iSchool Laptop Requirement FAQ

Updated 7/21/2017

The iSchool requires that all masters, PhD, and CAS students own a laptop that meets certain specifications. This document is designed to help students understand this requirement.

Why does the School require a laptop?

Having your own laptop ensures convenient access to the instructional media and tools you will need to complete your degree. For some of your classes, your instructors will require you to use particular software, and you will need a laptop to run it on. Online and hybrid courses require access to Blackboard Collaborate (as well as a headset and microphone). The recommended specifications meet requirements to run this software. It is vital that you have access to online resources both inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, having your own laptop will give you the opportunity to learn basic computer troubleshooting and maintenance, essential skills for a future as an information professional. Please don't worry if you are new at this. The Help Desk will provide training and support to help you build these skills.

Are there tax breaks for buying a laptop?

Maybe! The laptop may be a qualifying expenditure, however there are other requirements to take the American Opportunity Tax Credit. Contact your tax professional or visit https://www.irs.gov/individuals/aotc.

Laptop minimum recommendations for students entering in Fall 2017 and beyond:

Operating System:
Mac: 10.11 (El Capitan) or newer
Windows: Windows 7 or newer
Processor: Core i5 1.7GHz dual-core or better
RAM: 4GB or greater
Hard Drive: 250GB HDD/SSD or greater
Display Resolution: 1440x900 or greater
Administrator Access: You must have an administrator account on the laptop
Warranty: 2-year or greater warranty highly recommended

You can purchase a computer that meets these recommendations from any vendor. The University of Illinois Tech Zone (http://union.illinois.edu/shop/techzone) staff are familiar with our laptop recommendations and can assist you in choosing a laptop that will best suit your needs.

Purchase a laptop that you will feel comfortable with, not just now but during your entire time as a student.

Currently, when the School purchases laptops for faculty, staff, and student workers, we choose laptops that exceed the minimum recommendations, such as a MacBook Pro with 8GB RAM or a Lenovo Thinkpad X1 Carbon with a core i7 processor, SSD hard drive, and 8GB RAM. They are more durable than some other laptops, usually lasting a year or two longer. More memory and a faster processor help address the needs of our users, allowing them to have multiple programs open simultaneously and run more intensive applications without significant slowdown. A few iSchool classes utilize software that requires a more robust laptop.

Check the Course Information section (http://ischool.illinois.edu/academics/courses) of the School's website to see specific class software requirements.

Improvements over minimum recommendations:

1. More RAM (6GB or more).
2. A faster processor.
3. A larger hard drive (500GB or more)

What if I already own a laptop?

You can continue to use what has been working for you, but we suggest that you bring your laptop to the Help Desk to confirm it will function with our systems.

How often will the recommendations change?

The minimum recommendations will be updated annually so they keep pace with changes in technology. You may find that you need to update your laptop if it is more than three years old and does not meet the current minimum recommendations.

Can I use a tablet or smartphone instead?

Unfortunately, no. A tablet or smartphone can be used as a supporting, secondary device, but for primary use you will need a laptop. Online and hybrid classes use Blackboard Collaborate, and the tablet and smartphone versions have limited features that don't allow full class participation.

Should I get a Mac or Windows machine?

For most classes, this is a matter of preference. Currently, people in the School are split between the two operating systems. A few classes utilize Windows-only software, requiring either a Windows laptop or a Mac laptop with a Windows OS installed via Boot Camp or Parallels. *Check the Course Information section (http://ischool.illinois.edu/academics/courses) of the School's website to see specific class software requirements.*

Why do I need an administrator account on the laptop?

Classes may require you to do things that require administrator access, including installing applications and editing system files. It is also very difficult to troubleshoot computer issues without admin access to your machine. You will automatically have an administrator account for any machine you purchase for yourself. But if the machine is not yours, such as if you are using an employer's machine, you will want to check ahead of time.

I'm a distance education student and have a desktop. Do I need to buy a laptop?

So long as your desktop meets or exceeds the recommendations listed above, you are fine.

Where should I buy a laptop?

You can take the hardware specifications to any computing store, and we recommend you comparison shop to find the best value. Be sure to check the University of Illinois Tech Zone (http://union.illinois.edu/shop/techzone) for educational pricing on hardware and to discuss your needs with an expert.

Where can I get software?
The University of Illinois Webstore (http://webstore.illinois.edu) provides access to a number of software titles. Prior to buying software, check the Webstore to see if a licensed copy is available for free or at a reduced cost. While the Webstore might not have every piece of software you will want, it does provide a number of packages at educational discounts **(notably Microsoft Office and Windows Operating System)**.

Can the iSchool help me if I need laptop support?

The Help Desk will provide assistance to connect you to the campus wireless network and to set up printing. We will provide basic assistance with software installs as well as first level troubleshooting for common problems. The University's Technology Services Help Desk (http://techservices.illinois.edu/get-help) can assist with connecting to campus-level services.

Unfortunately, the iSchool Help Desk is not able to provide computer repair services, and we cannot purchase software for personal laptops. We will gladly direct you to technical services in the Champaign-Urbana area. Some vendors to consider include:
- University of Illinois Tech Zone - http://union.illinois.edu/shop/techzone
- Simplified Computers - http://www.simplifiedcomputers.com
- Muris Technologies - http://muristech.com/
- FYXIT - http://www.fyxit.net/

If you live outside the Champaign-Urbana area, we suggest you research local options using tools such as Yelp, Google Review, or get recommendations from people you know.

What do I do if my laptop breaks or if I forget it at home?

The Help Desk has laptops available for short-term loan (up to two weeks) on a first-come, first-served basis. Please note that software or other data saved to a Help Desk laptop will be deleted when the laptop is returned. The Help Desk will not be able to restore any lost data.

I'm not an iSchool student, but I am taking an iSchool class. Do I need a laptop?

We strongly recommend you have a laptop, but cannot require it. You may be able to borrow a Help Desk laptop for your scheduled class times. Laptops are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

What if I just want to check email or print something?

There are convenient print/email kiosks in the iSchool building outside Room 12A and on the second floor by the Help Desk.

Are there computer labs on campus that I can use?
Yes. Here is a list: http://techservices.illinois.edu/services/computer-labs

What do I do if I have concerns about meeting the laptop requirement?

Please contact Meg Edwards, assistant dean for student affairs:
mbedward@illinois.edu
217-244-3776

Where do I go if I have additional questions?

Please contact the Help Desk at help@support.ischool.illinois.edu, 217-244-4903, or 800-377-1892