

Re: Capped Major Admissions Policy Rationale

Dear community members,

Starting July 1, 2017 the UC San Diego CSE department adopted a new capped admission policy and procedure for students who submit a major change application: <https://cse.ucsd.edu/undergraduate/cse-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, many people would love to see us allow everyone who wants to major in computer science to switch to the CSE major. We wish we could! However, growing our major is difficult for many reasons. Some of the top reasons include:

- Instructors are limited and 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 is still growing its full-time long-term positions.
- Partly because of the above, high quality instructors are difficult to find and retain.
- We also lack sufficient staff resources. Growing our major requires growing our student affairs staff too. Again, this is a slow process.

We continue to work 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 a class late in the quarter to avoid getting an A- or 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.

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 our current system has its own stresses, but we believe it is fairer than the previous system which was based solely on GPA. We want to emphasize 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 system that broadly selects students from among a set of equally qualified applicants 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.

Since 2017, our current process has been working well. We have seen a vast reduction in the amount of cheating and detrimental behaviors in our early courses and we continue to have outstanding students in our program. 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 are committed to keeping our lower division courses open to *all* students, as a path to the CSE major 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