

Kaitlyn Wong



IDEA Center's Spotlight on UC San Diego's First Generation Engineers

Quick Facts

Grade: 3rd Year

Major: Mechanical Engineering: Renewable Energy and Energy Flow
with a Minor in Environmental Studies

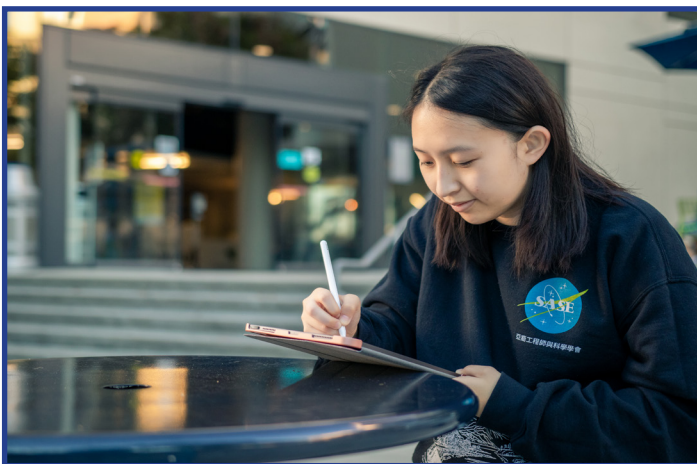
Outside Interests: Cooking, Boba Finding, Video Games, Bullet Journaling

Questions about your experiences:

How has your perspective as a first-generation college student influenced your experience at UCSD?

I feel like being a first-generation college student has only created more positive experiences for me at UCSD. As a first gen student, I've been able to tap into so many more resources and find more support systems at the university than I would as a normal student. In particular, the Student Success Program has been a great resource (shoutout to Coach Stephanie!) in guiding me to the right places to advance myself as a student and a future professional and in reminding me to take breaks for myself.

What has your journey been like at SASE? Do you feel you're ready to be president?



It has been very tumultuous, to say the least! The first event I went to, I instantly knew that I wanted to be president, but I guess I was so eager that I did it my third year. Transitioning to college, then the pandemic, and then back to in-person events has caused my time on board to be anything but consistent. The constant changes have made my journey with SASE an

uphill climb, but I've been lucky enough to be surrounded by supportive and passionate board members.

I started off in the organization as our publicity intern, transitioned to become our financial chair, and now, I'm our president! along with Josh. Beyond board positions, SASE has given me a lot of different opportunities and experiences that have helped me grow as a leader, which young, freshman me didn't think was possible. I've been able to connect with professionals, befriend other SASE chapters across the country (like our sister chapter, George Mason University!), and find a new source of passion for leadership.

As for my presidency, I'm not sure if I'm ready, but I'm excited to see where it takes me and the organization. Our board this year is the most passionate and innovative that I've ever seen it, so I know that even if I might stumble along the way, I'm surrounded by people who will support me. Ready to be president? No. Excited? Yes.

What has been the most beneficial aspect of being an IDEA Scholar? How has it made a difference in your UCSD journey?

The most beneficial aspect of being an IDEA Scholar is the community that it provides. Although SEI was a long time ago, there's something comforting in having that group of people that's been with you since day one and have gone through the same experiences as you, both in terms of personal and academic growth. I don't think that I'd be as motivated or as successful as I have been in engineering if it wasn't for the IDEA Scholars program. Surrounded by these great peers, I've always had someone I could turn to if I needed advice or homework help in a class or guidance on how to find an internship.

What has been the most difficult thing about transitioning to in-person classes this quarter? What has been the most beneficial?

Commuting! I didn't realize how nice it was to just leave my dorm 10 minutes before a lecture started, maybe grab a coffee from Roger's, and then take a nice stroll to wherever my lecture was. Or if I was cold, I'd just run back to my dorm and grab a new jacket. The commute is worth it since I get to casually run into friends when I'm walking around campus. I've missed all of the casual hang outs that come from impromptu meet ups. Plus, meeting everyone I've met over quarantine has felt very rewarding and makes the transition back worth it.

What's one thing you wish you could have done differently in your time at UCSD?

I wish I could've spent more time working on project teams and building up more relevant technical skills than building up leadership skills. While I have enjoyed my time working with Engineers for a Sustainable World and our Model United Nations teams on campus, I feel like I could've made better use of my time and I could've pushed myself out of my comfort zone more.

As a First-generation student, do you feel supported by UCSD/JSOE? What could they do better?

I don't think that JSOE does anything in particular to support first generation students, but I believe that UCSD's Student Success Program for 1st Generation students has helped me feel supported and welcomed by UCSD, especially during my first quarter on campus. Although I had access to resources given to me through SEI, I was able to step outside of my engineering bubble to meet students from other majors and colleges who have the same background as me. I think that providing spaces for first generation students to find each other and hear from successful first generation students allows both the University and JSOE to open discussions in which first gen students can feel more welcomed and aware of their potential.

What advice would you give to an incoming First-Generation College student?

Don't be afraid to reach out for help! There are so many different resources on campus that are meant to help you, so put that tuition to good use! If you're not sure if a resource can help you, reach out to someone. So many people at UCSD are willing to help you if you just ask, whether it be a student, professor, TA, a mentor, or someone in an org. Everyone wants to help each other succeed, so be sure to tap into that resource.