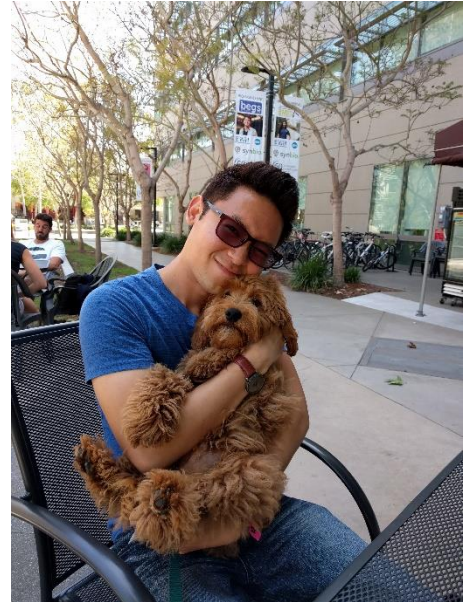# Sothyrak Tee Srey

IDEA Center's Spotlight on UCSD's
First Gen Students

Quick Facts

Grade: 2nd Year Master Student

Major: Computer Science

Outside interests: Cooking/DJ'ing

Questions about your experiences:

How has being a first generation student impacted your experience at UCSD? What resources would you recommend to first gen students?

It's a bit of a struggle at first as I felt that I was on my own. Nonetheless, it motivates me to work harder towards graduation and pushes me to ask for help. I would highly recommend the career resource center, all the programs offered by IDEA center. Most importantly, join a student organization.

Why did you join TEAM? How has the TEAM program benefitted you and how have you helped others by being a TEAM coordinator?

It is challenging navigating UCSD, especially as a first-year transfer student. I survived my first year and I still think that there are things I could have done differently. I decided to become a TEAM coordinator because I want to make sure that incoming transfer students have a more pleasant transition and succeed academically and professionally. I also got to meet and work with amazing TEAM coordinators, mentors, and mentees. That's always a plus. It is great seeing TEAM grow every year. I have always made myself available to help with looking at resumes, talk about my experience in graduate school, or class recommendation.

Why did you join HKN and oSTEM? What did you get from being a part of these organizations?

I value giving back to the community, so when I saw an email asking who is interested in starting the oSTEM chapter at UCSD, I said yes to the opportunity immediately. I also applied to be an officer of HKN so that I can challenge myself. In addition to the positive impact on the students and the contribution to the school of engineering, I got to gain great connections and leadership skills.

What advice would you give to students who want to enroll in a BS/MS program?

Make sure you have a clear plan and see if a Master's degree aligns with your goals. This program is great since you only need 1 more year to get your Master's. If you're deciding between industry and academia, it gives you more time to decide, get involved in research and take additional classes. On the other hand, if you're ready to go to the industry, you can always come back to get a Master's later.

What company did you intern at, and what did you gain from your internship?

I was an intern at Hughes Network Systems and continued working there throughout my undergrad. I also interned at Esri before I started my Master's. Besides the work experience, one take away from working at the two companies is the practice of breaking a big project into smaller tasks. It helps me focus on solving just one small task at a time. This can also be applied to school and personal life.

What are your plans for the future?

My short-term goals are to work as a software engineer during the day and teach at a community college in the evening. My long-term goal is to start a non-profit organization in Cambodia that teaches underprivileged children to code.

From your experiences, what advice would you offer current students?

"If you're comfortable, you're not learning."

Just like how you won't be learning much if you only sign up for easy classes. You need to challenge yourself to grow as a person. You don't see yourself as an outgoing person? Challenge yourself and apply to be the social chair of a student organization.