βeta

{{ first year **survival guide** }}

— news from computer science and engineering —

βeta

About CSESoc βeta

In This Issue

Welcome to CSE!

On behalf of the CSE Society, welcome to CSE! What you're holding is a copy of our society's fortnightly publication, CSESoc βeta.

βeta is a student newsletter produced by students in CSE for students in CSE. This means that βeta:

- Bridges the gap between the staff and students of CSE;
- Keeps you up to date with some of the cutting-edge research done by our staff, postgrad and undergrad students;
- Lets you know about the cool things CSE students get up to in their spare time;
- Allows students to express and debate their opinions; and
- Keeps you entertained with fun segments, puzzles, crosswords and much more.

You can grab your copy of CSESoc βeta at CSESoc's free weekly BBQ (Mondays 12:30–2:00p on the Physics lawn) or at the student office on the ground floor of K17.

This edition of CSESoc βeta is an introduction that'll help you get through that confusing first week where you're seeing new faces and finding new places. Turn the pages to find out more about upcoming events, what the society does, handy bookmarks you should have and your frequently asked questions answered.

The entire Beta Team looks forward to keeping you informed and entertained this year!

■ *The Beta Team*

About CSESoc

The hangout for cool nerds

CSESoc is the principal representative body for computing students on campus—all CSE students are automatically members. We're here to grow the school community and provide opportunities for all computing students to have fun and meet other students outside of your studies. To this end, we run weekly social and technical events throughout the year (and nearly all are free to attend!)

Our social events are an opportunity for you to meet other CSE students, and take a break from studying. In addition to our famous free weekly BBQ, we've run Trivia Nights, Poker Nights, Movie Nights, Cocktail Parties, LAN Parties, and more!

We announce these events by email, so make sure you sign up to the `soc-announce` mailing list during Lab 0 to receive them! Our events are open to all students; although, if you're not a CSE student—if you're not enrolled in a CSE degree or course—but want the full benefits of membership, ask the executives about becoming an associate member.

There are plenty of opportunities to get involved with running events and activities: we're always looking for volunteers, and it's a great way to develop your leadership and teamwork skills.

You can volunteer for any of CSESoc's teams:

Beta produces the publication you're reading now,

Publicity promotes our events by creating posters and running our social media,

Dev runs projects and code jams and maintains CSESoc's website and servers,

Social organises and runs all of our social events

Talkshops organises and runs the society's technical talks and workshops

Comp Club provides a head start for high school students to explore computing and eat pizza.

Keep an eye out for our First Year Camp at the end of Week 3—we encourage all new students (postgraduate coursework/research and undergraduate alike) to attend. First Year Camp is the best way to meet people in your courses (great for groupwork!) and the rest of CSE.

Most of all, we're here to help you settle in and have a great time at UNSW! We look forward to meeting all of you and helping you get the most out of this year!

▪ *Evelyn Chensen* ▪ *Pierre Estephan*
▪ *Vincent Wong* ▪ *Angelo Tamayo*

Upcoming Events

Now that you know what CSESoc is, come join us in some upcoming events:

The CSESoc signature social event is our *weekly free BBQ*. These run throughout the semester, rain or shine. We have a range of different food options, so if you are a meatasaurus or a vegetarian, you can still have a great time! When do you start getting our free food? The first BBQ will be on Monday of O-Week from 12:30–2:00pm on the Physics Lawn—make sure you're there!

On top of this plethora of social events, CSESoc also holds tech-based events throughout the year to help you explore your interests outside of the classroom. These events range from workshops and seminars, to coding competitions that are always fun to be a part of.

One of the first tech events of the year is the Linux Installfest, which will be on Thursday, 12 March from 3–7p. If you would like to install Linux on your computer and have questions,

worries or reservations about the process, bring it to the Installfest where experienced students can help you out. Postgraduates and undergraduates are all welcome!

Not only that, CSESoc also has activities and events to get you started in UNSW CSE. Be sure to check out Lab 0; it shows you how to access to, and set up, your own CSE account, as well as teach you some basic commands for navigating the CSE lab computers, and teach you some cool tricks like how to play games on the CSE network. If you're a postgrad, you can do Lab 0 on Thursday 1–3pm during O-Week—just check out the venue on the O-Week events calendar—which runs with the Postgraduate Welcome at the K17 Seminar Room. Undergraduates don't need to worry—you'll be partaking in Lab 0 in your first COMP1917 tutorial.

For more information, come by our O-Week stall, the Socs office—Room 306, Level 3, K17—or visit the CSESoc website, **csesoc.unsw.edu.au**.

Frequently Asked Questions

Nervous about starting at UNSW Computing? Don't be!

What is Lab 0? Lab 0 helps you become familiar with the CSE lab machines. It deals with using Linux, working with files, launching programs, using the terminal, and more. You should do the lab before your first COMP1917 or COMP1911 class, but if you can't, don't worry; it's covered in week 1. To get started just walk into a CSE lab! wiki.csesoc.unsw.edu.au/Lab0

What is Linux? Linux is an operating system that most CSE lab machines are running; it's a fantastic environment to program in, and it's open-source.

Are lectures compulsory? No, but attending them is an *incredibly* good idea.

Lectures are where relevant course content gets discussed. You may find that you know all of the content, but if you skip lectures, you may fall behind, and be unable to catch up. Other important course information gets discussed during lectures, including assignments and exams. It's a good idea to treat them as compulsory.

When do lectures, tutorials and labs start? Classes run for fifty minutes, with five minute gaps before and after to give you time to travel between classes. If you need to go a long way, make sure you remind your lecturer to finish on time; some lecturers will go overtime.

If you're running late, you should still attend! Lecturers may remark on your entrance when you sneak in; try not to disturb everyone too much, and if there is a rear entrance, use it. For the parts you missed, courses may have lecture recordings available via Echo360. Failing that, make friends with those who don't run late!

If your lecturer or tutor is late, remember that classes start five minutes past the hour, and they may be coming from another class. If it gets to quarter past, and they aren't there, you could do some self-motivated study—tutorials and notes are usually available on your course webpage—or alternatively, get in contact with the CSE Student Office.

What are tutorials and labs? Tutorials and labs let you put into practice content covered in lectures, and are your best opportunity to develop your skills. Tutorials focus on discussions and theory related to course material; labs let you flex your fingers and get programming. For most courses, you risk failing if your tutorial or lab attendance isn't sufficient.

Who are the tutors? Tutors are one of the best bits about taking a CSE course: they're all awesome people who take a great interest in helping their students. Often, they're other undergraduate students who have completed the course with high marks. Some courses have postgraduate tutors, other teaching staff, or even one of the course lecturers.

How do I contact my lecturers and tutors? For lecturers, email is usually best. Some may stay after lectures to answer questions, and most also offer consultations to ask questions in-person, but outside of these times they're usually busy, so expect that a response to an email may take some time.

For tutors, email is good; they may also be able to spend time with you after labs, or meet up with you during the day. They are the best person to contact if you have problems, but remember, they are students too, and aren't always free.

And in most courses, there will be a course forum available which the lecturers and tutors frequent, and where your classmates may be active and able to help.

How much time should I spend studying? That depends: outside of class, you need to complete assignments, revise content, prepare for tutorials, and study for exams. The Faculty of Engineering suggests that for each contact hour, you should do one hour of study outside class.

Of course, leave plenty of time for socialising and relaxing. You're a uni student, after all! There are many great activities to get involved in—especially CSESoc activities!

Can I cram for the exam? In CSE courses, it's generally difficult to do: you're learning skills (like programming) which take practise, as opposed to simply regurgitating content.

What is the Student Office? The Student Office is the place to go for any concerns about anything related to your program, such as enrolment, timetabling, or electives. You can find them in the K17 foyer, just inside the front door, beside the lifts. They are usually open weekdays from 9:30a–4:30p.

What is the Socs Office? It's a room the School of CSE provides for the CSE student societies—CSESoc, CSE Revue and the StuReps—to use, and is also usually open during the day. Like the K17 basement, it's a great place to meet and hang out with people from CSE, and is on Level 3 of K17 in Room 306. You can check if the Socs Office is open online at issocsopen.com.

The Socs Office isn't open! How do I get in? Only a few students have authority to supervise the office, and only a few of them have keys. If none of those people are there, the office must remain closed. Those are the rules.

I'm lost! What do I do? Firstly, don't panic! 38 hectares of campus is a lot to wrap your head around. Even for older students, some rooms are hard to find, especially in Old Main.

Secondly, you're not alone! Just ask someone—most people on campus are friendly!—or consult a map, located around the campus, and finally, wandering around the campus can be a fun way to explore (if you aren't in a hurry).

■ *William Korteland*

Do I Need To Buy A New Computer?

Tim answers the age-old question of whether or not
you need to buy a new computer for university.

One question regularly asked by new first year students is, "Do I need to buy a computer?". While the answer often depends upon the individual's circumstances, there are five common situations.

I do not own a computer; do I need one? Yes.

Every degree has a key set of resources necessary to study it effectively. For CSE degrees, this resource is a computer. Why? Most CSE courses—*especially* first year courses—use practical assignments to help with learning the course theory. Course material and help is also on the Internet, in the form of online notes, wikis, forums, email, and Google. What you will need is on-demand and uninterrupted access to a computer.

CSE provides computer labs and the resources necessary to allow you to complete your studies; however, as the year (and your degree) progresses, you will find it increasingly impractical, and frustrating to only use these machines (which are often occupied with classes and other students) and to be unable to work at home. That said, you can afford to wait before buying a computer, as I'll mention in a moment. A computer can be expensive, but buying one is an investment in your career.

My family owns a shared computer; do I need my own? Probably.

Unless the rest of your family uses the computer only occasionally, you will most likely find it problematic to use a shared computer. As noted above, you will be using a computer frequently, and interruptions when completing an assignment can be frustrating; you'll also need to install custom software on your computer to complete coursework. Having your own computer will make your life so much easier; but see below before buying your own.

I have my own desktop; do I need a laptop as well? Probably no.

The combination of a personal computer at home and the CSE lab machines will be more than adequate for at least first year. The majority of CSE students, though, will own a personal laptop by the time they graduate often purchased during the course of their degree. Most students find that a laptop is simply far more practical than a desktop because it aids with lecture note-taking, is useful for group work, and comes in handy socially around CSE.

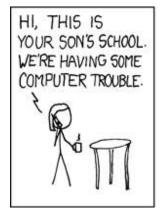**I own an old laptop; should I upgrade to a newer one?** No.

For the first year computing courses, all you really need to use is a web browser, a text editor, a terminal emulator, and a compiler. Unless your laptop is *really* ancient, it will meet these needs.

I'm buying a computer; what should I get? Probably a laptop, but which manufacturer or model to choose is more difficult to answer; ask five people, and you'll receive five different answers.
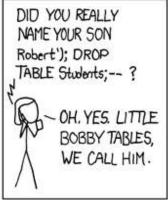
Almost all new laptops are capable of meeting your study needs, so the choice of which laptop to buy depends on a variety of other factors, including what else you'll use your laptop for—just for uni, or for gaming, or for everywhere, etc.—what operating system you prefer, memory, screen and laptop dimensions, weight, connectivity, and more. Figuring out what you want exactly in all of these areas can be hard, so the best advice is to wait a few weeks, months, or perhaps even until the end of session, to determine what you're after. There are lots of places to find cheap laptops, too; some vendors sell refurbished models at reduced prices.
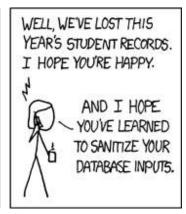
And don't forget that this is general advice, and your circumstances may differ.

■ *Timothy Wiley*

The CSE Student Network

New to CSE? A Student Network mentor can help you find your feet.

The School of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) runs the CSE Student Network to assist you with your transition into life at CSE and UNSW. CSE will assign a mentor to you, and run group events. The mentor will be a second year (or above) student.

This program is not academic—the mentors will not help you with assignments, etc. But they *will* help you find your way around UNSW, give advice on opportunities, and help you form a social network. It's aimed at new undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students.

You must register to participate:
www.csesoc.unsw.edu.au/student-network/mentees

The Road to Your Future

CSESoc's First Year Camp beckons!

Let's face it.

Coming into University is difficult. You have to use your brain to get good marks, and use your feet to get up the Main Walkway. It's a time of procrastination, spurred on by new friends and new experiences. But let's leave that difficulty behind—if only for one dreamy weekend.

The Computer Science and Engineering Society (CSESoc) wants to take you—yes, you!—away to a magical remote tropical island for a weekend, to relax, drink from coconuts and meet fellow students. Come with us to a paradise filled with new friends, loads of fun and games as well as more activities than you can poke a (bamboo) stick at.

Trivia nights, dance parties, scavenger hunts and more fun await you at our tropical sojourn. You'll be relaxed and in touch with your inner self in no time at all.

Following your trip, you'll return to uni calm and relaxed, with plenty of new friends to help you keep the good vibes going during the year and the rest of your time at UNSW. It's a once in a lifetime experience you don't want to miss out on.

We're looking forward to seeing you at our tropical paradise…

www.csesoc.unsw.edu.au/first-year-camp

When Friday, 20th March — Sunday, 22nd March (the end of week 3)

Where Wombaroo Adventure Centre; travelling by coach from UNSW

Theme Tropical

Cost Arc members, $70; non-Arc members, $80; you can deposit $10 to secure your place. Before 4th March, enjoy a $10 Early Bird discount.

Included Food! Accomodation! Transport! An *exclusive* CSESoc t-shirt! And a weekend of fun activities!

■ *Steven Strijakov* ■ *Jake Bloom*

CSE Revue

Sketch comedy, dance, music, tech, and a whole lot of fun!

Whether you're a new student wondering what there is to do at uni outside of class, or an old soul looking for something different to experience—never fear; CSE Revue is here! CSE Revue is a live sketch comedy show, entirely created, produced, and performed by students from the society. The show might be held during September, but putting together an entertaining show begins now!

Getting involved with CSE Revue is an opportunity to share your talents and discover ones you didn't know you had. You'll learn new skills, make lots of new friends, and above all, have an amazing time!

The society has a wide variety of teams to get involved in: there's *Cast*, for those who are interested in acting, singing, dancing, or just being on stage—no prior experience necessary; we'll teach you everything! For those with musical inclinations, the show has a live *Band*. The *Tech* team makes the show happen from backstage, running the stage, lighting, sound, and building sets and props. The *Costumes/Makeup* team ensures the actors look awesome on show nights.

Of course, there wouldn't be a show without content: head to the *Scripts* team, bring your creativity, and try your hand at writing; if you're interested in filming and special effects, the *VFX* team shoots and makes videos. And for the visually artistic, there's the *Design* team, which creates cool-looking posters and merchandise.

All the teams vary in the time commitment required: the Cast and Tech teams require the greatest commitment, while other teams are less involved, and become more active at different times of the year.

So, if you're looking for something more casual and fun, try one of the teams: the *Social* team organises all the fun events that happen throughout the year; the *Wellbeing* team is all about food and ensuring cast and crew are fed during show—a very important task, as you can imagine! The *Front of House* team takes care of the audience on show nights; the *Publications and Promotions* team work on getting word out and marketing the show on campus. And, last but not least, for those who want to apply their coding skills, the *Webmin* team is responsible for running the society's website and servers.

You can join more than one team, depending on your interests. No prior experience is required! We're looking for people with enthusiasm and dedication.

CSE Revue is open to students from all faculties. Get your friends involved in a fantastic show and experience! To find out more, drop by our O-Week stall in the Quad and say hello, or visit our website at www.cserevue.org.au!

■ *CSE Revue Producers*

Don't forget to check out O-Week Revue *at the Quad Main Stage, 24 Feb 2:30–3:30p, and again, 26 Feb 3:30–4:30p.*

Recommended Bookmarks

The Beta team offers some useful bookmarks that every CSE student should have

CSE

Taggi `taggi.cse.unsw.edu.au`

Taggi is a comprehensive FAQ for anything and everything related to CSE systems and resources. If you have a question, check out Taggi before posting on the forums, or emailing Student Support.

CSE Control Panel `status.cse.unsw.edu.au/Control_-Panel`

Need to configure or check something on your CSE account? The Control Panel lets you check your account options including mailing lists, disk quotas, and more.

Rectangles `mahler.cse.unsw.edu.au/rectangles`

Having trouble building your timetable? There are a whole family of tools to help, all built by CSE students, which allow you to pick your courses, select some options (like regular lunch breaks or days off), and generates a set of valid timetables. Rectangles is one of the more popular ones, along with Octangles, Bojangles, and Circles.

CSE Forums `cgi.cse.unsw.edu.au/~forums/support`

Forums just for CSE students and staff. Ask questions, get help or advice, or just have a chat.

myCSE `my.cse.unsw.edu.au`

For honours students, postgraduate students, and staff, you can manage your profiles, book rooms, and manage thesis submissions.

Give Online `cgi.cse.unsw.edu.au/~give/Student/sturec.php`

Log in here, pick a session, pick a course, and find out your CSE course marks.

Technology News

The Verge `www.theverge.com`

Breaking technology news coverage, product information and reviews, and community content.

TechCrunch `www.techcrunch.com`

Breaking technology news coverage, product information and reviews, and community content.

TED `www.ted.com`

Technology, Education, Design: a non-profit devoted to ideas worth spreading, and renowned for their annual conferences.

Webcomics

xkcd `xkcd.com`
Piled Higher and Deeper `phdcomics.com`
Geek and Poke `geekandpoke.typepad.com`
Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal `smbc-comics.com`
The Oatmeal `theoatmeal.com`
Alice Grove `alicegrove.com`

■ *the CSESoc βeta team*

This Edition of βeta Sponsored By...