College of Fine Arts Laptop Requirement

Beginning Fall of 2017, all Fine Arts majors are required to have a personal laptop computer. This requirement reflects the digital and technical nature of 21st century work in the arts. Students should plan to bring their laptops to all Fine Arts classes, unless exempted by the specific instructor of a class. Whatever your major, having a laptop will make you a more productive student - anywhere can become a creative space, allowing for collaboration and creativity at a moment's notice.

We understand that laptops are not cheap. Laptops are, however, a required tool for your professional future. The good news is that our laptop requirement is an opportunity for you to get something you need and get help from your financial aid. Since laptops are required in all Fine Arts programs, the WSU Office of Financial Aid can boost your financial aid eligibility to buy it. Please note that we do not consider Chromebooks to be laptops. While they are a cheaper alternative, they are little more than large phones and will not provide you with the technology you need to succeed.

Frequently Asked Questions

Mac or Windows?

Whichever platform you prefer is a personal choice. Both Mac and Windows hardware is sufficient for the programs students need to operate. However, not all laptops are adequate to run the necessary software. While everyone has a personal preference for computer platform, you should consider industry standards. Most animation, game design, and CAD work, for example, is done on the Windows platform while audio and a majority of filmmaking are created on Macs. Students should choose whichever platform they are most comfortable with, but we encourage you to make an informed selection based on your ultimate career goals.

What kind of software and storage will I need?

That depends on the course. For most courses, the software that comes with your computer will suffice. Apple's Pages, Keynote, Numbers, GarageBand, iPhoto, and iMovie are free, for example, with a new Mac. Windows computers also come with many free software packages. There are free "Office" alternatives for both Mac and Windows as well. One piece of software you will need is Adobe's Creative Cloud, which includes Photoshop, InDesign, Premiere Pro and many other industry-standard tools. Adobe offers discounted yearly subscriptions to those tools to students. Visit Adobe's Web site for information.

Whichever platform you choose, your laptop will need to run high-end software and be able to handle large files. The main requirement is that your laptop must be able to run Adobe Creative Cloud, a good baseline for minimum laptop requirements. Some of the software you will need is provided at a discount to WSU students. Visit the Resources page of the Technology Help Desk website to purchase and download this software with your myWSU ID.

Any new Mac or Windows laptop should run all of the software you will need, but pay particular attention to the processor speed and amount of RAM. Always include as much RAM as you can afford (more is always better). If you choose a laptop with 4GB or less, make sure you can add more RAM later. Adequate internal hard drive space is important to running software, but small, inexpensive external hard drives provide extra storage and backup protection if your laptop is damaged.

Graphics processing and screen size are also worth considering. If you plan on work with high-quality images, video, or video game design, make sure your processing power meets Adobe requirements. For screen size, some students prefer a smaller, more portable laptop with an inexpensive external monitor at home.

Questions regarding the capabilities of specific laptops are worth careful internet research. Look into the professional requirements and preferences of your field as well to make an informed decision.

What about non-majors who take Fine Arts courses?

While non-CFA majors are just as likely to have their own laptop already, we will leave a few computers in classrooms where courses that enroll non-majors are held.

What about printing?

Instructors limit the amount of required printing in courses (it's a digital world, after all). If you need to print, though, we make a printing service available through each school's office. Ask school personnel about it.

Who will provide technical support?

If you have questions about purchasing hardware, we will help you, but if you have basic technical support questions, there are many resources outside of the college that you can consult. We recommend googling the problem first. Then contact the support services for your hardware or software companies. Then, there is the university Help Desk available by phone at 978-HELP.

Are there any specific requirements?

The only requirement is that the computer you choose should run the software that you'll need for class. We love Macs. Any Mac laptop will run all of the software you will need. The Windows world is a little trickier. Generally speaking, though, you will not be happy with the performance of a bargain basement ($300) Windows laptop. Whatever you choose, try to include as much RAM (8GB or more is best) and the largest hard drive you can find. Questions regarding the capabilities of specific laptops are probably a good topic for some Internet research.

Is there anything else I might need?

You might consider purchasing an external hard drive for backup and long-term storage. There is nothing worse than losing your work due to a laptop failure. Backup your work! In addition, you might want to buy a large (4GB or bigger) flash drive ($10-$20) for sharing files with fellow workgroup members.

There are a great many free online file storage options, like Dropbox, Google Drive, etc. Finally, you may want to purchase an extended warranty for your laptop. AppleCare, for example, is about $200 but covers the computer for 3 years (long enough to graduate!).