

**School of
Computer
Science**



Facts Of Life (FOL)

**Class of 2022
Fall 2018**

This document contains **Facts Of Life (FOL)** for incoming SCS freshmen like you. So, please read this document very carefully. The information presented here will allow you to plan your fall schedule with a better understanding of the educational environment you are about to enter.

Facts of Life (FOL): Being an SCS Freshmen at Carnegie Mellon

1. As an incoming freshman, your general priorities, needs, and wants for courses come after those of every sophomore, junior, and senior at CMU. The reason for this is simple: sophomores are six semesters from graduation, juniors are four semesters from graduation, and seniors are only two semesters from graduation. You, as a freshman, have eight semesters to achieve your goals. Plans to do double majors or graduate in three years do not change this fact.

2. As an incoming freshman, your general priorities, needs, and wants for courses are no greater or less than any other CMU freshman. All freshman get preferential treatment for courses within their own major/department: thus, we guarantee that you will be registered in any Computer Science course that you need to take. Beyond that, all freshmen are equivalent in every way. Plans to do double majors or graduate in three years do not change this fact.

3. As an incoming freshman, you are here to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science or a Bachelor of Science in Computational Biology. I will explain how to choose one of these three degrees at the end of beginning of your second semester. That is what you and CMU have agreed to, when you accepted CMU's invitation to attend the School of Computer Science. In addition to your main degree you could complete a minor or an additional major in another field. In most cases, you would need to apply for the minor or an additional major after you complete one full semester at CMU and you may or may not be accepted. You will receive no special priority for registration in courses due to your plans leading up to an additional major or minor.

In addition, there is no implicit or explicit offer to you to graduate in three years, or explicit offer to you regarding summer internships or research opportunities.

4. During your first semester at CMU, you probably cannot register for courses required for freshmen in another school. Most seats in specialized courses are reserved for freshmen only in that major. If other seats become available, they will go first to seniors, then juniors, then sophomores on the waiting lists, who registered for courses last spring. When these seats are all gone, no one else can register for that course. Plans to pursue an additional major or graduate in three years do not change this fact. SCS has reserved seats in Math, Science, and English courses for our incoming freshmen. Most of you will get whatever Math and Science courses that you want; but only about half of you will be able to register for English (76-101) in the fall; the others will wait until the spring. You'll need to be flexible.

5. You will not be awarded sophomore status just because you have a large number of credits from AP/IB/CE (or transfer) courses. All first year students are freshmen; all second year students are sophomores, and all third year students are juniors –regardless of how many units a student has acquired. So, you are a freshman for your entire first year, and will register for second year courses with all the other freshmen; you will draw for dorm rooms with all the other freshmen. Plans to do double majors or graduate in three years do not change this fact.

6. Your goal at CMU is to challenge yourself and learn new things; it is not to collect units. Very few CS majors graduate with exactly the 360 units that are required: most have many more. You must not let the loss of previously awarded credit keep you from taking challenging courses and learning new things. Such an approach is antithetical to our understanding of why you are here.

7. Even if you have earned AP/IB/CE (or transfer) credits. Every year as the CS Freshman Advisor I receive several emails from incoming freshmen concerning the AP courses like this one:

Freshman: *I took the AP BC exam for Calculus in the 9th grade and scored a 5. Do you really expect me to remember all that stuff?*

Advisor: *Yes; if you do not remember this material at an appropriate level, you must repeat the course here at CMU, because subsequent classes will assume you know it.*

Remember, you come to CMU to learn, not just to collect units. When you finish a course here, we expect that you know the material and can use it in a later course. If that course is a prerequisite for another course, and you don't remember the material in the first course, then you will not be able to learn properly in the second course. We will always ask, "Will awarding credit for this course compromise a student's learning in a future course?" Unless the answer is, "no", we will not award the credit.

8. We are leery of awarding credit for any Computer Science course (beyond 15-112). The reasoning is the same as for FOL 7: when we award credit, we are concerned about compromising a student in later courses. If the Dean were to award transfer credit for say 15-122, and we later find out that the student is not adequately prepared for subsequent courses (typically by him/her taking a course requiring 15-122 as a prerequisite, and doing poorly in it), it could be a very expensive mistake. The student would have to go back and take 15-122, as well as the other course again. In fact, because of us incorrectly awarding credit, the student might have to pay tuition for attending CMU for an extra semester. Thus, we tend to be conservative in awarding credit in an attempt to avoid this kind of costly mistake.

9. Successfully registering for a course does not mean that you should be in the course. Many courses have special locks that are designed keep out (certain) freshmen. However, you may find a course, by some fluke that allows you to register for it, even if though you should not be able to do so. For one example (and I have seen many), a freshman found that he could register for a Biology Lab course that was designed for Biology majors only; against the advice of his advisor, the Biology Advisor, and the Associate Dean of the Mellon College of Science, he registered for the course. When the professor teaching the course learned that this student was not Biology major, she immediately dropped him from the course. So, just being able to register for a course does not mean that you belong there, nor that you will be able to take it.

There is a reason why CMU uses an advising system: we offer advice based on years of observing students working towards exactly the same goals as you are. Our advice is not meant to hold you back or to create unnecessary hurdles for you to jump. But, when our advice differs from your desires (or just what you want to hear), you should listen carefully to what we are saying and try to understand our point of view.

10. All this said, you are the person in charge of scheduling courses during your four years at CMU. We want to encourage students to register for courses that will challenge them, not retake courses consisting of material that they already learned in high school or elsewhere (balanced by FOL 8 and FOL 9). You are going to build your schedule using CMU's **Student Information Online (SIO)** during the summer (probably the second week of July). I will show you how to do so, and I will be available to answer any of questions that arise while you register. But, you will do your own registration, so you must have a fundamental understanding of what is required to graduate in four years. That is the main purpose of our summer communications. I will spend more time during your first semester at CMU explaining what you need to graduate. But if you have not read all of this material, several times, attempting to understand and master it, you will glean little from these discussions.

11. I, Jacobo Carrasquel, will be your freshman advisor. Once you successfully complete the first two semesters you will be assigned another advisor, who will advise you for your last three years at CMU. I will talk with you, offer advice to you, and comment on your scheduling plans. However, you must first articulate to me what you are planning, and you must come to me well-informed. This means that you must be fluent with the registration materials that I will ask you to read during the summer, and must at least begin to understand what it takes administratively to earn a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science (CS) or in Computational Biology (CB) at CMU. To balance out all that has been said above, I will act as your advocate in all manner of issues while you are attending CMU. But you must keep me well informed and act in a partnership with me.

It is likely, perhaps, that you will get more information from other faculty, other students, and even your parents. Of course, getting all this information is a simple step: analyzing it and making a decision is harder (but at least, if you follow these steps, you will make an informed decision). On the other hand, you need to understand that our curriculum changes and you need to be careful when you hear things from current and former students because they may not be aware of those changes. It is always a good idea to run things by me just to make sure you have the correct information before you make any decisions.