Professor Pascal van Hentenryck's "Introduction to Computer Systems" aims to show class members what happens behind the scenes in a computer as a program executes. To that end, students learned about computer architecture from the ground up: starting with low-level hardware operations, through assembly language, and ending with the compiling and execution of Java programs. The official prerequisites are CSCI0150, CSCI0180 or CSCI0190, and students wrote that these prerequisites "made sense:" familiarity with Java (and object-oriented programming) was necessary. Knowledge of data structures, the C language, some discrete math, and circuits was also deemed useful.

Respondents were very happy with Professor van Hentenryck's teaching. They described him as "an amazing lecturer" -- engaging and entertaining, witty and humorous. At the same time, "lectures were informational and effective." Many wrote that the professor was "awesome," others that he was
"the man" (and, alternately, "da man"), and one proclaimed, "Pascal rocks!" A student shared, "I never wanted to miss a single class."

Reviewers wrote that the professor frequently engaged the class and checked understanding by asking, "who is following me?" However, a few respondents complained that he would then move on regardless of the results of this 'poll.' A number of students also commented that the instructor moved at a fast pace, and they would have appreciated it if he slowed down during some of the more challenging concepts. Some also expressed a desire for more detailed lecture slides.

The workload for this course consisted of eight homework assignments, five programming projects (they "related well to course goals," as one reviewer wrote), a midterm, and a take-home final exam. Respondents were generally happy with these assignments; several said that they could suggest no improvements to them, and some described them as "perfect." This course had an optional textbook, but there were no assigned readings.

Respondents were unanimous and enthusiastic in recommending this class to computer science concentrators and anyone interested in how computers work. However, they warned that even though the class is fun, it requires a good amount of work (between four and fifteen hours a week, on average, which matched nearly everyone's expectations). The consensus is that it was worth it: "you cannot graduate without taking this class," "it's probably one of the best courses at Brown." "Pascal is God" and "one of the best professors at Brown." Be warned, though: "it's dangerous. It might make you want to be a CS concentrator."