NYU - Fall 2019

1. Another semester came to an end, leaving only one left till my graduation (if I manage to graduate) from NYU's Master in Data Science program. This semester made it clear that regardless of any parts unknown in the future, going back to school has provided me with diverse opportunities and experiences valuable for both my professional and personal life.

2.Teaching

As a teaching assistant (TA), I met my students twice each week, fulfilling my official duty of helping them understand probability and statistics concepts during labs, and providing guidance for homework during office hours. Whenever I saw my students, I got nervous and excited as if I was going on a date, worrying that I would give them an overdose of sarcasm and excitement, leading to a wrong perception of the beauty of probability and statistics. I managed to present myself as a helpful, yet serious (and gloomy) TA until the very last day of the semester, so that I could freely show my sarcastic self when I met my students in a completely friendly setting later on. Mission #1 accomplished!

3.d Working

It was pure luck that I became responsible for an important project during my internship at NBCUniversal. The project was to develop a sentiment metric that evaluates the social impacts of nominees for the People's Choice Awards. NBCUniversal recently added the Data Science team in an effort to make business decisions backed by data. Given NBC's scale and reach, a small change can have quite a large impact. For example, an analysis on the Olympic's schedule and ads would affect tens of millions of viewers, while a subtle recommendation on the Tonight Show's content could potentially lead to millions of tune-in or tune-out. The power comes with responsibilities. During my time at NBCU, in addition to applying NLP models and learning PySpark to deal with big data (e.g. tens of millions of tweets), I also got a valuable lesson on how to fit Machine Learning models and concepts into the big picture so as to business values in this fascinating media world.

4.d Learning

At the end of the day, I was still a student, so you would often find me sitting in frustration with my teammates while trying to debug and complain about the diversity of bugs (diversity is not great when it comes to bugs!). I spent a majority of my time doing NLP homework. Each NLP problem set is unique, challenging, yet interesting in its own way, ranging from developing a simple text classification model to building a (dumb) chat bot or a machine reader. What I found most interesting from this class were the grading sections where the team walked the teaching assistant through the models and answered questions. In order to prepare well for the grading sections, we of course worked hard on the modeling part, which led to lengthy conversations on Slack, new friendships (e.g., when you asked for questions during the grading sessions), and memorable experiences (e.g., you do not remember how you built your models, but only what you explained to others). I also spent a lot of time on my Data Engineering reading, to learn one or two things about the machine learning pipeline from

data collection to model deployment in real life. I skipped most of the lectures, partly because I had my amazing friends (and classmates) to help out when needed, and mostly because I was lazy (I felt like an adult when I could justify my reason for being lazy and skipping classes!).

5.d Being

My friends often joked that I had an overdose of NLP as almost everything I did during the semester was related to NLP and that I would go crazy given my ridiculous schedule. To my surprise, they were wrong. I clearly felt overstressed once or twice when all the deadlines came at once, but found myself quite relaxed toward the end of the semester without any exams, and even had time to dedicate myself to food plating. Indeed, maybe these hours working on food presentation and watching ASMR videos were for me to escape from real life, and to appreciate the subtle beauty of a cup of tea, early sunlight, or the first snow. I truly thank this semester for giving me opportunities to enjoy new experiences, getting to know amazing people, learning about state-of-the-art models, and finding calmness in the midst of chaos.

…. Onto 2020!