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Reflection on SYE experience

I learned a lot about myself from this experience. I thought going into it that I would struggle with deadlines and accomplishing the work but that was not really a challenge. I think the fact that we agreed to do deadlines and small goals from the beginning definitely helped with staying on track. I struggled a lot more with the project getting hung-up and frustrating than I thought I would. I have always been one who steps back when I get stuck and returns to the problem at a different time. I had a hard time with the fact that when I did that here, it was the same when I got back to it. I couldn’t walk away and go to class or learn something new and then come back to it. I had the same problem and the same resources every time I worked on it. This was the biggest thing I have done outside of a classroom environment so without that safety net of “I can go to class and maybe we will discuss exactly what I am stuck on” I had to ask for help more directly. I learned that I probably got stuck a little too long once or twice before I explicitly asked for help from my advising professor. I already knew I was stubborn but I learned from this project that it is always a good idea to take a step back and consider if there may be an easier way to get something done. I got stuck a couple of times thinking I had to make it work or run when the easier solution was to just change what I was doing.

Statistically, I learned a lot about cleaning data and organizing a shiny app and html output for a project. I also learned about the use of GitHub and just a code upload site in general. I now know how to share the things I find and the data I make with the world, if I want. I learned how to publish a website and create a public domain that other people can see and utilize. I learned a lot of little things about coding but the major take-aways were the big-picture publishing and sharing of the project. Taking something from not existing to being a site any person can look at was incredibly rewarding for me to do.

This process was not exactly what I expected it to be, as it changed a lot from my initial vision for the project. However, it was enjoyable and definitely educational for me. As I stated above, this was the first time I have ever taken a project from no data to raw data to models and plots to a publicly accessible final product. The biggest unexpected component of that was the freedom of choice. Being able to say that something in the final site wasn’t working and my solution was to just change the original excel file with the data in it was definitely a new idea for me. On the topic of collecting my own data, I had a lot of challenges with that. I did not realize just how many things were out of my control when collecting this data, like choice in where horses were turned out and with what other horses. I also underestimated how small the data would look when grouped into, not only horse, but also personality. I thought, while collecting, that I had so much and I filled many pages of a notebook but when it was all grouped, and in a csv, 54 rows is not that many rows. It absolutely made me respect huge data sets more and appreciate that I can go online and google public data sets and just pull them to use. I also realized I had to be forgiving with myself about changing the plan because of the limited data. I was stuck for about a month this spring on thinking every time I made a design choice because of my limited data points, it was another way I had failed in collecting data. I had to overcome that feeling and look at the project once I had the data as simply the project it was, and not try to make it into something it could not be.

Something I would change if I did this again would be collecting more data and changing the way I did it. I think that if I had a tighter schedule and grouped as I went I would have ended up with a more comprehensive final selection of horses and been able to do more with it. I also would have continued collecting into the spring and in the winter because a lot of my code and final output could change right now if I altered the points and I do not think that occurred to me early on in this process. I didn’t realize how much freedom I had to choose what the data looked like, because it was my own. I was in the mindset of, “this is the data set and it is what it is” because that is the way data is in low-level stats classes. I could have done a lot more if I had realized sooner that this project wasn’t like that. I kept myself in a box that I essentially made up in my head. Once I got out of that box and realized I could just make an app and not use a model and I could just go in and change the excel file, because it was all mine to alter, everything went a lot more smoothly.