

For Prospective Students

Q: What does it cost to go to SJSU?

A: The most current information is on the [bursar's web page](#).

Q: I work during the day. Can I obtain the MSCS degree while working?

A: We try to offer graduate courses in the late afternoons and evenings or early in the morning. Occasionally, you may have to take a course during the day; hopefully your employer will help by allowing you to flex your schedule. You have up to 7 years (!) to finish the degree, although we naturally don't recommend that you actually take that long. Many of our students are professionals who obtain the MS degree while working full-time.

Q: I have been in California for X months/years. Am I entitled to in-state tuition?

A: Please check the [web-based SJSU Catalog](#) for more information.

Q: I don't have a degree in computer science, can I be admitted?

A: If your degree is in a related discipline (such as Information Systems), and there is space in the program, you may be admitted conditionally, with a few extra prerequisite course requirements. If your degree is in an unrelated field, and there is space in the program, you may be asked to complete most or all undergraduate CS core courses.

Q: I am an international student. Is there additional information available?

A: The [International Programs and Student Services](#).

Q: What form of financial assistance is available from the department?

A: Unfortunately, financial assistance is very limited. The department does not offer full scholarships or tuition waivers. A very limited number of teaching associate, grader and lab monitor positions are available. However, these positions are not usually open to incoming students. The salary for these positions is not high, and you should not rely on them for financial support.

Q: What is "Open University"?

A: "Open University," or "Continuing Education" at SJSU allows individuals that are not registered in a degree program to take university courses. There are a number of restrictions.

- There must be space available in the course after all degree program students have registered.
- The instructor must agree to admit the student.
- The student must fulfill all prerequisites to the course.

- At most 6 units of these courses can be transferred into the MSCS degree program. You will need to have the transfer approved by the graduate coordinator.
- Open University is intended for students who want to take a small number of courses outside a degree program. It is not intended to provide courses that count towards a degree program.

Q: Should I apply to Computer Science or Software Engineering?

A: You should apply to the department that best fits with your interests and aspirations. You may find the following definitions of Computer Science and Software Engineering helpful for your decision-making process. These definitions are from the [Joint ACM/IEEE Computing Curricula 2005 Overview Report](#) and are reproduced in their entirety.

Computer science spans a wide range, from its theoretical and algorithmic foundations to cutting-edge developments in robotics, computer vision, intelligent systems, bioinformatics, and other exciting areas. We can think of the work of computer scientists as falling into three categories.

They design and implement software. Computer scientists take on challenging programming jobs. They also supervise other programmers, keeping them aware of new approaches.

They devise new ways to use computers. Progress in the CS areas of networking, database, and human-computer-interface enabled the development of the World Wide Web. Now CS researchers are working with scientists from other fields to make robots become practical and intelligent aides, to use databases to create new knowledge, and to use computers to help decipher the secrets of our DNA.

They develop effective ways to solve computing problems. For example, computer scientists develop the best possible ways to store information in databases, send data over networks, and display complex images. Their theoretical background allows them to determine the best performance possible, and their study of algorithms helps them to develop new approaches that provide better performance. Computer science spans the range from theory through programming. Curricula that reflect this breadth are sometimes criticized for failing to prepare graduates for specific jobs. While other disciplines may produce graduates with more immediately relevant job-related skills, computer science offers a comprehensive foundation that permits graduates to adapt to new technologies and new ideas.

Software engineering is the discipline of developing and maintaining software systems that behave reliably and efficiently, are affordable to develop and maintain, and satisfy all the requirements that customers have defined for them. This reflects its origins as outlined in Section 2.2.2. More recently, it has evolved in response to factors such as the growing impact of large and expensive software systems in a wide range of situations and the increased importance of software in safety-critical applications. Software engineering is different in character from other engineering disciplines due to both the intangible nature of software and the discontinuous nature of software operation. It seeks to integrate the principles of mathematics and computer science with the engineering practices developed for tangible, physical artifacts. Prospective students can expect to see software engineering presented in two contexts.

Degree programs in computer science offer one or more software engineering courses as elements of the CS curriculum. Some offer a multi-course concentration in software engineering within CS.

A number of institutions offer a software engineering degree program.

Degree programs in computer science and in software engineering have many courses in common. Software engineering students learn more about software reliability and maintenance and focus more on techniques for developing and maintaining software that is correct from its inception. While CS students are likely to have heard of the importance of such techniques, the engineering knowledge and experience provided in SE programs go beyond what CS programs can provide. The importance of this fact is so great that one of the recommendations of the SE report is that, during their program of study, students of SE should participate in the development of software to be used in earnest by others. SE students learn how to assess customer needs and develop usable software that meets those needs. Knowing how to provide genuinely useful and usable software is of paramount importance.

In the workplace, the term software engineer is a job label. There is no standard definition for this term when used in a job description. Its meaning varies widely among employers. It can be a title equivalent to computer programmer or a title for someone who manages a large, complex, and/or safety-critical software project. The layman must be mindful not confuse the discipline of software engineering with the ambiguous use of the term software engineer as used in employment advertisements and job titles.

Q: What are the application deadlines?

A: Please see [Admission Deadlines](#) for up-to-date information about deadlines.

Q: Do you accept incomplete applications?

A: International applicants have a month after the application deadline to submit letters of recommendations.

Q: Can you mail me the application materials?

A: No. You must apply to the university through the online web site (<http://www.csumentor.edu>). If you cannot apply on line due to a slow connection, then write to the Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations Office, explain why you cannot apply on line, and ask for a "paper application form." .

Q: What is the Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations office?

A: The [Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations](#) office administers all graduate admissions. It checks that your applications fulfill the minimum university criteria for admission. It checks your transcripts, degree certificates, TOEFL scores, visa status, and financial information. Once Graduate Admissions is satisfied that you are qualified to join the university, then it forwards your file to the department. In the CS department, we check your qualifications for the master's program in computer science. Graduate Admissions determines if you can be admitted to the University; if you are, then the Computer Science Department decides whether to admit you to the MSCS program.

Q: Where should I mail my application materials?

A: The application fee, official transcripts, degree certificates, TOEFL scores, visa and financial information, all go to [Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations](#) office.

Q: What are the application fees?

A: Please visit the [Prospective Students](#) page for the current university application fees.

Q: Can you look over my application before I submit it?

A: Sorry—I can't help you with putting together your application. Simply submit your application and supply the requested information. If we have questions after receiving your application, we will contact you. It is important that you supply a current email address for that purpose.

Q : I need to know NOW whether you will accept me later, so that I can decide whether I should try applying at a different department or university.

A: Unfortunately, we cannot give you a guarantee now that we will admit you later. It is always a good idea to apply at more than one university.

Q : I fulfill all requirements for admission. Am I guaranteed to be accepted?

A: Unfortunately, no. When there are more qualified applicants than we have space available in the program, we offer admission to those whom we consider the most promising applicants, until all of the available space is filled.

Q : Should I provide letters of recommendation?

A: It is strongly recommended.

Q : Where should letters of recommendation be mailed?

A: Either include them, in sealed envelopes, with the documents that you send to the Graduate Admissions office, or, if your recommenders mail them directly, ask that they be mailed to the CS department and not the Graduate Admissions office. The mailing address is:

Graduate Coordinator
Department of Computer Science
San Jose State University
One Washington Square San Jose, CA 95192-0249

Q : Is there a special form for recommendation letters?

A: Letters must be on university or company stationery and sealed in university or company envelopes.

There is no special form. Please tell your recommenders to address the following questions:

How long has the recommender known you, and in what capacity?

How does the recommender rate your computer science achievements? Compared to what pool?

What specific achievements in computer science did the recommender observe?

Q : How can I request a confidential letter of recommendation?

A: U.S. law states that you have access to all records in your student file unless you have explicitly waived this right. Recommenders may be more inclined to write candid letters, and those letters may be given more credence, if you do so. In order to waive your right to see your recommendation letters, follow these steps.

Write a letter to the person providing you the letter of recommendation. Include these sentences: "I am asking you to write a letter of recommendation on my behalf and to send it to the Graduate Coordinator, Department of Computer Science, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA 95192-0249. I understand that, under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), I have the right to see this letter of recommendation. I hereby waive my right of access under FERPA with respect to this letter of recommendation." Sign and date the letter.

Write a letter to "Graduate Coordinator, Department of Computer Science, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA 95192-0249.". Include these sentences: "I have asked X, Y, and Z to write letters of recommendation on my behalf to support my application for the W term. I understand that, under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), I have the right to see these letters of recommendation. I hereby waive my right of access under FERPA with respect to these letters of recommendation." Sign and date the letter.

Q: My BSCS degree is older than 7 years. Can I still apply for the MSCS program?

A: Yes, but there is the possibility that you might only be admitted with the condition that you take some refresher courses.

Q : What TOEFL and GRE scores do I need to have to be accepted?

A: If you are an international student, you need a TOEFL score of 550 (paper)/213 (computer). This is a requirement of Graduate Admissions. For the GRE test, there are no hard cut-offs. We use the scores to compare and rank candidates.

Q : What is the status of my application?

A: The department does not give out status information. You can check your status online at [MySJSU](#), using the user ID and password in your confirmation email.

Q : Did you recently change the admission requirements?

A: Admission to the MSCS program is a competitive process. We continually monitor the number of applicants and the number of spaces in the program. We periodically revise our guidelines to give students accurate guidance for submitting successful applications.

Q : What are my chances of being admitted?

A: Please note that I cannot predict your "chances" of being admitted to the program. However, you may find the following guidelines helpful. We are looking for students with a recent BSCS or a related degree. If you meet these criteria, we would like to encourage you to apply. If you have a degree in another computer or information technology related discipline, and we have space in the program, we may admit you conditionally and ask you to enroll in preparatory classes.

Q: I took college courses in (C|C++|Java|Cobol|Perl|Unix|Oracle) programming. Do you consider these courses when evaluating my computer science background?

A: No.

Q : I took certification courses in (Novell|Unix|NT) system administration. Can I use them instead of college courses as course equivalencies?

A: No.

Q : What is a typical set of computer science courses that you might expect of an applicant?

A: Here are some typical courses. This is not a complete list, but it should give you a flavor of the kind of courses that are typically a part of a BSCS degree.

Data Structures
Computer Architecture
Operating Systems
Formal Languages
Computability Theory
Software Engineering
Computer Graphics
Graphical User Interface Programming
Object-Oriented Programming
OO Analysis and Design
Programming Language Design Principles
Functional Programming
Compiler Design
Analysis of Algorithms
Artificial Intelligence
Data Base Management Systems
Computer Networks
Parallel Processing
Information Theory

Coding Theory
Cryptography and Computer Security
Robotics

A typical BSCS program will expect students to complete about 12 junior/senior level CS courses (i.e. not counting introduction to programming).

Q : Why are you requiring all this coursework? I am an experienced software engineer and shouldn't have to take these academic prerequisites.

A: You don't need a master's degree to have a successful career in the computer industry. A master's degree is an academic endeavor for those who are interested in the fundamental principles of computer science. We believe that an academic undergraduate background is an appropriate prerequisite for the master's program.

Q : I am self-taught in computer science, and I don't want to take a lot of undergraduate courses that repeat what I already know. Is there another way to prove my knowledge in computer science?

A: Unfortunately, with the demise of the GRE CS Subject Test, there no longer is an easy way of demonstrating your self-taught knowledge. You may want to take several CS courses through open university at SJSU and get letters of recommendation from your professors.

Q : I already took some graduate level computer science courses at another institution or through SJSU's Open University. Can I transfer them into the SJSU MSCS program once I am admitted?

A: Yes, but there are three restrictions:

You can transfer at most 6 units (2 courses)

These courses must not have counted towards any prior degree ("no double dipping")

The courses must be less than 7 years old.

Q : I concluded that I need to take quite a few courses to prepare myself for admission to the MSCS program. Can I be conditionally admitted and take the courses as an MSCS student?

A: We may admit students on a conditional basis if the number of fully qualified applicants is less than the available space in the CS program.

Q : I was accepted with a condition, but I don't like the condition. Can I negotiate to have it waived or changed?

A: No. The condition is part of our admission offer to you. This is our final offer, and it is not subject to negotiation. If you do not want to fulfill the condition, or you do not think that you are able to, then you should not accept our offer of conditional admission.

Q : I will be completing my undergraduate degree in the same semester in which I submit an application. Is that ok?

A: Be sure to clearly indicate that you expect to earn your BS in the current semester. Completing the degree will be a condition for admission. Note that the date that the degree is conferred must be before the first day of classes in the graduate program.

Q : I do not have a 4-year Bachelor degree. Can I be admitted to the MSCS program?

A: No, a 4-year Bachelor degree is a minimum requirement for admission to the graduate school.

Q : I have a 3-year degree from another country. Can I be admitted to the MSCS program?

A: No, a 4-year Bachelor degree is a minimum requirement for admission to the graduate school. However, some students with a 3-year degree have gone on to do one or two more years of post baccalaureate work in computer science. These applicants will be handled on a case by case basis.

Q : Can I use work experience to fulfill some of the entrance requirements?

A: No, we do not accept experience in the workplace as a substitute for academic requirements.

Q: The California State University policy states that in unusual cases, the department may make exceptions to the 4-year Bachelor degree requirement. Does your department make these exceptions?

A: No.

Q: My application was rejected, but I disagree. Can I appeal?

A: No.

Q: My application was rejected. Can I find out why?

A: No. We rank applications, and pick the highest ranking ones. For privacy reasons, it is not possible for you to compare your application against others.

If you were not accepted, then that does not mean that we find you unqualified. It usually means that we have had more applicants than we were able to accommodate and, in our opinion, you did not rank among the top ones.

Q: My application was rejected. Can I join the program on a part-time or conditional basis?

A: No. There is no separate part-time program. If we had been able to accept you on a conditional basis, then we would have done so. If your application was rejected, the only way you might be admitted is to reapply.

Q: My application was rejected by the Graduate Admissions office. Can you intervene on my behalf?

A: No. The Graduate Admissions office determines whether you fulfill the minimum entrance requirements to join a graduate program at San Jose State University. If the Graduate Admissions office determines that you did not meet those requirements, or that you did not submit required documents in a timely manner, the CS department cannot intervene.

Q: My application for a previous semester was rejected, but I would like to be reconsidered for the next semester. Can I submit additional materials without reapplying?

A: No. Your previous application is no longer active. You need to reapply. The department will make an effort to keep letters of recommendations for a semester, so you may not need to resubmit these. The Graduate Admissions office may be able to locate your old transcripts. Check with both offices to see if your old materials are still available.

Q: My application was rejected, and I would like to reapply. What can I do to improve my chances?

A: Here are some suggestions:

Complete an undergraduate CS degree.

Submit letters of recommendation that show exceptional promise in computer science

Submit other evidence of exceptional promise such as publications, open-source software contributions, patents, etc.