

Rebecca Wong

IDEA Center's Spotlight on UC San Diego's Future Women Engineers



Quick Facts

Grade: Class of 2024

Major: Electrical Engineering

Outside Interests: Painting and Drawing, Photography, Video Games

Questions about your experiences:

You've been a part of SEDS since your freshman year, starting off in SEDSxFEM to becoming a team member to being on their executive board. How has SEDS helped you throughout your undergraduate career?

SEDS has been a wonderful experience and an integral part of my undergraduate career. Entering UCSD freshman year, I wasn't sure where I would fit into UCSD's diverse community and didn't know what I wanted to do within the field of engineering. SEDS gave me a way to meet new people and explore other fields that I hadn't really considered before coming into college, like aerospace engineering. Throughout my three years with SEDS so far, I've met some of my closest friends, developed a strong support system, and have gained invaluable hands-on technical experience. It has been a place where I am able to apply the theory I have learned in classes, expand my knowledge of real world applications, and is where I have grown to love electrical engineering.

SEDS has also been a fundamental part in helping me learn more about myself and my interests, and is where I have learned fundamental leadership skills. This past year as Director of Internal Affairs has pushed me in ways that I didn't expect; and as a result of my time in this role, I have gained confidence in technical as well as professional abilities. As I approach my third year in SEDS I can confidently say that my time within the club has led to irreplaceable experiences and skills that I will use for the rest of my life.

What led you to join the SEDSxFEM program? How did it impact you? Do you feel that similar programs would be useful in other project teams/student orgs?

To give a bit of background, SEDSxFEM is a program in SEDS dedicated to creating equity in the field of engineering for gender minorities. I got involved with the program as a mentee when the founder of the program came to an IDEA Scholars meeting pitching the mentorship group during my freshman year and I thought it would be a beneficial program to join.

SEDSxFEM has helped me grow infinitely as a person and engineer over the past few years. It provided me with the opportunity to meet other women in the field, and has been the basis of my support system throughout my undergraduate career. As a first year, SEDS, and engineering in general, felt far more welcoming and approachable when there was a group of women with experience in the field to help guide me through it. I was really unsure of myself coming into college, and this program gave me the opportunity to build a solid foundation in engineering, build lifelong connections, and pushed me to my fullest potential.

My sophomore year I took on the role of co-lead of the program. It was a very integral part of my leadership experience, as it was my first experience with truly taking on such a large leadership role. I think the program is incredibly important, and I do believe it would be useful in other project teams and student orgs. Programs like SEDSxFEM create a welcoming environment for women within engineering and can make the barrier of joining project teams a lot less daunting. We aim to foster an environment where women and other gender minorities can flourish in the field of engineering and hope to increase the retention of such groups within the field. More programs like these would also help to further diversify project teams and provide extra support to a group of individuals who may benefit from it throughout their first year and beyond.

What advice would you give to students interested in joining a project team, like SEDS?

If you're interested in joining a project team, put yourself out there and go for it! There are a variety of project teams at UCSD with a ton of different concentrations, and they are an amazing way to gain technical experience while getting to meet new people and make friends. Project teams can be really intimidating going in sometimes, but I promise that they are a lot less stressful and tough than we present ourselves to be. Everyone on the team is a student and started out at the same place as you at some point in their careers. It's never too late to join a project team, as they are always looking for new people to join that are passionate and could bring about a new perspective to our approach.

Only about 30% of enrolled undergrad engineering students identify as female. Do you feel supported as a woman in engineering by the school of engineering? By the ECE Department?

While there are a lot of movements to be more inclusive of women in engineering at UCSD, I don't feel directly supported by the school of engineering or the ECE department, but I also don't feel discriminated against. I think that a lot of the support women in engineering receive at UCSD is provided by peer led resources and programs, like SEDSxFEM or SWE (The Society of Women Engineers). These communities, as well as within connections made with my peers, is where I have found the most support as a woman in engineering.

As a junior, you started off your undergraduate career in quarantine and have now transitioned to mostly in-person classes. How has this environment affected your experience in college?

Starting off college during quarantine was definitely a struggle. The first few months were extremely isolating, and I felt very disconnected from the campus and my peers. Thankfully, I had made a couple of friends during the IDEA Center's (Online) Summer Prep program as well as my first introductory ECE courses that I could talk to and spend time with. I ended up sticking with these first few friends for the first two years of my college career, before things shifted in person and I was able to meet and befriend more people. The transition to in person classes was invigorating, but also really difficult as build sessions for SEDS became in person and I had just started my new job at the IDEA Center. I also struggled with adapting to the vigor of in person classes, as I missed out on the transitional period that first and second year courses tend to provide. However, it was amazing getting to meet my classmates in person, study in Geisel, and finally get to touch physical electrical components in lab classes, giving me the taste of hands-on learning I went into engineering for. Overall, the transition to in person helped me make some great connections with my peers and develop some unique experiences and friendships that I look back on with great fondness.

What inspired you to pick up a minor in Speculative Design? How do you balance your minor with Electrical Engineering?

I have always enjoyed visual arts, and I knew coming into college that I would like to pick up an art minor. I decided on Speculative Design specifically because it is a very broad and open field, allowing me to cross my interest in engineering with my interest in art; it allowed me to exercise my creativity while still utilizing my technical skills. Balancing a minor with the Electrical Engineering coursework is definitely a struggle, due to the sheer number of classes I need to take and the added stress of not having priority enrollment for my upper division art minor classes, forcing me to have a relatively strict four-year plan. However, it's been incredibly worth it to me as my art classes feel like a breath of fresh air between my heavy engineering courses and provide a nice balance to the school work I'm assigned.

You're heavily involved with the IDEA Engineering Student Center, having been a part of the Summer Prep program, IDEA Scholars, and now as the Publications and Design Intern. What about the IDEA Center has inspired you to stay involved over the years?

I love the IDEA Center. It's provided me with so many opportunities and experiences that I am not sure I would have found otherwise and has proven to be an integral part of my support system. I met some of my first and closest friends due to the IDEA Summer Prep Program as well as through the IDEA Scholars program. To me, the IDEA Center feels like a hub of engineering within UCSD, where all engineering majors, student organizations, and project teams are connected in some way. It has so many programs, resources, and connections to the engineering student body that I love being a part of.

As a former participant in the Summer Prep (now Summer Engineering Institute) program and IDEA Scholars, do you feel supported by the IDEA Center and its programs? What could they do to improve?

I feel very strongly supported by the IDEA Center and its programs. The IDEA Scholars program was a wonderful experience that provided me with a strong foundation and support system immediately as I transitioned into college. The program provided me with great mentorship and professional development opportunities that were a great jumping off point early in my undergraduate career. I'm not quite sure if I can really speak on how the IDEA Center could improve, as most of its core programs are targeted towards underclassmen and my experience with those programs was hindered by them being either fully remote or in a transitional period due to quarantine.