My name is Nicholai L’Esperance, and I am an Engineer at IBM in Essex Junction, Vermont. I’ve been working at IBM for about four years now, and I enjoy it thoroughly. I’m a native to Vermont, and even stayed in the state to go to college. I was very lucky to find a job that I both enjoy doing and allowed me to stay in Vermont. A little bit more background is necessary to really explain why I am at Stevens, and in particular, taking this course.

For as long as I can remember, I’ve been around computers. My father was always into technology, and he used to write code back in the day. Growing up, he would occasionally take an extra computer home with him. He would let my older siblings and I play on the computer all we wanted, so long as we fixed it when we inevitably broke it. What I really fell in love with, though, was video games.

Video games were my favorite thing growing up; you couldn’t beat the experience of playing on a computer. As more and more demanding games came out, however, the requirements eventually eclipsed the hardware. So, I saved all of my money and bought a cheap, used computer. This was a good band-aid for my problem, but it didn’t solve the issue. These consumer grade office computers were just two weak.

This is when I decided I needed to build my own computer. I spent months researching and saving up money so I could build my own powerful gaming computer. It took a while to get everything together, but it worked—and the computer I assembled could play new AAA games. It was at this point I realized I was hooked into computer systems. Just a few years later, for my senior year in high school, I enrolled at a local technology center. I studied computer systems, receiving my A+ technician certification at the end. It was my teacher in the tech center who convinced me to go to school for electrical engineering, instead of computer science (later on, I realized this may have been a mistake).

Graduating high school, I enrolled to get my bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering at the University of Vermont. Due to my education at the tech center, I worked all four years as a technician at the University’s helpline and computer repair depot. Eventually I was the most senior technician there. While it was good work, I knew I wanted to eventually get out of customer facing rolls. Upon the completion of my degree program, I stopped working at the helpline, and decided to focus more on my studies. I became a TA, and I began working on my master’s degree in electrical engineering at the university.

I was contemplating working on a PHD when a job fell into my lap. One of my peers in the master’s program was working at IBM a few towns over, and they were looking for engineers. I tossed my name in the hat, and before I knew it, I was hired. Over the next 6 months, I wrapped up and completed my masters and began working.

After 6.5 years of electrical engineering, I was suddenly working as a computer scientist. On a day to day basis, I was writing python code, querying large databases, writing programs to connect disparate data systems. While I wasn’t “trained” in computer science, I took to this work quick, and enjoyed it a lot. While I was good at this job, I was still missing a lot of the computer science fundamentals. I studied as much as a I can in my free time, however, I figured the best way to build this foundational knowledge was a University. Luckily for me, IBM had a program, where they send engineers back to school in order to build skills that are in demand in the industry. I signed up for this program as soon as I learned of it, and applied to a number of different schools. Stevens Institute had a good reputation for its Web Campus education, and it looked like a perfect match. I was accepted into the program, and have been working on a degree in Spring 2018. There are two reasons I signed up for this class in particular. First, I chose this class because it is extremely relevant to my job (and likely future jobs as well). Every single day, I am crafting SQL to pull data for analysis. With the size of the data available to me, it is important to be able to do this efficiently, and without pulling a lot of extra fluff. On top of this, it is not uncommon that I am even (naively) designing my own tables, and speed is often very, very important. Secondly, I find databases remarkably interesting. Sure, they are extraordinarily useful and are pervasive throughout the world, but they are also pretty dang neat in and of themselves. For these reasons, I am quite excited for the course ahead.