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 enjoy it thoroughly. I’m a native to Vermont, and even went to school here, so I was very lucky to find a job that I both enjoy doing and was close to home. So, why am I enrolled in this course? I think a little bit more background is necessary.

For as long as I can remember, I’ve been around computers. My father was always into technology, and he used to love writing code back in the day. Growing up, he would occasionally take an extra computer home with him, letting me and my older siblings play, modify, and break (and then subsequently fix) them. What I really fell in love with, though, was video games.

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

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. And it took a while to get everything together, but it worked—and it 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 technology center. I studied computer systems, and got my A+ technician certification. It was my teacher in the tech center who convinced me to go to school for electrical engineering, instead of computer science.

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, but while it was good work, I knew I wanted to eventually get out of customer facing rolls. At the endo 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 different data systems, the whole gamut. While I wasn’t “trained” in this at university, I took to this work quick, and enjoyed it a lot. I found three major things really helped me fall into this role so well: my experience with building and troubleshooting computers, working as a computer technician at the university, and all of the problem solving skills (and some technically knowledge) I learned as a student at the University of Vermont.  
 While I found myself to be good at this job, I was still missing a lot of the computer science fundamentals. I study 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 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 since Spring 2018. Why did I sign up for this class in particular? There are two reasons. Firstly, 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. Additionally, 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.