MSUS Culminating Experience Reflection

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Project name: Construction and Demolition waste impact, policy and diversion

Project client: Stardust Building Supplies

With my interest in waste management, I was very excited when I initially learned about Stardust project. The main agenda of the project was to find out key performance indicators and metrics for C&D waste that Stardust is involved with and perform data analysis. There are many challenges that I came across while working on this project. I had both personal issues and professional issues. I will reflect on both in this reflection.

First challenge, I did not have much experience in C&D waste and what it involved. Now I can give a talk about C&D waste and what it involves and how we can manage. Second challenge was the policy aspect of this project. Since I am more interested in quantitative aspect of waste, it was hard for me to focus on qualitative methods. With some advice and help I can come up with a strategy to tackle this situation. The important lesson that I learned here is I need to take up projects which I have passion in and I feel comfortable working on. Since the project was initially about data analysis, I was more excited about it than doing the policy analysis which I had no direction or knowledge about.

The biggest obstacle for my project was when I could not find any information about C&D data capture. I contacted ADEQ, Waste Management, Republic Services and understood that no one is calculating how much of the waste is C&D in numbers. Learning about the policy structure helped me to understand that - unless we clearly define the waste and categorize it, it is hard to quantify or measure. During this period which was about 3-4 weeks, I had the biggest feeling of failure and assumed whether I would graduate this May or not. I was focusing on the quality of the result that I could not provide than the lessons that I was learning. My advisor Professor Hanna Breetz came to my rescue and helped me see things clearly.
Switching to my personal challenges, I think emotional well-being and happiness is very important when we work on sustainability challenges. If we are internally challenged with issues, it is hard to focus on world problems. For a student who is also a mother and a wife, a non-American student and adding travel time for commuting, things got challenging to manage at times. I am happy to mention that I have survived the dark period and learned to move on while learning and adopting new things that I discovered in both my personal and professional life. I will be more careful with what I choose in future.