Ideas for Chapter Activities

The kinds of activities a student chapter can undertake are endless, depending on the creativity and interest of each group. But here are a few examples of academic, social, and professional activities that may be of interest to your group:

❖ Distinguished Speakers Program/Lectures

Invite a speaker from a computing-related business or nearby research school to speak to students. Use ACM’s Distinguished Speakers Program: [http://dsp.acm.org](http://dsp.acm.org)

❖ CS Alumni in Other Fields

Ask an attorney, physician, or veterinarian, etc. who studied computer science to hold a short conversation with the people-in-computing group. Have the speaker concentrate on how the computer science undergraduate degree helped her to succeed in her chosen field.

❖ High School Students Shadowing College Students

Pair high school students with college students. The undergraduate should invite the high school student to spend the day with him or her, attending classes and eating meals together. (High school vacation days work well.)

❖ College Students Shadowing Professionals

Pair college students with professionals in the students’ desired career field. A student can spend the day with the professional at his/her place of work.

❖ Departmental Posters

Gather a group of students to make posters advertising all of the departmental events. Alternately, students may create posters advertising course offerings for the upcoming semester, focusing on the fact that just one computer science course can be beneficial regardless of the person’s major.

❖ Poster Session

Organize a small poster session for students who have conducted summer research and participated in internships. Consider a cooperative effort with any and all local ACM student chapters.

❖ Interdisciplinary Posters

Ask for volunteers who are double majors and who would like to be profiled in a poster display destined for the computer science lounge/laboratory area. Create high-quality posters, explaining how the presenters combine computer science with another major.
Banquet/Award Ceremonies

Reward academically outstanding students by recognizing them at an end-of-semester banquet. Rewards can include gift cards for local restaurants or stores, plaques, or certificates. Be sure to include at least one "most improved" award.

Advisory Board

Students in the computer science department are elected by their peers to serve on a committee that meets periodically with faculty members in the department. Students and faculty discuss issues such as curriculum, department activities, and any problems that arise during the school year.

Mentoring

Description: Pair younger students with older students based on similar interests and hobbies. Make sure that someone in the group is made explicitly responsible for driving group activities, so momentum begins early and keeps going.

Tri-Mentoring

Forming groups consisting of a first-year or sophomore, a junior or senior and a member of the computer science faculty. Different groups can consist of a high school student, undergraduate student, and faculty member; undergraduate, graduate, and faculty member; or undergraduate, graduate, and professional. Again, make sure that someone in the group is made explicitly responsible for driving group activities so momentum begins early and keeps going.

Tutoring

If at all possible, find funding for departmental tutors. (In extreme cases, where no funding can be secured, ask student volunteers to tutor their peers in specific classes.) Tutors can sign up for time slots; the information can be emailed to majors; and students can meet the tutors in the computer labs or in special reserved rooms. Strive to create the ideal balance of students, male-to-female, international-to-US, etc. The tutors have good contacts with new students; they are ideally positioned to recruit new majors.

Alternatively, your chapter may want to organize volunteers to tutor local high school students, using a location on the high school campus.
❖ Make a Website

Make a website for your chapter. Include upcoming activities, pictures and descriptions of recent events, and biographies of successful people in a wide variety of interesting computing-related careers.

❖ Study Sessions

For classes, have students from the same classes can meet the night before a test to review the material and ask questions.

For GRE or graduate school preparation, ask faculty members to hold a study session for students interested in taking the GRE. Afterwards, encourage students to review each subject area (such as computer organization) as a group, using at least two sessions where all students prepare for the first meeting using notes and textbooks from previous classes. Individual members of the group prepare presentations that address unanswered questions in a second meeting.

Benefits: Allowing the students to ask experienced faculty members questions about the Exams will calm nerves and kick off the test preparation phase. "Dividing and conquering" further preparation keeps the group on task and lends efficiency to the process.

Group Size: Large

❖ “Take Apart Your Computer” Day

Faculty members help students explore the inside of a computer. Alternately, student volunteers take computers apart with younger students, such as students from local high schools.

❖ Research

Encourage professors to apply for grants from the National Science Foundation, ACM, etc. to fund research programs for students of all levels, not just upper-class students. Encourage fellow students to submit their research to current ACM Student Research Competition (http://www.acm.org/src) at conferences throughout the year.

Another option is to select several seniors from the capstone course (Senior Project, Senior Seminar, etc.) for a program where the seniors give advice to younger people. Some or all of them can demonstrate their work for the younger students.

❖ Visit Universities

Small- or medium-sized colleges plan a field trip to a nearby large, research institution’s campus to visit research project laboratories and/or hear graduate students talk about their research and their lives as graduate students. For large universities, plan a trip to a nearby small or medium-size college to present research and talk about lives as graduate students.
Meet the Grads Night

Invite recent graduates to talk to current students in the computer science department. The graduates should be a mix of people who went to graduate school and people who started their careers right after graduation.

Bulletin Boards

Gather a group of students to make announcement boards to be placed in public areas, advertising classes in the computer science department, career possibilities, research posters, pictures of local award winners and people in-the-news, tutoring opportunities, grants scholarships, other chapter meetings, etc.. Popular places to post would be restrooms, inside classrooms, and in dorms. Consider fun pictures of officers, blown up to poster size. This also helps to dispel stereotypes.

Scrapbook

Organize a group with scrapbook experience to construct a "people in computing" scrapbook. When high school people come for visits, show them the book. When young people in introductory classes talk about majoring or when faculty members suggest it, also share the scrapbook with them.

Buddy System

At the beginning of each semester, hold a meeting where people can gather and meet the other people in their classes. The students can then pair up with each other (or form small groups) and set up times to meet outside the classroom throughout the semester, so that the class goes more smoothly for each.

Communication Workshop

Find an expert in communication who is willing to volunteer time. Many schools or offices specialize in providing teaching and training for campus groups and departments. Frame the workshop as a general-audience event: How everyone can improve communication practices.

Lab Welcoming

The uninviting and unfamiliar COMPUTER SCIENCE laboratory environment can be daunting to people. Gather several older students and invite the laboratory assistants and any other student assistants in the department to a discussion session, providing information that will sensitize the students. The lab assistants should be sure to circulate among the students, be friendly, stop to ask how students who don't request help are doing, and not wait for students to summon a tutor.
✓ Invite a Friend

Ask people to invite as many people as they can to a lunch or dessert event. Advanced students should briefly describe "why I am majoring in computer science" and "what our classes are like". The sponsor can suggest that taking one, single class can make a difference in one's career choices; that taking the introductory course is a win/win situation; that having no computing background serves as a filter to strain out future options. S/he also describes the support system in place for people-in-computing.

✓ Interdisciplinary Activities

Invite students who are double-majoring or otherwise pursuing interdisciplinary paths, along with faculty members who perform interdisciplinary research to speak about projects. Examples include digital art, artificial life, mathematical simulation, etc.

✓ Combined Event

Join forces with another campus group, such as an ACM-W chapter, a People in Science group, or the Society of People Engineers (SWE) for a combined event.

✓ Laboratory Assistants

Invite juniors or seniors to volunteer their time and help out during busy lab hours. Alternately, recruit people to serve as paid laboratory assistants. Profile current tutors, during a chapter meeting, encouraging the students to discuss the benefits/advantages of their work.

✓ Book Club

Invite students to participate in a monthly book club meeting, where they are free to discuss any interesting novels, but are encouraged to read computer science related books, such as Unlocking the Clubhouse: Women in Computing.
✓ Oral Histories

People have valuable stories to share with succeeding "generations" of students. Have people tape each other and edit the footage into stories. Ask each pair to describe how each member chose computing as a major, what struggles s/he has had and how s/he overcame adversity, and her future plans.

✓ Science Fair

Ask for student volunteers to judge high school or grade school level science fair projects.

✓ Brain Games

Send out campus flyers from the chapter. The flyers should be filled with brain games and puzzles that exercise one’s problem solving skills. Be sure to include a line that says "If you like these brain games, you’ll love CS1!"

✓ Graduate School Information Sessions

Ask computer science professors to hold a graduate school information session for students who are considering continuing education. Topics of discussion may include cost, what to expect, possible degrees one may obtain, and what to look for in a graduate school.

✓ Visit High Schools

Ask for student volunteers to visit local high schools to educate younger students about the field of computer science and its benefits. Call high schools to find out times and dates for college/career fairs or other counseling events. Offer to attend the event and represent computer science.

✓ Programming Contests

The Association for Computing Machinery holds local, regional, and international contests each year. During the contests, teams of three students must solve eight problems in a period of five hours. The winners of the local and regional contests move on to the international competition, where finalists receive awards, scholarships, and prizes. For more information, please visit the ACM programming contest homepage: http://icpc.baylor.edu/icpc/default.htm.

As a chapter event you may choose to hold a programming contest for introductory students only, with questions supplied by local professors. Invite advanced students to prepare for and to attend programming contests hosted by professional organizations.
“What Is COMPUTER SCIENCE, by the Way?” Showcase

Organize a short-series of workshops that happen every week or two, where faculty members (and perhaps PhD students) provide short, engaging presentations on their research, aimed at undeclared, exploring undergraduates. Provide lunch.

Career Luncheon

Ask several advanced students to research careers (e.g. project manager, consultant, Web page developer) and attend a luncheon "in character". Use several round tables, if the group is large. Have people rotate among tables describing their work and "what a typical day is like."

Open House

Hold an information session close to registration time for prospective students. Invite current computer science majors as well as professors in the department to mingle with possible future computer science majors. Offer the prospective students tours of the department and its spaces.

First-year Orientation

During the spring, request inclusion in the school's first-year orientation program for students interested in the computer science major. Provide snacks and a good place for the students to circulate and get acquainted with other students and faculty in the department and learn about computing classes.

Conferences

Invite students to attend a people-in-computing conference, either locally or nationally, or persuade your university to host one.

Workshops, Software

Host a workshop, where volunteers from the computer science major teach other students the basics of certain software programs, such as Microsoft Office, Photoshop, PowerPoint, FrontPage, or even navigating the Internet.

Graduate School Applications

Faculty members, professionals, or graduate students give tips and advice to undergraduates who are filling out applications for graduate, professional school, assistantships, fellowships; writing personal statements and interviewing.

Resume Building

This meeting is to help chapter members build a resume for potential internships. The
workshop will organize group activities such as ice breakers and public speakings to prepare for interviews.

- Lego Mindstorms®

Gather a group of students to experiment with Lego Mindstorm® robots.

- Community Service, Workshops

Hold periodic workshops for people in the community. Students can help citizens with any computer problems they may be having, or simply teach them to set up and use an email account. Additionally, students may help the unemployed or under-employed construct resumes and learn basic technology skills. The Ohio State University’s TWICE group (http://twice.cse.ohio-state.edu/) also helps teach a computer club for girls at a low-income elementary school and provides technical support for low-income neighborhood resource centers. An organization might also want to partner with a local free geek chapter (http://www.freegeek.org/) to collect, repair and redistribute old PCs.

- Job Hunts

Assemble a group of students to attend a job fair in the nearest big city.

- Mock Interviews

Have professors or professionals from area businesses volunteer to participate in mock interviews for students contemplating graduate school or entering the work world.

- Panel Discussions and Roundtables

Invite three or four people from the technology workforce to speak with students about their careers and lives outside work.

- Database of Interview Questions

Construct a database of interview questions and add to the database as each year’s group of seniors interviews. The database may also include general tips and advice for interviews.

- Database of Research Opportunities

Compose a database which contains information about different research opportunities available to undergraduates.

- Database of Scholarships and Grants

Build a database of scholarship opportunities for people in computing. Encourage people to provide the names and contact information for scholarships they have applied for or received.
- **Database of Internships**

  Have students submit reviews of their internships -- location, specifics of the job, feedback, etc. -- or keep on record places that are accepting students for internships.

- **High School Computer Science Demonstrations**

  Ask student volunteers to travel to local high schools to give computer science demonstrations for the younger students. Suggestions for presentations include robotics, basic game programming with graphics, and website design. Talk with principals and college administration to determine if high school students can audit or enroll in undergraduate CS1 classes. If both parties agree, advertise CS1.

- **Grade School Visits**

  Ask volunteers to take trips to area grade schools to educate students about the computer science field. Alternately, invite a grade school class to the college.

- **Philanthropies and Community Service Days**

  Select some local philanthropic organizations and volunteer to help, either by raising money, participating in individual events that the charities sponsor or organizing a people-in-computing team to contribute to the success of a fundraising activity. Events include walks for cancer, blood drives, etc. Volunteer at the local humane s/helter, soup kitchen, nursing home, etc.

- **Achievement Parties**

  Celebrate when students or faculty members in the department gain special recognition. Examples include job offers, graduate school acceptance or receipt of an award of special significance.

- **Ice Cream Parties**

  Invite professionals from various companies and seat them at different tables, each with a different ice-cream topping. When students arrive, they receive their ice-cream, and move from table to table to complete their sundaes. At the same table, they are able to meet and talk with the professionals. Alternately, place upper-class students at the tables and invite first-year and sophomore people to construct sundaes.

- **Movie Night**

  People spend a simple, relaxing night with other people in the computer science department, watching movies and eating popcorn. Recognize scenes where errors demonstrate that the producer had no computing consultant present or ask students to silently record the errors and award a prize for the "best set of errors". Benefits: Movie night provides an opportunity for socializing and a break from studying. Many movies have computing themes (e.g. The Net, Hackers, The

- T-shirt design contest

Gather a group of people to participate in a people-in-computing t-shirt design contest using computer generated graphics. Students vote on the best design, which will be used to make t-shirts for the entire group.

- Revamp Display Cases

Redo the computer science department display cases so that they draw attention to more people and other underrepresented groups. Alternatively, as a creative, light-hearted, and social prelude, organize a "sculpting" party to produce computer art for the display cases -- sculptures built from discarded computers and parts. Include pictures of the "artists".

- Computer Jewelry

Design computer jewelry. Buy earring backs, beads, stringing material, glue, etc. and use old chips or motherboards to make computer-inspired jewelry. Benefits: This activity is a fun and creative outlet for students and provides "free advertising", when other students ask about the jewelry.

- Women in Computing event

A day to celebrate the impact of women in technology.

- Computer Science Lounge

If the school has no computer science majors’ lounge, organize a group of at least half people to approach the computer science faculty members and/or the administration to create a lounge with a kitchen area. If the school already has a computer science lounge, organize a task force to improve it. Again, request that faculty members provide help.

- Stress Relief

Prior to finals time, bring materials for making stress-relief icons: silly putty, bean bags, rubber bands to snap, don’t-worry dolls, don’t-worry beads, etc. Use the activity as a light-hearted approach to finals time; however, augment the activity by asking junior and senior people to give
general advice about preparing for finals. Ask each woman what computer science final(s) s/he will take. Ask for volunteers (who have had each class) to give specific advice for each final. Lastly, group people according to finals and invite them to organize study groups.

- Communication Tools

Organize a listserv, Blackboard, or similar communication tool for local people-in-computing communication and/or among regional chapters and computing-organizations.

- Organized Outings, Student’s Choice

During one meeting, ask each participant to describe his/her favorite out-of-class activity (amusement park, concert, walking, hiking, working out, etc.) and then organize the event/activity in which the group shows the most interest.

- Dinner

Meet another people from another chapter from a nearby institution at a restaurant that is approximately halfway between the two schools.

- Luncheons, Professional

Invite professionals from various fields (databases, software engineering, project management, etc.) to speak to students during lunch time. More students are likely to attend the lecture in this informal setting where lunch is provided.

- Meet the Faculty

Set up a luncheon date at the beginning of each school year and invite students and faculty to meet and socialize. Organize "how to succeed in computer science" discussions at these kinds of socials.

- Blogs, Wikis

During a lunch or other event, invite people who write blogs to share by reading an entry. Hold the event in a tech-equipped room, so that the blogs can be viewed, as well. Distribute a handout with URLs. Ask the people to describe the process of creating a blog.