Should you purchase a new PC before or at the start of your academic career?

Personal Purchasing

High school seniors and their parents face a lot of decisions regarding purchasing and/or bringing a computer to campus. Often the high school graduation gift that both parents want to give, and students want to receive, is a brand new computer.

One observation associated with the giving of a computer gift is shown in the statistic that approximately 97% of surveyed graduates of 2008 stated they had a computer for their personal use during the school year. Over 70% of those students indicated their computer was less than 3 years old. Students do have computer labs readily available, so ownership is definitely a convenience, but at the same time, an advantage.

The Iowa Regents institutions (like most colleges and universities) all have affiliations with computer vendors to better be able to provide significant price discount opportunities. Therefore, waiting until the student is eligible for the programs can save on the acquisition costs. At UNI, most eligibility begins once the student has their CatID (university electronic account), which is well before they attend orientation or classes. We suggest that parents may want to provide a ?computer gift card?, redeemable before classes as a high-school graduation gift as a way to save money on a new computer purchase.

We can assure every student that the university experience will include use of personal computers. Activities will likely include daily email, word processing for composition of papers, finding information sources electronically, checking a professor's class web site, participating in an online learning experience with the UNI eLearning environment, developing an electronic presentation for class, etc., etc. Our residence hall rooms have RESNET (a wired Ethernet port per pillow plus wireless access), therefore, the ability to connect from their room is available for those bringing a compatible Ethernet equipped PC to their dorm room. Our campus is very much ?wireless?, nearly 100% of our buildings and residence halls have wireless but not necessarily 100% within each building. University apartments do not have wireless access.

If you have made up your mind to purchase a computer, UNI would like to inform you there are purchasing discount programs available through the university once you are a student. It is important to determine your individual needs before purchasing a computer. These needs will likely vary depending upon your academic interests and your personal preferences. In selecting a computer, it is prudent to consider your support base that is likely to include friends and family, as well as the university community. Also, don't forget to include software to go along with your needs. We have software discount programs available as well. Having your computer compatible with software on campus is an effective and reasonable goal. Specific colleges may have discipline-specific software, knowing that software is important from a compatibility standpoint. It is also prudent to consider being efficient with the public Student Computer Center software (i.e. Microsoft Office), which can be found from the web URL location Computer Labs [1]. Those Centers are not as convenient as personal ownership but are an extremely available resource.

Laptop, or a desktop, is a question we hear often and the answer is, ?it depends?. Students are extremely mobile and I am convinced that for the majority of students, the laptop is the correct answer. The cost is slightly higher, but the mobility is such a significant factor for students that it should be considered. Some students opt for both, when desktop capacities are also needed.

Since students first entering the university settings are likely to change majors more than once, deferring significant expenditures until academic endeavors are more settled can be appropriate. Bringing an older PC from home can be a good way to start for some, while others may actually need the most current technology. Since computer configurations quickly become out of date, we certainly recommend that you review the options available just prior to placing your order. We also recommend you view the configurations on our web sites to do comparison shopping.

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Links:
[1] http://www.uni.edu/its/labs