

# Free Donuts in Soda!\*

## Honors Society Helps to Foster Community and Scholarship Amongst Computer Science Students

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### ABSTRACT

- Big and impersonal classes in EECS department
- Student organization (UPE) helps to bridge gap
- Social activities sponsored by UPE
- Academic activities sponsored by UPE
- Community outreach by UPE
- Conclusion

### UPSILON PI EPSILON

Berkeley is known for having big classes and impacted majors; nowhere is this truer than in the Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS) department. Consisting of two majors, Computer Science (CS) and EECS, from two different colleges, Letters & Science and Engineering respectively, the EECS department is comprised of approximately 1300 undergraduates. With lower division class sizes ranging from 300 to 400 students each and upper division class sizes ranging from 100 to 250 students, it was often difficult for students, new and old alike, to find their way in the department. This was especially true of prospective Letters and Science first and second year students who were required to apply to the competitive CS major - which accepted approximately 50 students a semester, typically with grade point averages of 3.4 or higher - after finishing eight technical prerequisite courses; these courses include three computer science courses (CS 61A, CS 61B, CS 61C), four mathematics courses (Math 1A, Math 1B, Math 54, and Math 55 or CS 70), and one electrical engineering course (EE 42).

One of the student organizations that tried to help CS and EECS students find their way in the big and, perhaps, impersonal EECS department is the UC Berkeley chapter of Upsilon Pi Epsilon (UPE). Founded in 1967 at Texas A&M University, College Station, and endorsed by both the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Computer Society (IEEE-CS), UPE was the only honors society in existence

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devoted solely to the computing sciences. The UC Berkeley Chapter was relatively young, having been founded in 1995 by Steven CM Kam, Greg SiHoon Kim, Yaoshiang Ho, and David Wu. Even though UPE was a relatively young organization at Berkeley, it was named the ASUC Hardest Working Academic Club this year. Joining UPE was by invitation only, an honor typically extended to the top one-third of computer science majors, typically students with grade point averages of 3.7 or higher, approximately fifty people.

UPE offered many services and events for undergraduates students, both social and academic. One of the most successful social events that UPE hosted was known as the “donut run.” Occurring typically late in the evening on a night before a big project was due, several UPE members distributed free donuts and milk to thankful students in the computer lab (basement of Soda Hall, the computer science building) finishing up their projects at the last minute.

One ambitious project that UPE initiated during the spring semester was the “CS/EECS Yearbook,” a website where all undergraduates in the Berkeley computer science community could register and put up a profile; the goal of the project was to bring the computer science community closer. Michael Yang, a senior majoring computer science and spring semester president of UPE, explained, “On any given day, I see a dozen new faces in the department. I think the CS/EECS Yearbook is a great way for me to get to know others better.”

With the academic end, UPE offers free one-on-one tutoring for any computer science or mathematics course. For industry bound students, UPE sponsored several info sessions a year with companies looking to hire graduates and interns. Kurt Diegurt, a sophomore in computer science, was once such person who found an internship through an info session. “I made a connection with Intel when a representative came to speak at an info session,” explains Diegurt, “this summer I’m working at Intel as an intern.” For graduate school bound students, UPE hosted seven to eight “faculty luncheons” a year. During these luncheons, undergraduates had the chance to meet computer science professors who talked about their area of research in computer science. Students in the past have been able to find research advisors through these luncheons.

At the beginning of the year, Gifford Cheung, a senior in

computer science and fall semester president of UPE, initiated an ambitious partnership between UPE and the Palo Alto Research Center (PARC, formerly affiliated with Xerox), one of the most respected computer science research institutes; PARC is known for many innovations in computer science including the Ethernet, the predecessor to the internet, and graphical user interfaces. Through this partnership, UPE members have been able to secure research positions at PARC working on several cutting edge areas of computer science. "Once I began getting a sense of the organization as a whole I found a very engaging environment," Cheung explains about PARC. "Suffice to say, there's a lot of learning going on around me and more than a few things that I eagerly expect to see move the field. It's an information rich place and has kick started a bit of my own passion and eyes on what I'd call relevant computer science."

Finally, UPE also helps with community outreach. In the past, UPE members have helped at Berkeley Neighborhood Computers, a nonprofit organization that builds computers from recycled parts and distributes them to low income families. During Cal Day, UPE members were found at Soda Hall speaking to prospective computer science students and their parents, gave tours of the facilities, and answered questions at the student panel. Chris Loer, a senior in computer science and Community Service officer for UPE, played the stereotypical CS student and pretended to sleep on the floor of Soda Hall, brandishing a sign that read, "Ask us about sleeping in Soda Hall vs. the Dorms." When asked by parents of a prospective student, Loer replied, "It's easier to sleep in Soda Hall since it's quieter."

With the increasing number of students attending Berkeley due to Tidal Wave II, a term dubbed by administrative officials referring to the University of California plans to accommodate 63,000 more students system wide in the next decade, 4,000 of which will be at Berkeley, the EECS department will undoubtedly grow as well. Student organizations such as UPE will become even more essential to students who may find themselves helplessly swept away by the sheer magnitude of the increase in students at Berkeley.