To Nick's Future Students,

Be proud. You are surrounded by the brightest applicants the SPCS program has to offer, which means that you fall into the same category. As such, the effort you apply towards your regular work must be tremendous, making you well suited for the weeks to come. Furthermore, regardless that the work will be immensely difficult, you will be capable of completing it on your own.

Now adopt a bit more modesty. Every sentence in the first paragraph (aside from the first) is fallacious, which is not to say that the assumptions may not be true. Chances are you are all both accomplished and competent, yet I would venture that regardless of what you have learned in the past, the plans Nick has in store for you over the next four weeks will eclipse your knowledge of math, programming, and most importantly critical thinking. This might excite some, and it might frighten those who remain, as they realize that such these plans imply a great deal of work. Fear would be the appropriate response if you had any other teacher. But you have Nick. His teaching style is both unique and far more effective than traditional teaching, and by the end of your four weeks (maybe even this letter), I think you'll agree with me.

To break down the course a bit, I will speak from personal experience: the first two weeks are daunting. You will barely have time to comprehend the majority of the mathematics and programming covered before you start your final project. The rough draft of your project will be due about a week after you finish the bulk of the lectures, and you will present in front of your peers before you even realize that the program is almost over. The sheer quantity of material that you will go through is a marvel on its own, and the range of topics will be so spectacular that you may go from discussing the uses of Homographic Coordinates to understanding the Phong Model for Specular Reflection in a matter of minutes. What's more remarkable, however, is the way you will learn it all.

It took our class four weeks to recognize what Nick knew from the start: all of the topics covered will probably be forgotten within a year's time. The concepts are simply too far removed from the average high school curriculum. This has an enormous impact on the way Nick goes about the lecture, because everything you will do from class discussions to homework is imbued with values important to the entire field engineering. Everything is structured to emphasize the value the formulation of a solution, rather than the solution itself. As a result, you will learn a new way think, whether about a problem or an idea, and you will learn how to think for yourself. This is the heart of the course, and aside from a (really cool) final project, it is something you will be able to carry with you throughout the rest of your life.

This letter isn't intended to change how you will study at SPCS, but to give a bit of insight as to how the next few weeks will work. Yet if there is piece of advice that I may add, it is to remember the facts mentioned from the start. You are surrounded by the brightest applicants the SPCS program had to offer, and the work will be difficult. Your classmates are one of your greatest resources, so work together. They will inevitably become some of your closest friends at the program, and the director is not mistaken when he asserts that you will maintain connections you make here for years to come. Furthermore, the opportunity you have been given is like no other, both uniquely challenging and exceptionally rewarding. So work hard, and throw yourself into it. Give yourself a reason to be proud.

A former student,

Brian Tanabe