SCS Computer Recommendations and Specifications

The first thing you should know is that here, in the School of Computer Science at CMU, we do not have any computer requirements at all. Also, we do not make any suggestions as to which computer to buy. But, what it is true is that the university has a minimum set of specifications if you decide to bring a computer to campus. These set of specifications can be found at:

https://www.cmu.edu/computing/services/endpoint/workstation-support/dsp/

Laptop or Desktop?
This is a common question. Again, this is a matter of personal taste. The campus is 100% wireless, so many students prefer a laptop because it allows them to work anywhere. My guess is that 95% of all the students at CMU own a laptop. Also, there are many students who own both a desktop and a laptop.

What about the Operating System (OS)?
Typically, 70% of the CS students own a Mac OS computer, 25% a Windows based, and 5% a Linux (Unix) one.

None of our courses require a specific OS. If and when that is the case, then the expectation is that the student will work in what we call computer “public clusters”. Public clusters are open 24/7. There are clusters running each OS mentioned above.

What about Software?
Whatever software you need to do your coursework will be given to you for free (in most cases). Also, the university has acquired licenses for many software packages (for example, Microsoft Windows). During Freshman Orientation in August you will have the opportunity to install in your computer whatever is needed.

Bottom line
You definitely should bring a computer to campus, preferably a laptop. Not owning one would be a mistake. As a CS major, you are most likely to spend many hours on your computer. So, make sure you buy one that you feel comfortable with.