

Best Educational E-Practices (BEEP)

Prepared and disseminated by [Project Eagle, St. Petersburg College](#)

Number 1

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October 1, 2000

Student Computer Ownership Programs

"Providing each of us with a notebook computer is like providing everyone with a technology minor." ([UMC Student](#))

The policy of requiring college and university students to have constant access to a computer is not a new one. [Virginia Tech College of Engineering](#) has had all its students purchase a computer since 1984. However, only in the past few years has this policy become more common among institutions of higher learning. A look at ten colleges and universities that have placed their requirements and policies on the Web reveals considerations involved when initiating the practice at any institution.

Ownership Policies

Least specific - Mandatory access, but ownership not required

[Georgia State](#): It is the responsibility of students to have computers with "access to email accounts, the worldwide web using a current browser, spreadsheet capability and word processing."

[University of Florida College of Liberal Arts and Sciences](#): "Ready access to computer" is a must, whether by purchase, lease loan, share, rent or other arrangement.

More specific - Ownership required, computer of student's choice

[Georgia Tech](#). Student computers must be able to run the standard software package required by the college.

[Northland Community and Technical College](#) (MN). Students in its accounting and computer electronic technology programs are required to have laptops, which they can provide or rent from the college.

[University of Cincinnati College of Engineering](#). For the 2000-2001 academic year, the previous ownership requirement of desktop or laptop was made more specific: a portable PC with wireless network access.

[Virginia Tech College of Engineering](#). Virginia Tech has a list of required hardware.

Most specific - Ownership of one model of computer required

[Clayton College and State University](#) (GA). The school provides all students with multimedia notebook computers. The cost is partially covered by an "information technology fee" and the balance underwritten by state and private funds.


[Rose-Hulman Institute](#) (IN). Entering students must buy an Acer laptop of the model designated by the Institute.


[University of Minnesota, Crookston](#). UMC, which calls itself the original ThinkPad® University, provides IBM ThinkPad® notebook computers to entering freshmen. Cost is covered by a quarterly "technology access fee" that includes hardware, software, warranty and insurance. Full-time students keep the computers as long as they are enrolled and turn them back when they leave. Part-time students pay a reduced fee and check out a notebook computer daily.


[Wake Forest University](#). Wake Forest also provides IBM ThinkPad® notebook computers, as well as color printers. Students take the machines with them when they graduate, and the computers are upgraded every two years.

Other Requirements

Although the extent of specific requirements varies from institution to institution, it may relate to









 **Hardware.** CPUs (e.g., processor, RAM, CD-drive), monitors, printers (usually optional since schools provide free or fee printing), network adapters, cables, modems, sound cards, zip drives, machine requirements of individual departments.

 **Software.** Operating system, email, Web browser, spreadsheet, word processing, anti-virus programs, network access, software requirements of individual departments or courses. Several schools surveyed require Windows and Microsoft Office as their standard software package.





 **Orientation and training.** Use of computer and software, general computer literacy. [Rose-Hulman](#) provides an online orientation to the use of the computers. At [UMC](#) all students must take an Introduction to Information Technology course where they learn the use and care of their computers and software.

Computer Support & Services

Types and degree of support and service range from the minimal to the complete, but may include




-  **Sales**, usually discounted, of machines, software, parts, peripherals. Of the schools surveyed, those who made special arrangements with specific computer companies named IBM (3 institutions), Dell (2) and Acer (1).
-  **Installation and repair service**, including warranty service. Several schools that require ownership provide loaners while a machine is being repaired.
-  **Computer support centers or help desks**, which can be online or in labs, sometimes available 24 hours a day, to answer student questions. [Georgia Tech](#) places technology advisors in every residence hall to provide telephone and on-site technical support with networking questions.
-  **Free email accounts.** [UMC](#) also provides a Web page account.
-  **Free Internet access.** Some schools place a limit on the number of free hours.
-  **Documentation**, paper or online, that deals with the institution's policies and procedures regarding student computer ownership. [Georgia Tech](#) has a very comprehensive manual.
-  **Wired facilities.** Places may include classrooms, labs, libraries, dorms, lounges.
-  **Secured storage facilities on campus.**

Financial Assistance for Computer Purchase

-  **Financial aid.** All the schools that addressed this issue state that the cost of required hardware and software is part of the expense figure used to calculate eligibility for state and federal aid. The latest average amount suggested in calculating this expense when applying for student aid is \$2500. [UMC](#) includes its technology access fee in the determination of and eligibility for student financial aid.
-  **Scholarships.** The [University of Cincinnati](#) suggests scholarships that can be used to offset the cost of a computer.
-  **Loan programs.** In addition to the PLUS federal loan program, [Georgia Tech](#) recommends personal loans through local banks and companies like Apple Computer, which offers loans for the purchase of their computers.
-  **Purchase plans.** [Rose-Hulman](#) allows entering students to spread the cost over four years, with special arrangements for transfer students.




Policies for Responsible Use

Several schools publish written guidelines for responsible computer use.

-  [Rose-Hulman](#) has guidelines for appropriate use, intellectual property, etiquette, disclaimers and enforcement.
-  [Wake Forest](#) includes a section on system monitoring.
-  [Virginia Tech](#) addresses the subject under the heading "Software Use and the Law."

Web Resources

Some of the institutions surveyed have prepared useful Web pages that provide additional information for those considering a student computer ownership program.

-  [UMC's](#) benefits and applications. A list of what students gain from the technology component, complete with student quotes.
-  [University of Cincinnati's](#) links to other universities with student owned computer programs.
-  [UMC's](#) links to articles about its ThinkPadU® program. Includes a 1998 *US News & World Report* article on colleges using technology.