy instructor Andrea Lyons. Only one month into the internship, he was hired as a full-time employee despite the fact that he hadn’t yet graduated from BHCC.



Nine months later, Hafid is still at NWN where he currently works as a command center engineer. He is responsible for monitoring, maintaining, and troubleshooting network infrastructures for client companies and finds that “almost everything I’ve learned in the Cisco program, I’ve been able to apply.” Hafid feels he is making a contribution and appreciates being viewed as a valued employee. Drew Phelps, Hafid’s supervisor at NWN, confirms Hafid’s contributions, saying, “Hafid has been a tremendous addition to our Command Center team. Thanks in part to his Networking Academy training, Hafid came to NWN with a solid understanding of networking fundamentals and quickly mastered a fast-paced and demanding role. He proves his solid work ethic, skills, and technical acumen day after day as an engineer for NWN.”

On a personal level, Hafid attributes some of his success to the discipline, respect, and commitment he learned in the process of attaining a black belt in karate. He is hard working and dedicated to education and attaining his goals. “Commitment and passion are the keys to success,” says Hafid. “You have to love what you are doing and be committed to it.” This belief is reflected in his advice to others who may be interested in the Networking Academy: “Have passion for what you’re doing and be committed. That’s all it takes.”

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Hafid has earned his Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA®), Planet 3 CWNA, and Microsoft MCP certifications. He plans to specialize in networking security and has already started studying for the Cisco Certified Security Professional (CCSP®) certification. Hafid’s night shift job at NWN enables him to enjoy his daytime interests outside of technology: traveling, exploring the outdoors, and “discovering the natural world.” He’s also an avid reader, especially in the areas of behavioral science and psychology. “Life is all about learning!” Hafid concludes enthusiastically.

For more information on the Networking Academy at BHCC, visit: <http://www.bhcc.mass.edu/>



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