Dear current students,

The CSE department recently posted its new admissions procedure that will take effect for students who submit their major change application AFTER July 1, 2017: https://cse.ucsd.edu/undergraduate/admissions/capped-major-status. In this message, we address some concerns that have been raised about this new policy as well as describe the rationale for this new policy.

First, we want to emphasize that this policy does not take effect until AFTER July 1, 2017. Spring 2017 (current round) and fall 2017 (applications submitted at the end of spring 2017) will use the current admission policy (i.e. GPA in criteria courses).

Next, we want to address the desire for more space in the CSE major. We agree! However, growing our major is difficult for many reasons. Some of the top reasons include:

- Attractive faculty lines are scarce. Most high quality instructors (rightfully) want full-time positions with employment security from year to year. The department has money for temporary lecturers, but does not have enough full-time long-term positions right now.
- Partly because of the above, high quality instructors are difficult to find and retain. Just because they leave UC San Diego does not mean we don't want them here.
- We don't have sufficient staff resources. Growing our major requires growing our student affairs staff too. We haven't yet gotten the resources to do so.

We are actively working to resolve the above issues, but securing resources is, unfortunately, a slow process.

Finally, here is the rationale for the new admissions policy. Using GPA as the sole criteria for admission was not serving our goals of allowing as many qualified students into the major as possible while providing a high-quality education for all students in our courses. It was causing students to focus too much on grades, not focus enough on actual learning, and to make rational but harmful choices for themselves and for our program (e.g. dropping classes in the 9th week, cheating) in order to maximize their chances of getting into the major. It was creating a competitive, stressed-out environment. Finally, it was penalizing students with less experience and less privilege. We needed to replace this system, and quickly. We only get the chance to change our process once per year, so when we had the opportunity, we moved on it.

Our ideal system would be a holistic admissions system that takes into account motivation, background and external circumstance, class performance, activities outside the classroom, etc. However, such a system is (1) prone to its own unfairness and bias and (2) more importantly, extremely resource intensive, and would have drastically reduced the resources available to teach our courses and support our students. We saw this limitation as unacceptable in the current climate.
We recognize that a lottery system has its own stresses, but we believe it is fairer than the current system. We want to stress that "everyone" at UCSD deserves to be in CSE as much as anyone else. There simply isn’t room for everyone. We believe that, given resource constraints, a lottery is the fairest way to ensure that everyone gets a chance. The minimum GPA threshold is designed to give an incentive to do as well as possible in introductory classes, without undue stress.

We had to act quickly on this policy, and it will apply as stated in the 2017/2018 academic year (all applications after June 1, 2017). However, we will continue to examine our admissions policy and may make changes to it in the future. We look forward to hearing your input as we consider these future changes, and we will take this input seriously. At the same time, we ask that you respect our expertise, and recognize that we might make decisions that you are not happy with, or that you disagree with, but that these decisions might have good reasons behind them which you cannot see.

Finally, we want to stress that a CSE major is not your only option for your future, or to be part of the CSE community. We have committed to keeping our lower division courses open to all students, as a path to the CSE majors as well as to provide essential computing education to all students who want it. We hope you will stay engaged in our community through the tutor program or the student orgs, even if you do not end up in one of our majors. Please look at the Computing Paths project (http://computingpaths.ucsd.edu/) for more information and options for you if you are not selected into a CSE major, or if you decide another computing path is a better option for you.

Best Regards,
Christine Alvarado
CSE Vice-Chair for Undergraduate Education