BETHEL COLLEGE
INFORMATION AND MEDIA SERVICES

Choosing a Laptop for College

A buying guide for students and families

One of the most common questions we hear before the school year is, “What kind of laptop should I buy?” The good news: almost any modern laptop will get you through your coursework. You do not need to spend a fortune or buy the most powerful machine on the shelf. This guide explains what we recommend, what those specifications actually mean, and how to take advantage of the discount programs available to you.

The short version

If you just want a quick answer, look for a laptop with these three things:

- **Processor:** Intel Core i3 or higher (an AMD Ryzen 3 or higher is comparable)
- **Memory:** 8 GB of RAM or more
- **Storage:** A solid state drive (SSD) rather than a traditional hard drive (HDD)

Anything that meets or beats these will serve you well for four years. If your budget is tight, a machine that falls a little short will still work—these are recommendations, not hard requirements.

Recommended specifications

Use this table when comparing laptops. The middle column is the bare minimum that will function; the right column is what we suggest for a comfortable experience that lasts.

Component	Will work	We recommend
Processor (CPU)	Most processors from the last few years	Intel Core i3 or higher (AMD Ryzen 3 or higher is comparable)
Memory (RAM)	4 GB	8 GB or more
Storage	Traditional hard drive (HDD)	Solid state drive (SSD), 256 GB or larger
Operating system	Windows or macOS	Windows (our top pick—see below)

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Student and family discount programs

Bethel College has partnered with Dell and Lenovo to offer discounted pricing. These programs are a great way to get a quality laptop that meets our recommendations, often below standard retail prices.

Dell

Shop the Bethel-specific Dell store, which already reflects member pricing:

- **Store link:** https://www.dell.com/bethelks
- **Extra savings:** Apply coupon code **MPPSAVE5** at checkout to take an additional 5% off.
- **Dell questions:** Reach Dell's education team directly at Student.laptops@dell.com.

Lenovo

Shop the Bethel Lenovo store for discounted pricing:

- **Store link:** https://www.lenovo.com/us/en/bethelks
- **Who can use it:** This link can be shared freely—with faculty, staff, students, family members, and even local businesses. Feel free to pass it along to anyone who could benefit.

Note: The discount programs are offered by Dell and Lenovo. For order status, shipping, returns, or billing, please work directly with the vendor using the contacts above.

What the specs actually mean

If the terms above are unfamiliar, here is a plain-language explanation of each one and why it matters.

Processor (CPU)

The processor is the "brain" of the computer—it does the actual work. Intel labels its processors i3, i5, i7, and i9, with higher numbers being faster (and more expensive). An i3 is plenty for writing papers, web browsing, email, video calls, and streaming. Step up to an i5 if you expect to do heavier work such as video editing, engineering software, or large data sets. You rarely need an i7 or i9 for typical coursework.

Memory (RAM)

RAM is your computer's short-term work space—it determines how much you can do at once. With too little, the machine slows down when you have several browser tabs, a document, and a video call open at the same time (which is normal during a busy class day). We recommend 8 GB because it keeps things smooth without paying for more than most students will use. 16 GB is a nice upgrade if your major involves demanding software.

Storage: SSD vs. HDD

Storage is where your files and programs live. A solid state drive (SSD) has no moving parts, so it starts up faster, opens programs quickly, and is far more durable if the laptop gets bumped in a backpack. A traditional hard drive (HDD) is cheaper per gigabyte but noticeably slower and more fragile. This is the single upgrade that makes the biggest difference in how fast a laptop feels day to day—we strongly recommend an SSD. A 256 GB SSD is comfortable for most students, especially when paired with cloud storage.

Operating system: what we support

We are operating-system agnostic, meaning you can succeed at Bethel on Windows, macOS, or Linux. That said, we do have a preference, and one type of device we steer students away from.

Windows—our preference

Windows offers the widest compatibility with the software you may encounter in your courses, the broadest range of price points, and the most familiar support experience. If you are unsure what to buy, a Windows laptop that meets the specs above is the safest choice.

macOS—fully supported

Mac laptops work well at Bethel and are a great fit if you already prefer them or your program leans that way. They tend to cost more, but the hardware is well built and long lasting. Just confirm any program-specific software you need is available for macOS before you buy.

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Chromebooks—not recommended

We advise against Chromebooks for college work. While they are inexpensive and fine for basic web browsing, they cannot install much of the standard desktop software used in coursework, and in our experience they create more roadblocks than they are worth over four years. If a Chromebook is all you have right now, you can still get started—but plan to move to a Windows or Mac laptop when you are able.

Other things worth considering

Beyond the core specs, a few practical factors make a real difference in daily campus life:

- **Battery life:** Aim for a laptop that can last through a day of classes so you are not hunting for an outlet between buildings.
- **Weight and size:** You will carry this everywhere. A 13–14” screen is a good balance of portability and usable workspace.
- **Warranty and accidental damage:** A multi-year warranty with accidental-damage protection is worth considering—drops and spills happen, and a repair can cost more than the coverage.
- **Webcam and microphone:** Useful for online classes, group projects, and virtual office hours. Most laptops include both, but it is worth confirming.
- **Ports and Wi-Fi:** Make sure it has the connections you need (USB, headphone jack) and modern Wi-Fi so it connects reliably to campus wireless.

Questions? We’re here to help

If you are not sure whether a particular laptop is a good fit, or you have questions about getting set up once you arrive on campus, reach out to Bethel College Information & Media Services (IMS). We are happy to help you make a confident choice before you buy.

IMS Help Desk: (316) 284-5214 • support@bethelks.edu • Mantz Library - M-F 8-5