UC San Diego Computational Social Sciences M.S. Student Handbook

Revised for the 2024-2025 Academic Year
The policies and procedures here are valid only for Academic Year 2024-2025, and may be modified for future years, and is subject to change prior to the start of the 2024-2025 program.

This handbook is designed to provide a single resource for CSS M.S. students as they move through the program. *Enrollment in the CSS M.S. Core Courses indicates your agreement to all the program policies and procedures outlined in this handbook.*

0 - Introduction

Welcome, CSS M.S. Students,

Although we all come from different backgrounds, disciplines, and areas of focus, we are united in our interest in fundamentally human and social questions, explored using statistical, analytical, and computational methods. The CSS M.S. program is designed to provide both an academic home and a useful course of study for those of us who view our field through an analytical and computational lens. Our goal is to balance exposure to the many disciplines which make up the School of Social Sciences at UCSD with rigorous training with the tools, techniques, and methods which will help you to do great work. We hope that your experience in our program will leave you prepared both to do great work and to keep asking meaningful questions, whether your path after our program leads into academia, public service, industry, or anywhere else.

There are three main components to the program, which we describe in more depth in this handbook. First is the CSS Bootcamp, meant to bring students up to speed with the kinds of software, analysis, techniques, and computing knowledge needed to be successful in our courses on campus. Second are our courses, both the CSS Core and our elective courses chosen from classes around the School of Social Sciences, designed to give you continued growth in your ability to do computational work, while letting you engage with the social sciences in greater depth. Finally, we have the Capstone project, where you'll connect with people doing computational social science, on campus, in industry, or elsewhere, and you'll dive deep on a year-long project which will give you a showpiece for your portfolio, and the work you do will make a real difference for the people you work with.

Most importantly, you'll become a part of our academic community here at UCSD. One of the best parts of the CSS program is our community, spread across departments and disciplines. During your time here, you'll hear from folks from across the social science and data science world, and you'll both engage with and bring your own unique background knowledge to a huge variety of tasks and ideas. Although you're here in part to learn from us and from each other, as graduate students, we know you all bring a great deal to the table, and we look forward to getting to know you all, and to seeing the unique approaches you'll take within the program.

So, welcome to UCSD Computational Social Science, and we look forward to seeing you on campus.

Will Styler
Director of the UCSD CSS Program

1 - General Information

Email
Students will be assigned an @ucsd.edu email address at the start of the program. This address should be checked regularly, and used for all correspondence associated with the CSS M.S. program.

[Academic and Administrative Calendar](#)
The CSS Program follows the three-quarter system at UC San Diego. To stay informed about crucial dates throughout the academic year, such as the beginning and conclusion of each quarter, holidays, and breaks, students should regularly consult the academic and administrative calendar.

Health Insurance
Each quarter that you enroll in classes at UC San Diego, your student billing account is automatically charged the fee for the [UC Student Health Insurance Plan](#). If you are already covered by another insurance plan and wish to opt out of UC SHIP and have the UC SHIP fee waived, you must apply for a [Health Fee Waiver](#) by the timelines stated on the foregoing website.

Modality
This is a synchronous, in-person, full-time on-campus program. Students will be expected to be taking classes in person on the UCSD campus in La Jolla during all academic periods (e.g. Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring quarters). Although accommodations can be made for short periods with good cause (e.g. student illness or public health crisis), and individual courses may have their own policies, students should not expect to be able to complete any portion of the program remotely or asynchronously. If you cannot join us on the campus for the entirety of the program, including the bootcamp, you'll need to apply in a different year when you can.

Housing
UC San Diego is on its way to having the greatest capacity graduate housing of any campus in the nation.   Even so, wait times for housing can be formidable. Admitted students who will be seeking [on-campus housing](#) are strongly encouraged to create an application for housing as early as possible, after accepting their official admissions offer. Students can also find affordable off-campus housing options through UCSD's [off-campus housing website](#).

Transportation
There are a number of options to commute to and from campus. A summary of information is available on the [transportation site](#) and includes transit, ride-share, cycling, and driving and parking, including costs of permits. All students who park on campus will be required to purchase a [parking permit](#). Be aware that many parking lots on campus tend to fill early in the day, so when driving and parking, it is advisable to allow extra time (15-20 mins) for these purposes if arriving on campus after 8 am.

Student Campus Cards

The Graduate Coordinator will reach out to you in the summer to request that you submit your photo for your student ID card. Our program will work with the UCSD Campus Card Office to print your cards and we will distribute student ID cards on the first day of classes. You do not need to visit the Campus Card Office to request your ID.

Security

Thefts on campus can unfortunately occur. Do not leave your belongings unattended, even for a short time. When you leave a room for any reason, LOCK THE DOOR. Most buildings are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you work at night please be sure to always be aware of your surroundings and of who else is on the floor. Safety escort service on campus is available by calling the Campus Police at extension 49255 (4WALK) - (858)-534-9255.

[Smoke Free UCSD](#)

UC San Diego, along with all of the UC campuses, are Smoke and Tobacco-Free. This will contribute to a healthy campus environment for all students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

1.1 - Required Materials, Technology, and Tools

Textbooks and Materials

Although individual classes which are a part of your degree program may require you to purchase materials and/or textbooks, the program itself has no required purchases, and the bootcamp requires no paid materials.

Computers and Technology

You will need to have access to a general-purpose computer to complete the program. We don't recommend a specific brand or model, but here are a few considerations:
- **You will need a general-purpose computer running MacOS, Linux, or Windows.**
  - You will not be able to complete the program using a 'walled garden' or 'App Store' device like a smartphone, an Android or iOS tablet (e.g. an iPad or Galaxy Tablet), or a Chromebook.
  - **Your life will be slightly easier if you're using a device running MacOS (e.g. an Apple computer) or Linux**, due to easier access to unix command line utilities, python, and package management software, although experienced Windows users should be able to complete everything they need to using WSL (Windows Subsystem for Linux)

- - **You should consider using Linux for this program only if you're already familiar with Linux**, as it comes with considerable complexities, and you want to focus on learning materials, rather than learning Linux system administration.
- **You'll need a computer with you in the classroom.** You'll be able to use any device you'd like on your own time, but we don't have the facilities to allow you to bring your own desktop, nor will we be in a 'computer lab' with fixed machines.
  - You'll also want to bring a power adapter for the long days of the bootcamp
- **Computer performance requirements are flexible,** and there's not a specific level of performance required beyond your average modern laptop.
  - Your current laptop purchased in the last 3-4 years, if working well, will likely suffice
  - As a quick guideline for new purchases, you'll want to make sure you have at least four CPU cores, 16GB of RAM and 256GB of free drive space. If you will be unable to upgrade the machine after purchase (i.e. Apple computers), you should consider at least 512GB of storage for futureproofing, with 1TB if possible.
  - GPUs are useful for some kinds of computing, but discrete laptop-based GPUs are seldom sufficient, and often force other compromises (e.g. weight, cost), so we recommend students simply use other, network-based computing resources for GPU-based computing (e.g. CoLab, Datahub, SSRDE)
  - x86 or ARM (e.g. Apple M-series chips) are both fine
- **You'll want method(s) for external backup.** This could be a service (e.g. BackBlaze) or an external hard drive to use with local backup software
  - This isn't a hard requirement, but data loss can be devastating, and planning to avoid it is wise
  - Consider employing a [3-2-1 Backup Strategy](#)
- **Remember that many companies offer educational pricing**. This can often include a substantial discount, or additional free hardware.
  - Particularly from Apple, also consider direct-from-Apple refurbished products, which are often substantially discounted with the same warranty and support.

If this technology requirement represents a substantial hardship for you, please contact the CSS advising team and we can discuss ways to address this.

2 - Advising and Support

Students in need of advising or support should contact the [CSS Advising Team](#) at css-advising-g@ucsd.edu as their first place of contact. From here, problems can be resolved directly, or forwarded to the necessary people for resolution.

Students interested in applying to industry, government, or NGO positions are encouraged to meet with our advising staff as well as faculty working in relevant areas, to discuss possible paths forward within industry, work on their resume and application materials, and more. UCSD Career Services (https://career.ucsd.edu/) is also available to our students to help you plan a path ahead and hone your image and skills.

Students on an academic path are encouraged to talk with their capstone faculty advisor (once assigned), a CSS-affiliated faculty member in their department of interest (e.g. an economics-minded student might meet with a CSS faculty member in economics), or with the CSS director to get a sense of what Ph.D. program applications might look like and how to proceed from here.

Students will be paired with a Ph.D. Student Mentor, who can answer questions about the university, the area, life as a UCSD student, the Ph.D. application process, and more.

Finally, **if a serious, emergent situation arises which could affect or hinder your academic work and which cannot wait until the next business day**, students should directly email the CSS Director (listed at https://css.ucsd.edu/people/Administration.html, CCing css-advising-g@ucsd.edu).

2.1 - Reaching out for Help

We here at CSS want you to succeed. From the Director, to the Staff and Advisors, to individual faculty, we want nothing more than for you to learn what you need to, complete your degree requirements with great grades, graduate, and find success in the world.

That said, we know that there are many roads to success, and sometimes, life takes us into dark places along the way. Whether this means illness of any kind, family tragedy, personal troubles, financial peril, or countless other difficulties, we understand that things *do* come up, and even in a program as short as ours, we expect that some students will experience problems.

When these difficulties come up, we will do everything within our power to support you (while, of course, still following university policies, being fair to your colleagues, and ensuring that you've truly earned your degree). There exist administrative procedures, within-program petitions, modifications to the expected plan, connections to campus resources, and pointers towards assistance which we can offer which may help you turn a potentially program-ending issue into something much less problematic.

In order for us to help you, though, we need your help. *It is crucial that you let us know about potential issues as soon as you become aware of them*, so that we can start working with you to find the best plans. With every passing week of the quarter, our ability to refund, change policies, or modify your schedule drops. Also, this process often takes time, such that even if you contact us before a campus deadline, the administration might not be able to consider any needed petitions and get decisions back in time to meet that deadline. Considering and resolving student petitions can take anywhere from one to two weeks. Put simply, no matter its nature, a request for help is easier to address sooner rather than later.

It's human nature to hope that your problem 'solves itself' or winds up not being a problem. We also understand that many feel hesitation about sharing their difficulties with others, or bringing them to somebody at the school. We also understand that you may want privacy, and although you may be asked for documentation for some administrative purposes, we can talk things through with you, no matter what you're able or willing to share, and can offer referrals to confidential services on campus, who may be able help us confirm that you're in need, without sharing all the details.

But the simple fact is that the sooner you let us know what's going on, the faster we'll be able to talk you through your options, and the more likely it is there will be a solution with more benefits than negatives. And, if you're worried about a situation, but it winds up going better than expected, then you get to share the good news, and nothing is lost. But regardless, suffering in silence, or worse still, slowly falling away from the program, can't help, and will hurt.

So, please, **if you find yourself needing help, contact the CSS Advising Staff ASAP** (css-advising-g@ucsd.edu). We can't guarantee a solution to the problem, but we'll do our best, and our best is better when we have more time to work something out.

3 - Admissions and Entering the Program

3.1 - Application Deadlines

There are two deadlines for Application.

- The **Priority Deadline**, which is earlier each year, is the 'Priority' deadline. Students in this application period will have priority for both admission and fellowships, and will be evaluated as a part of the initial round of review.
  - International students in need of a Visa to join us in the US should apply for the 'Priority' deadline to ensure enough time after acceptance to get a Visa for the start of the Bootcamp in early July.
- The **Secondary Deadline** is meant for students needing a bit more time to put together their application, and gives more flexibility. Students applying for the secondary deadline are still eligible for fellowships and admittance, but will be competing against all applicants.

Note also that Priority Applicants who were not offered admission in the first round will be considered alongside applicants for the Secondary Deadline, and thus, it is completely possible that a student could apply at the priority deadline, but only get accepted following the second deadline.

3.2 - CSS Fellowships

All applicants, particularly those submitting by the Priority Deadline, are automatically considered for fellowships from the CSS program during the admissions process. Although these fellowships only defray part of the cost of attendance, they are designed to motivate strong students to join us, or enable attendance by students showing exceptional need. **Students who are awarded fellowships by the admissions committee are ordinarily notified of their award at the same time they are notified of their admission.** Occasionally, additional funds may become available mid-year, at which point eligible students will be informed of next steps.

3.3 - Starting the Program

The program begins on Day One of the Bootcamp (generally the first week of July), and students are expected to be on campus, in person, for the first day of the bootcamp. This is an in-person program, so although we do our best to accommodate circumstances outside of students' control, you should not anticipate being able to complete any portion of the bootcamp remotely. Students with circumstances that would prevent them from joining the program in person on the First day of the Bootcamp should defer their acceptance, or re-apply in a future year when they can.

3.4 - Deferral of Admission

We understand that sometimes your circumstances change between application and admission. In cases of circumstances beyond your control, you may request to defer your acceptance to the following year (e.g., a student admitted in Winter 2023 for a July 2023 start date could choose to start the program in 2024 instead). There are a few important provisos:

- **Students may only defer admission for a single year.** A student admitted for Summer 2023 could request to defer and start in Summer 2024, at the latest.
- **Deferring students who were offered a CSS fellowship will not retain their fellowships, but will be re-evaluated for a new CSS fellowship in the following year.** Deferring students will be considered for fellowships among the priority applicants in the following year. Although fellowship-earning students are likely to stand out among any candidate pool, we are unable to 'put aside' the funding for the following year.
- **Deferring students should contact the CSS Advising Team in the following November if they intend to re-join the program.** At this point, you'll be advised about the process and put up for fellowship consideration.
- **Deferring students unable to join the program in the following year are welcome to apply again in future years.** There are no hard feelings here, and if you're unable to join in the following year even after deferral, you're encouraged to re-apply when your circumstances change.

4 - Coursework

This program will require 14 courses (55 units), consisting of our core courses, and three additional elective courses.

Core Courses
- CSS 201S and CSS202S (16 units total) - See the CSS Bootcamp section below
- CSS 204 (6 units) - Statistical Computing and Inference from Data I
- CSS 205 (4 units) - Statistical Computing and Inference from Data II
- CSS 206 (4 units) - Machine Learning for Social Sciences
- CSS 209 (1 unit per quarter) - See 'Colloquium Series' below
- CSS 296 - See 'Capstone Program' below
    - Taken for 2 units in Fall, and 4 units in both winter and spring

Elective Courses
In addition to the core courses, students will also take three elective courses, one per quarter, from the list chosen by the CSS Educational Committee each year according to the courses being offered. Due to variations in the scheduling and offering of courses, these electives will vary from quarter to quarter, and year to year. Please keep an eye on your inbox for updated lists of electives for upcoming quarters. Elective options for each quarter will be sent to students shortly after the schedule of classes is published for that specific quarter.

Elective Course Petitions

If a course being offered within the School of Social Sciences is not included in our elective list, but you think it should be, you may seek approval from the CSS Educational Committee to substitute your chosen course for one of our electives, although this is a more difficult process and is not guaranteed. For your petition to be considered, all of the following must be true:

1) The course must include computational elements, to an extent comparable to or exceeding the approved elective courses on offer
2) The course must be listed in the School of Social Sciences
3) The petition must be submitted at least one month before the start of the term
4) The course must have open spaces (e.g. no waitlist) at the time of submission of the petition, or the student must show evidence that they have contacted the instructor and would be granted entry.
5) The student meets the prerequisites for the class, or has plausible reason to believe that they'd be granted an EASy request to join the course (e.g. following discussion with the instructor).
6) If the student is the only person from CSS planning to take the course, the student has not previously petitioned for a new elective as a single student during their time in the program

7) If the enrollment period has begun, students must already be enrolled in a CSS elective. If your petition is approved and you are enrolled in your petitioned class, your original CSS elective enrollment can then be dropped.

Note that due to campus-level constraints on our ability to seat students in electives, these petitions are more likely to be accepted when several students from your cohort are petitioning to join the same class. Single-student petitions for a new elective choice are generally granted once per student per M.S. program. So, if you've got your eye on another class as an elective, check if any of your colleagues would also be interested (although courses may not have the capacity for large numbers of additional students, so please keep that in mind as well).

Please contact the CSS Advising Team at least one month before the quarter is scheduled to start, and we can discuss the process of petitioning the CSS educational committee for the course to count as a CSS elective course. Note also that you may only submit one elective petition in a given quarter. Irrespective of the outcome of the petition review, subsequent elective petitions for that quarter will not be considered.

If your petition is approved by the educational committee, you are responsible for enrolling in the course on your own. If you do not meet the prerequisites for the course, you will be required to submit an EASy request to obtain departmental approval. Please note that EASy request approval is up to the discretion of the department housing the course, and is not guaranteed. Undergraduate courses in high demand may not be reviewed until undergraduate enrollment has concluded.

Additional Coursework
We have designed the Computational Social Science M.S. curriculum to be a complete curriculum, and the required courses above already constitute a full load. Due to the demanding nature of the CSS curriculum, as well as constraints placed on the program, we do not recommend that CSS students enroll in additional courses beyond the core and elective courses required each quarter (excepting any administratively required courses, e.g. for teaching or research assistants). Also, enrollment in additional courses will raise the cost of your degree program, as you'll be expected to pay the unit fees associated with all course registrations, and they will not count towards your degree program or requirements.

5 - Course Registration

5.1 - Enrollment Overview

During Fall, Winter and Spring quarters, students must be registered for all core courses offered in that quarter alongside one elective course. Students should refer to the UC San Diego Enrollment and Registration Calendar for important dates and deadlines pertaining to enrollment. Reminders for important dates and deadlines will be sent via email by the CSS advising team.

Prior to registration opening, students will be provided with a list of designated elective courses for the upcoming quarter. Once registration opens, **students are responsible for registering for both their chosen elective, and their required core courses** (the CSS bootcamp 201/202 over summer, and one of 204, 205 and 206, along with 209 and the 296 Capstone under their faculty advisor during the year). **Students are not guaranteed spots in their elective courses as their enrollment is outside of our control, so students are encouraged to register as soon as registration opens.** Some elective courses will have prerequisites and restrictions for enrollment, for which students must submit an Enrollment Authorization System (EASy) request to be granted permission to enroll or join the waitlist for the course (see section 5.2).

Students who are waitlisted for an elective course may enroll in an additional elective as a 'backup' course, with the understanding that if they 'roll in' to their preferred course, they must drop the 'backup' course themselves by Friday of Week 2 of the quarter in question to receive a full refund for units dropped (and failing to do so will result in the student having to pay the additional fees for the additional course). And, as before, if you do not meet the prerequisites requirements for the course, you will be required to submit an EASy request to obtain departmental approval.5.2 - Enrollment Authorization System (EASy) Requests
It is important to know that some elective courses will have prerequisites or restrictions which are required to be authorized for enrollment in the class, and CSS students are not automatically guaranteed authorization to enroll in all of the possible elective options on the pre-approved elective lists. Prerequisite and course restriction information for each course is available on the [Schedule of Classes](#) on TritonLink and the [UC San Diego General Catalog](#). Students must submit an EASy request to ask for authorization to enroll in a course with prerequisites and restrictions. You may begin submitting EASy requests after the Schedule of Classes is posted to TritonLink.

To submit an EASy request, follow the steps below after the Schedule of Classes is posted:

- **Step 1**: If the class you wish to enroll in has prerequisites or restrictions, submit your preauthorization request via [Enrollment Authorization System (EASy)](#).
- **Step 2**: In your request, include justification for your request such as the relevant courses you have completed, and communicate that you are a CSS M.S. student seeking to take the course as an elective for your degree program.
- **Step 3**: Upload a PDF file with any additional details supporting your justification for enrolling in the selected course. Ex: unofficial or official transcript or official AP scores.
- **Step 4**: Submit the request.
- **Step 5**: You will receive an email notification once the department has made a decision on your request. In some cases, you may be required to supply additional supporting documents.Please note that each academic department has their own process and policies for EASy requests.

- **Step 6**: If your request is approved, visit [WebReg](#) to enroll or add yourself to the waitlist. **You will not be automatically enrolled.**

Important Notes:

- Each academic department has their own process and policies for handling EASy requests, which cannot be manipulated by CSS.
- For high-demand courses, some departments will begin reviewing EASy requests only after students in their degree programs have all had a chance to enroll.
- It is recommended that students submit EASy requests as soon as the Schedule of Classes is published. You do not have to wait until the enrollment period is active to submit your request.
- You are not required to enroll in a course if your EASy request is approved, so if you are interested in multiple elective courses with prerequisites, you can submit multiple requests.

6 - CSS Bootcamp

The CSS Summer 'Bootcamp' (formally CSS 201S and CSS 202S) is designed to bring students in the CSS M.S. Program up to speed with the kinds of computational, quantitative, statistical, and machine learning methods useful for conducting computational social science. CSS 202S will focus on introducing tools and analytical techniques, whereas many days of CSS 201S will be presented by a variety of different CSS-affiliated faculty and other guests, providing information about the kinds of computational work and methods going on on campus.

The CSS Bootcamp will be conducted on the UCSD Campus, and students will need to be physically present to participate. Because of the intensive nature of the program, students should plan to arrive in San Diego at least one week before the start of the bootcamp to move in, learn the area, and attend to any logistical needs.

Although limited accommodations can be made for missing portions of the bootcamp when forced by factors outside the student's control, if you would be unable to arrive before the start of the CSS Bootcamp, you should apply for a different year, or talk with our advisory team about deferring your acceptance.

The CSS Bootcamp is not optional and must be taken at the start of the program. All students, regardless of background, are required to attend and complete this course satisfactorily in order to take classes in the immediately-following Fall quarter.

7 - Colloquium Series (CSS 209)

All students will be enrolled in and attend our colloquium series (formally "CSS 209 Computational Social Science Research Seminar"), a one unit course which is taken as 'Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory'. This is a weekly seminar which will be hosted either by CSS directly or will involve attending a designated talk or event in another UCSD Department, focusing on research, application, or professionalization in computational approaches to social science.

Students will be given a schedule including the time and location of each colloquium, and will be expected to attend and complete in accordance with CSS 209 course policies, which students will be enrolled in for during Fall, Winter, and Spring.

8 - Capstone Project

As part of the master's program curriculum, all students in the program will complete a three-quarter capstone project (CSS 296, taken for a total of 10 units) that provides students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience working with real data. Students will be assigned a capstone project (taking student preferences into account) and work in groups of up to four either on campus or with an off-campus third party. Capstone placements are not paid, as you are working towards your degree program.

Project proposals are solicited by the CSS administration and interested third parties then submit descriptions of the context, project, and supervisory team involved in completing the project. Although we do our best to identify partners in a variety of areas, industries, and social science fields, we cannot guarantee specific types or areas of projects, as proposals are ultimately submitted by interested third parties. Students may submit recommended capstone hosts to the Director prior to the start of the CSS bootcamp, but again, the choice of whether or not to participate is in the hands of the capstone host, and the program can offer no guarantees about the participation of capstone hosts from year-to-year.

The capstone may take two forms:

1. **An off-campus 'internship' style placement**, where students will be embedded with a local (or remote) company or organization in a mutually beneficial arrangement that allows the student to learn from the environment as well as provide a meaningful contribution to the organization. Students will be assigned to a team, and will be connected with both a project host, and a faculty advisor.
2. **An on-campus faculty project**, where students will work with a faculty member from UCSD on a project of mutual interest, involving computational social science techniques. Students will be assigned to a team of up to four and the faculty project lead will also serve as their advisor.

In either case, the 'project host' refers to the person at the capstone hosting organization who is directly responsible for guiding and supervising students, and 'faculty advisor' refers to the faculty member with whom the student will communicate at UCSD (and in faculty projects, these will be the same person).

8.1 - Capstone Guidelines, Timeline, and Paper Requirements

Please see the UCSD CSS Capstone Guidelines document for a project overview, timeline, expectations, rubric, and more. The document is available at https://savethevowels.org/docs/css_capstone_guide.pdf

8.2 - Capstone Project Student Responsibilities

Because of the outside-of-the-classroom nature of the capstone project, students are expected to take responsibility for their learning and coordinate their work independently, both within the groups and with faculty mentors and project hosts. That said, at the minimum, student teams are expected to…

- Meet weekly with the Capstone host, with the faculty mentor joining once a month
- Meet at least once per month independently with the CSS faculty mentor
- Work on the capstone project for the entirety of the Fall, Winter, and Spring quarters, spending 13-14 hours a week on average across the year (resulting in about 400 hours across the 30 weeks of the project)
- Submit a 'Questions and Methods' document at the end of Fall Quarter
- Submit a full outline of the project at the end of Winter Quarter
- Complete the final paper for the capstone project by the indicated date
- Present their work at the Final Project Presentation event in June
- Inform their faculty advisors in the event that they encounter serious problems or difficulties in their projects

Additionally, students are expected to communicate regularly with their capstone host (at least weekly) and faculty advisor (as scheduled), and to both respond promptly to requests, and to regularly check in and offer status updates. Repeated and regular failure to communicate with the capstone project host and faculty mentor is grounds for an 'Unsatisfactory' grade on the capstone project, which could jeopardize your ability to complete the program.

8.3 - Capstone Troubleshooting

Although we hope that your capstone projects will be straightforward and feature beneficial collaboration, there's a chance that difficulties may arise. Although you are expected to put in a

sincere effort to work with your team members, project host, and faculty mentors, this is a collaborative process, and everybody involved should…

- Attend scheduled meetings whenever possible
- Complete necessary work and provide necessary information in a timely manner
- Communicate regularly and clearly, making expectations and needs clear
- Have reasonable expectations for the project and people involved, and expand or modify the scope of the project only where reasonable and mutually agreed upon
- Provide a safe, supportive and welcoming environment for you to work in, free of discrimination, harassment, and hostility.

In the event that problems arise within your team, first attempt to compassionately resolve the issues on your own within the group, and then, failing that, raise the issue(s) with your faculty advisor who can advise as to the best ways to proceed.

In the event that problems arise with your off-campus capstone host, first attempt to solve the problem with the host directly if you feel comfortable, then raise this issue with your faculty advisor who can help you to strategize, reach out to the hosts directly, or coordinate with CSS leadership to identify a path forward as needed.

In the event that problems arise with your faculty advisor or on-campus capstone host, first attempt to address the problem directly with the mentor or host if you feel comfortable, and failing that, contact the CSS Director directly who can discuss possible strategies for you to proceed, reach out to the faculty mentor, or take other action as needed.

8.4 - Capstone Difficulties

Students are expected to complete the capstone satisfactorily within their first year. Students who receive an unsatisfactory grade for any part of their capstone will be evaluated by the CSS Education committee on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the student's academic performance in the rest of the program as well as any good-cause circumstances beyond their control. This could lead to outright dismissal from the program, being required to repeat the capstone sequence in its entirety with a new project host in the following year at the students' cost, and in unusual cases with extreme extenuating circumstances, other possibilities may be available.

Regardless, your capstone should be your highest priority, and **you should not assume the ability to 'redo' or 'make up' the process without good cause circumstances**. So, if you're struggling or falling behind at any point in your capstone work, please work with your capstone host and the CSS advising team proactively to ensure that you're able to meet the requirements and complete the program.

9 - Requirements Leading to an M.S. in CSS

9.1 - Expected Time to Completion

9.2 - Reduced Course Load

Students are expected to complete the program as outlined above, with a full course load during all quarters. This is both to keep you connected and working with your cohort, and to keep you on track for an on-time graduation. As a result, *we do not allow students to increase the time to completion without good cause resulting from circumstances outside of the student's control.* However, we understand that occasionally medical or extreme personal circumstances may require you to reduce the number of courses taken in a given quarter.

For students who are not in the US on an educational visa (e.g. US citizens or permanent residents), they can communicate these needs to the CSS advising team, who can advise them as to the procedure and consequences of reducing the number of courses taken in a given quarter, and will allow them to petition the CSS administration to change their course plan. *These students do not need to worry about the formal Reduced Course Load process described here, and can just talk to the CSS advising team.*

For international students, though, this process is more complicated, as full time status is required for international students to remain in the US. In order to remain in the US at less-than-full-time load, international students must also apply for an [academic, medical, or final quarter 'Reduced Course Load](#)' or RCL from the International Students & Programs Office (ISPO). RCL's cannot be requested during the summer term since this is your first term at UC San Diego and the summer bootcamp is a requirement of the program.
- An [academic reduced course load](#) may only be requested once during a student's M.S. program, during Fall, Winter, or Spring, due to English language challenges or difficulty adjusting to U.S. teaching methods.
- A [medical reduced course load](#) may be submitted on a quarter-by-quarter basis due to an illness or medical condition affecting the students ability to maintain full-time status. Medical documentation is required to support the request.
- A [final reduced course](#) load may be requested if a student is in their final graduating term and the number of units required to graduate falls below 12 units.

You must first speak with the CSS Advising team to discuss your academic concerns and then ISPO to determine if you are eligible for an RCL. RCL requests must be submitted **2 weeks prior to the drop deadline** to ensure all offices have enough time to review your request.

Please note, submitting an RCL does not guarantee approval and international students cannot drop any courses until their RCL has been approved and receive final authorization from ISPO.

9.3 - Leaves of Absence

We understand that some students may experience *good-cause difficulties* (e.g. family crisis, military deployment, illness, or other difficulties outside the students' control) which disrupt work or prevent students from completing the program on the expected schedule. Although short, within-quarter disruptions can often be accommodated by your instructors and the CSS advising team, we understand that sometimes, you are simply unable to continue in the program as scheduled. In these situations, contact the CSS advising team, and we'll do our best to identify a path forward meeting your specific needs, and a leave of absence may be the only solution.

Leaves of absence (LOAs) are limited to one calendar year (e.g. a person taking a leave of absence in the Winter must re-enter the program in the following winter, rather than in subsequent years), and students must have successfully completed at least one instructional period (Summer, Fall, or Winter) to be eligible for a leave of absence, otherwise they will need to withdraw from the program and apply for readmission at a later date. International students should contact ISPO to better understand the potential [impact of a leave of absence on your visa status](#) (as students are generally required to leave the US during their LOA).

Importantly, because of the year-long CSS capstone and the fact that the core courses all build on one another (e.g. 204 is prerequisite for 205, 205 is prerequisite for 206), **students requesting a leave of absence will be required to re-enter the program in the same quarter of the program (that is, Fall, Winter or Spring) during which they left.** This means that a student requesting an LOA in Fall of 2022 (e.g.) will be asked to return to the program in the following Fall (in this example, Fall 2023), so that they can take the courses they missed in the order expected and restart the capstone process with a new project and cohort. Similarly, a student needing an LOA in Spring (e.g. 2023) will need to return to complete their classes (and capstone research) in the following Spring (e.g. 2024). If tuition and fees differ in this subsequent year, students will be expected to pay the current tuition and fees at the time of re-entry.

Note also that **students taking a leave of absence are unlikely to be able to complete their original capstone project**, as capstone hosts are signing up for a finite project and supervisory period and cannot be reasonably expected to repeat their effort a year later for a returning student. As such, depending on the specifics of the situation and timing of the LOA, students may be asked to join another capstone team in the following year (in the event that they departed in Fall), to conclude the analysis on their own supervised by a faculty mentor (in the event of a mostly-complete project), an alternate faculty-supervised project may be assigned to fulfill the remaining requirements of the CSS capstone, or another solution may be identified at the discretion of CSS administration.

So, although they are a valuable tool for helping students in difficult situations, leaves of absence will cause major disruption for your path through the program and time to completion, will potentially increase the cost of your program (as you will have to pay additional or increased program fees for additional quarters or parts of quarters beyond the initial year), and as such, leaves of absence should be considered a choice of absolute last resort.

9.4 - Requirements for Degree Completion

Division of Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs (GEPA) - Academic Policies
Good Academic Standing Requirement:

Note: The following language was obtained directly from the GEPA website linked above.

- A student must maintain a GPA of 3.0 or above in upper division and graduate course work, have no more than 8 units of F or U, and resolve any outstanding grading problems.
- maintain satisfactory progress toward completion of degree requirements, as defined by the graduate program, the student's faculty advisor, and/or the student's committee (if applicable)
- satisfy examination and other program requirements, as defined by the student's graduate program
- advance to candidacy (if applicable) and complete the degree, within the established time limits specified by the student's graduate program
- comply with conditions set at the time of admission to the student's graduate degree program

Graduate students who are not in good standing for any reason are subject to probation and/or disqualification from further graduate study. Academic disqualification is determined by the Dean of the Division of Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs in consultation with the student's graduate program, and normally relates to: unsatisfactory academic performance, e.g., failure to maintain a grade point average of 3.0 or better; failure to meet criteria of performance; failure to advance to candidacy or complete the degree within established time limits; accumulation of more than eight units of F or U grades; or failure to comply with conditions set at the time of admission to a graduate degree program.

Graduate programs are responsible for monitoring their students' overall progress toward degree. Programs should inform students about the expectations for satisfactory progress through published program descriptions and by written evaluations.

Unit Requirements
This program will require 14 courses (55 units), consisting of our core courses, and three additional elective courses, as described in "Coursework" above. Students must earn either a

'Satisfactory' or a C- or better in each course for it to apply to degree requirements. Additionally, you must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 to complete the program, and all courses towards the M.S. must be taken for a letter grade, with the exception of CSS 209 and CSS 296 which can only be taken S/U.

Bootcamp and Capstone Completion
All students must satisfactorily complete the CSS Bootcamp and receive a passing grade on the Capstone program final paper to be eligible for the M.S. degree.

Comprehensive Exams in CSS Core Courses
Students planning to complete their M.S. in Computational Social Science are required to complete a comprehensive exam via passing three course-hosted comprehensive exam components in the core Computational Social Science courses of CSS 204, CSS 205, and CSS 206. To ensure that the comprehensive exam encompasses each student's comprehensive experience in the program, the CSS 206 course-hosted portion of the comprehensive exam will include integrative questions that require the use of knowledge and techniques acquired from the elective courses.

The comprehensive exam is a practical exam designed to evaluate each student's ability to apply what they have learned. In order to ensure that the exam is relevant and presented in context, it is integrated into host courses. The associated work serves dual purposes, contributing independently to the student's course grade and comprehensive exam score. The exam is supervised by the Computational Social Science Educational Committee, who has ultimate responsibility for the content, evaluation, and administration of the examination. It is in the purview of the Educational Committee to ensure that the comprehensive exam questions reflect and satisfy the learning objectives of the master's program.

The exam material typically takes the form of a specific class assignment or exam, or portion thereof, which has been approved in advance by the Computational Social Science Educational committee. By combining examination components from each of the three core courses, with content and applied knowledge that will be central to all specific applications of computational social science, the comprehensive exam will serve to verify that students graduating from the program have sufficiently mastered these key domains.

Students are required to pass all three portions of the CSS Comprehensive Exam (that is, for CSS 204, CSS 205, and CSS 206). Students are permitted a maximum of (5) five total attempts across all parts of the exam, with no more than (2) two attempts on any given portion. If a student does not pass a portion of the comprehensive exam, the student has the ability to retake a new version of the comprehensive exam portion no sooner than 2 weeks and no later than 1 month after the initial attempt.

9.5 - Lapse of Status

All students in the CSS M.S. Program are expected to be enrolled in the relevant coursework at all times during their year-long degree program. Without prior approval from the CSS administration (e.g. a leave of absence granted for good cause), a student who has not paid for a quarter by the final payment deadline is considered to have withdrawn from the program. In this case, the student's status and candidacy for the degree will lapse, and students will have to re-apply for admission in a future year. International students should contact ISPO to better understand the potential [impact of a lapse of status or leave of absence on your visa status](#).

9.6 - Grade or Degree Appeal Procedure

Although we very much hope that this information won't be necessary, as we do our best to evaluate students in a fair, equitable, and rigorous manner, students who have concerns about a grade or changes to their program status should use the following procedure, although it will naturally vary some on a case-by-case basis. Grade appeals are confidential unless this confidentiality is waived by the student and faculty member(s).

1) **Present your concerns directly to the faculty member(s) involved.** This is often all that it takes, and particularly in cases where one or both parties are missing information, amicable resolution is often possible.
2) If your concerns persist, **contact the CSS Director directly and make an appointment to review the situation.** If warranted in your particular case, either the Director themselves will attempt to adjudicate the case, or if needed, an ad-hoc faculty committee composed of CSS faculty can be empaneled to hear the details and review the case, offering a proposed resolution. This is the final level of appeal for any disagreements over assessments of academic performance.
3) **If you remain unsatisfied with how the situation was resolved,** you may further appeal to the UCSD Dean of Graduate Division (GEPA) in limited circumstances. Graduate students should appeal a course grade or exam result at the GEPA level only after contacting the program director and concluding that process, and *only if they believe (and have evidence that) nonacademic criteria were applied in determining the course or exam grade.* Per the Graduate Division, disagreements over assessment of academic performance are not an appropriate basis for an appeal to the Graduate Dean.

9.7 Core Course Repeat Policy

In the event that a student does not pass a CSS core course, they will need to [submit a petition to GEPA](#) to retake the same core course the following academic school year since it is only offered once per year.

Additionally, students will need to have a conversation with the instructor of the following course to see if the student is eligible to waive the prerequisite (i.e. if a student failed CSS 204 in the Fall they will need to speak to the instructor of CSS 205 since CSS 204 is an enforced prerequisite).

Lastly, the student must submit a written petition to explain why they are competent to take the following core course and what their plan is to successfully complete the core course requirements. It must be reviewed by the educational committee and the instructor of the course.

9.8 Elective Course Repeat Policy

In the event that a student does not pass an elective course with a C- or better, they may be able to retake the course the next time it is offered (although graduate courses are often one-off and seldom repeated). Graduate students must [submit a petition to GEPA](#) and receive approval in advance to repeat a course. If retaking the same elective course, the original grade will still appear on their transcript, and both the original grade and the grade received in the repetition will be used in calculating the student's cumulative GPA. Alternatively, the student may take a different approved CSS elective course to fulfill their degree requirements. If there is a possibility that you will not pass an in-progress elective course, please reach out to CSS Advising so we can help you assess the situation and strategize your enrollment accordingly.

9.9 Course Repetition for International Students

We make every effort to allow all students to re-attempt core or elective courses and complete their degree even when they've not passed a course, particularly if they struggled due to good-cause reasons like documented health or family difficulties. However, for international students, due to visa regulations outside of our control, it may not be possible for you to remain in the US to re-attempt classes, as full time status is required for international students to remain in the US.

In a few specific circumstances, we can help you petition for Reduced Course Load (RCL, see above), but approval of this is not guaranteed, even if you meet requirements. Although we'll work with you to problem-solve (e.g. attempt to find a remote elective course which can be completed while you're outside of the country, or to help you work with ISPO to explore options), there's a very real possibility that international students who fail a class may not be able to complete the program. So, it is absolutely critical that international students who are at risk of not passing a class reach out to CSS Advising as quickly as possible so we can help you to assess the situation.

10 - Financial Aid for Current Students

The CSS M.S. Program is a paid degree program, and being a self-supporting program on campus, has relatively limited resources in terms of student financial aid beyond fellowships offered on program acceptance, but we may be able to help. As such, **students experiencing hardship should reach out to the CSS Advising team ASAP such that we can identify the best ways to help.**

But here are a few resources which may be helpful to our students as they navigate the program.

10.1 - Employment on Campus

The CSS M.S. program has an intensive workload (two graduate classes per quarter with an additional ~14 hours per week of capstone work), and thus, although we acknowledge the necessity for some, we generally discourage students from committing to additional work alongside academic responsibilities, as the last thing you want is to be overcommitted and unable to succeed in your degree program. Students can find on-campus job postings on Handshake; see this FAQ for more information: https://career.ucsd.edu/jobs-experience/student-employment/on-campus/index.html.

10.2 - Teaching Assistantship

Although the same proviso about not overcommitting yourself applies, students who have demonstrated clear excellence in CSS classes may be eligible to seek and apply for Teaching Assistantships. Opportunities for M.S. students to TA are not particularly common, but enterprising students can investigate open Teaching Assistant and other Academic Student Employee positions on the Open Positions page on the Academic Student Employment System: (note: this is an internal campus system and requires campus log-in). Additionally, interested students should inform the CSS advising team, in case opportunities to TA within the CSS program arise whether during the quarter, or perhaps in the following year's bootcamp.

Because we need to fully evaluate student classroom performance in the Fall to authorize TAships, and due to the intense time commitments involved with finalizing capstone projects in the Spring, *CSS M.S. students are only eligible to apply for TAships for the Winter quarter.*

Note that although you may apply for TAships, ultimately, your eligibility to TA must be approved by both the host department and the CSS administration, and approval is contingent upon both your performance in the program and the time and workload requirements of the program.

Important note: Recent changes to TAships and funding on campus have made TA positions much more scarce, expensive, and thus, hard to get for *all* graduate students, not just CSS M.S. students. Although you're welcome to apply to programs, and students who have exceptional background in a subject *and* get very lucky may still be able to get a TAship, in the current climate, *you should not plan on or anticipate getting any TAships during your M.S. program.*

10.3 - Student Loans

For many, student loans can help you to focus on your schooling during the program. A variety of loan types may be available. More information can be found on the [Financial Aid site](#).

10.4 - Immediate Financial Assistance

Students in *immediate* need of financial assistance (e.g. facing food insecurity, housing instability, unable to afford transportation, or faced with an overwhelming short term bill) should contact the [UCSD Basic Needs Hub](#), who can provide food directly, connect students with affordable housing, provide transportation vouchers and a grocery shuttle, and offer immediate short term loans.

[**Limited emergency loan funds**](#) are administered by the Financial Aid and Scholarships Office and are offered in small amounts to help students in critical short-term emergencies. Short-term emergency loans:

- Range in amounts from $500–$1,000
- Can be borrowed once per quarter
- Usually must be repaid within 30 days with a documented source of repayment
- Are subject to a $20 service charge per emergency loan
- Cannot be used to pay registration and tuition fees. Students can utilize the Triton Installment Plan to assist with registration and tuition fees.

Students who are experiencing food insecurity may benefit from the [CalFresh program](#) which is a federal program that provides eligible students with funds to purchase food at grocery stores.

CalFresh is California's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that awards eligible recipients with monthly benefits that can supplement your food budget and help you pay for groceries. CalFresh benefits are loaded onto an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) debit card each month and can be spent at most grocery stores, farmers markets, and some on-campus markets!

The Computational Social Science M.S. program has received the designation of a Local Program that Increases Employability (LPIE) for the purposes of CalFresh eligibility. This means that you can use your enrollment status in our program as qualifying student exemption to the

CalFresh work requirement. If you meet the [remaining CalFresh eligibility requirements](#), including [current income requirements](#), you may be eligible to receive CalFresh benefits to spend on groceries.

The UCSD CalFresh team can provide assistance with applying for CalFresh. We encourage you to follow the steps below to get connected to CalFresh:

Step 1: Learn more about CalFresh via the [website](#) or by filling out the [CalFresh Assistance Form](#).

Step 2: Connect with a CalFresh Outreach Assistant. The UCSD CalFresh Outreach team holds walk-in hours virtually and in-person to help answer your questions and learn about next steps if interested in applying for CalFresh. The UCSD CalFresh Walk-in hours for this quarter can be found on their [website](#).

Step 3: Apply for CalFresh! You can apply for CalFresh with support from the CalFresh Outreach Team through a 1:1 Application Assistance Appointment virtually or in-person, or you can apply independently. To schedule an application assistance appointment with the CalFresh Outreach Team, visit their [website](#).

Need food now? Explore the [on-campus food security programs](#) offered by the [UCSD Basic Needs Center](#), or check out these [off-campus community resources.](#)

11 - Student Conduct Policy

Students in the CSS M.S. program are expected to comport themselves ethically, kindly, and with integrity.

Students are expected to act ethically as Social Scientists by conducting rigorous research, avoiding the misrepresentation or falsification of data, and engaging in analytical best practices where possible to ensure quality of analysis and modeling. Students are also expected to maintain confidentiality of data in contexts where it is required and accord with all guidance and established protocols from institutional review boards (where applicable). Finally, students are asked to act as good members of the scholarly community, citing others' work where relevant, promoting (where possible) the open sharing of data with a mind towards replicability and reproducibility, and archiving their work in widely accessible, open venues.

Students are also expected to act kindly and with courteousness and compassion for others within our program, in their capstone placements, and on campus more broadly, and always abide by the [UCSD Principles of Community](#) and [policy on sexual harrassment](#). Our program is designed to unite people of many backgrounds under a shared spirit of scholarship and enthusiasm for computational social science, and as such, although opinions are welcome, all students should be mindful and respectful of others' positionalities, experiences, and points of

view. Speak with others using respectful and kind language, just as you'd like them to do with you, and focus your discussions on ideas, rather than individuals. Treat your colleagues, instructors, capstone supervisors, and other members of the campus and CSS community with respect and compassion, and do your best to represent our program well. Finally, remember that as we discuss and evaluate conversations, the focus will be on the impact on an individual or group, not the intention or motivation of the actor.

Finally, students are expected to follow the [UCSD Policy on Academic Scholarship](#), and to complete their work honestly, without unauthorized aid, and for group work, with accurate representation of who completed work and how. The UCSD CSS Program works closely with the Academic Integrity office to ensure a level playing field for all students, and ensure that our graduates' grades accurately reflect their learning and effort. Repeated academic integrity violations will result in disqualification from the program.

12 - Student Resources

Health and Wellness Resources:

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS)
Galbraith Hall 190 | CAPS provides counseling, outreach, and consultation services to students

For Mental Health emergencies, contact the U.S. SUICIDE AND CRISIS LIFELINE | CALL OR TEXT 988 from any phone

[UCSD Recreation](#) | Provides intramurals, sports clubs, rec classes, & FitLife classes

[Canyon View Aquatic Center](#) features two outdoor, Olympic-sized pools.

[Student Health Services](#)
Provides primary care, urgent care and optometry

Campus Resources:

[Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD)](#)
Pepper Canyon Hall – 3rd Floor | works with students with disabilities and determines accommodations disabilities.ucsd.edu

[Graduate life at UC San Diego](#)
Events and campus resources specifically for UCSD graduate students

[Basic Needs Hub](#)
Provides food security, housing stability, financial wellness, and can provide lyft rides

Student Legal Services

Free confidential legal counseling by appointment only | (858) 534-4374

Parking & Transportation

Provides various transportation options for getting to/from campus

UCSD Community Centers:

Cross-Cultural Center
Price Center East, Second Floor

Women's Center
Original Student Center, Room 290 West

LGBT Resource Center
Original Student Center, Building 290 East, Top Floor

Raza Resource Center
Student Services Center, First Floor

Asian Pacific Islander Middle Eastern Desi American Programs and Services
CCC, Price Center East, Second Floor | apimeda@ucsd.edu

BLACK RESOURCE CENTER
Original Student Center, Student Center A, Top Floor

International Student Programs Office
Student Center B | Provides advising and immigration services to international students

Graduate Student Organizations

Safety Resources:

Campus Police
Non-Emergency number to Report a crime or request a safety escort call: (858) 534-4357
Emergency Only - Call 911

Triton Core: Crisis response team of mental health professionals providing crisis response, mental health wellness check, and telehealth assessment (minimized police presence)

To use, call UCSD campus police and request Triton Core team

CARE at the Sexual Assault Resource Center

This is confidential resource for sexual violence, stalking, dating and domestic violence survivors. (858) 534-5793

[Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination](#)
Handles Complaints of discrimination or harassment | (858) 534-8298

Technology Support

[IT Service Desk](#)
Provides technical support | (858) 246-4357 | servicedesk@ucsd.edu