

Students: Laptop Purchasing Guide

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This article reviews **general guidelines** for a typical student purchasing a laptop for four years of college.

See also:

- [New to Bryn Mawr College? Start Here!](#)
- [Students: What tech to bring to College](#)
- [Software for Personal Devices](#)

For information regarding specific requirements, please **contact the department of your major**.

Operating system

Both **Microsoft Windows** and **Apple’s macOS** will work at Bryn Mawr. If you aren’t sure which you’d prefer, consider what software you’ll need to use as well as any differences in pricing.

LITS **does not recommend** Chromebooks/ChromeOS due to their limited support for third-party software and incompatibility with public printing. See [Example configurations](#) for low-cost alternatives.

Recommended hardware

CPU/Processor: 4 or more cores

Your CPU is integral to the performance of your laptop; we recommend at least a **quad-core processor**. For limited web browsing and word-processing, a dual-core can be sufficient.

CPU Manufacturer	Recommended Brands
Apple	M4, M3 (prior generation)

CPU Manufacturer

Intel

AMD

Recommended Brands

Core 5 or Core 7

Ryzen 3, Ryzen 5, or Ryzen 7

Comparing two laptops?

Memory/RAM: 8GB or more

Memory matters when multiple programs, windows, or browser tabs are running or open. We recommend at least **8 gigabytes (8GB)**, but 12GB or 16GB can make a significant difference.

Can I upgrade RAM later?

Storage Drive: 256GB (or larger) SSD

Your storage drive holds all the data on your computer. It is important to consider its **size** and **type**.

- **Size:** We recommend at least **256GB**; keep in mind your operating system can use up to 30GB!
- **Type:** Hard disk drive (HDD) vs. solid state drive (SSD). **We strongly recommend SSDs** because they are much more durable, and are also much faster!

Warranties

Extended basic warranty

While most laptops come with a brief pro bono warranty, we highly recommend purchasing a **4-year extended warranty**. For those four years, this will ensure any failed components will be repaired at no additional cost.

Can I extend my warranty after purchase?

Accidental damage protection

A basic warranty won't cover spilling coffee on your new laptop or knocking it off a desk. As such, we also

highly recommend purchasing a **4-year accidental damage protection plan**. This may eat into your budget, but it is usually much cheaper than the price of repairing or replacing a laptop.

Additional considerations

- **Get hands-on:** Go to a store and physically interact with it¹
- **Size and weight:** Is it comfortable to use and easy to transport?
- **Overall build quality and design:**
 - How do the trackpad and keyboard feel?
 - How much does the chassis flex when you type?
 - Does the hinge feel strong and durable?
 - How bright is the screen's max brightness?
- **Available ports:** How many & what types² of ports are present?
- **Battery life:** Many reviews include battery life tests
- **Wireless connectivity:** Must support WPA-2 Enterprise

MacBooks and Keyboard Reliability?

¹Otherwise, pay close attention to the return policy.
²Some USB Type-C ports support charging, data, and video output; other's don't. Be sure to check.

Example configurations

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Below are recommended specifications we would look for at a range of price points.

NOTE: You should always research what is available to you. This list isnot comprehensive or necessarily up to date.

Warning: Before purchasing, always look for reviews

	Affordable (Less than \$600)	Mid-Range (\$600-\$900)	High-End (\$900+)
CPU	Intel Core 5 AMD Ryzen 3/5	Apple M4 Intel Core 5 AMD Ryzen 5	Apple M4/M4 Pro Intel Core 5/7 AMD Ryzen 5/7

	Affordable (Less than \$600)	Mid-Range (\$600-\$900)	High-End (\$900+)
RAM	8+ GB	8+ GB	16+ GB
Storage	256GB SSD	256GB SSD	512GB SSD

Bringing an older laptop to campus

While laptops can last for many years, please keep the following in mind when considering using an older device when you come to Bryn Mawr:

- Older laptops may be unable to run the [latest, most secure operating systems](#) and will be **unable to connect to the college's network**
- Laptops with older HDD storage are **much more prone to damage** than those with SSD storage
- Depending on their age, older laptops may be **ineligible for extended warranties** or have limited manufacturer support
- Laptop battery health degrades over time and **batteries may eventually need to be replaced**

Questions?

If you have any additional questions or problems, don't hesitate to reach out to the **Help Desk!**

Phone: [610-526-7440](tel:610-526-7440) | [Library and Help Desk hours](#) ☐

Email: help@brynmawr.edu | [Service catalog](#) ☐

Location: Canaday Library 1st floor