

Questions and Answers for Student Computing and Purchasing Computers at Virginia Wesleyan College



Does Virginia Wesleyan College require students to have a computer?

No. But the College does strongly recommend it. Personal computers are important tools in education - valuable for accessing and managing information resources in all disciplines, and an effective means for communication between students and faculty.

Should I bring a laptop or desktop computer?

The College is recommending that students bring a laptop to campus. Their versatility enables them to be used in many types of situations: residence hall rooms, classrooms, labs, meetings, study rooms, the Marlin Grill. Wireless laptops can be used in the libraries and other academic buildings for research and assignments. Over the next several years wireless capabilities will be expanded to other buildings and even to outdoor locations so students will have ready access to services such as e-mail and the Internet from locations all over campus. Laptops also take up less space in residence halls where space is limited.

Does Virginia Wesleyan College have a purchase program for computers?

Yes. The College has selected specific Dell laptop models that we recommend for students. Dell has provided special discounted pricing on these laptops for students only. Virginia Wesleyan College receives nothing from this promotion, except the advantages inherent in having the same model being used by many students, making support for these students easier and more consistent. These laptops can be purchased online or by calling Dell on or after July 1st.

Please visit <http://www.vwc.edu/laptop>

What benefits are there in purchasing the recommended laptop?

In addition to being top quality hardware platforms at special discounted prices, these laptops are completely configured to work on the *VWCNET* network when they are delivered to students. Installed software includes Symantec anti-virus, as well as specific software that lets the laptops login and operate on the campus network. Wireless connectivity is also activated. In the event the software on a student's laptop needs to be

reinstalled, a restore CD is provided that the student can use to restore the original *VWCNET* configuration. Future changes to the network will be tested with the recommended laptop models to be certain the changes do not cause problems. Purchasing the recommended laptop presents the least problems for students in getting started and continuing their computing experience at Virginia Wesleyan College.

If I purchase a recommended laptop model, when and how can I place the order? Where will it be delivered? Will I be able to use it this summer?

Purchasing for Virginia Wesleyan College's recommended Dell laptop models will be available on or after July 1. In order for the laptops to be delivered to students with the complete *VWCNET* configuration already installed, we create and test the software image on the campus network in June after our annual network upgrade is completed. We then send the software image to Dell. This process ensures that the student laptop configuration includes the latest versions of network software that will be used in the fall. When the ordering process becomes available, students will be able to place an order online at a special Dell site that will be accessible for Virginia Wesleyan College students only: <http://www.vwc.edu/laptop> Ordering will also be possible by telephone. Your Dell laptop will be delivered to the address you specify when you place the order; in most cases this will be your home. While we cannot guarantee delivery times for Dell, our experience has been that Dell typically builds each computer individually as it is ordered and delivers it in about 2 weeks. Laptops will be delivered to students with the complete *VWCNET* configuration already installed. You must be on campus to connect your laptop to *VWCNET* and you will not be able to connect to *VWCNET* from off campus. You can certainly use your laptop as a standalone computer. **We caution you, however, not to install network/Internet connections or applications that change your laptop's configuration** if you expect to connect your laptop to *VWCNET* without reconfiguring it when you arrive on campus in the fall. A significant advantage of purchasing the recommended laptop is that the *VWCNET* network configuration is already completed. If the configuration is altered so that the *VWCNET* software no longer functions properly, you will have to restore the original *VWCNET* image before you can connect your laptop and use the network and Internet on campus.

If I purchase a computer other than the model recommended by the College, can I get service to connect it to the network?

Students can get service from the College Help Desk to configure the computer to connect to *VWCNET*. This is the most reliable method of getting a computer other than the recommended laptops connected. Over the past several years there have only been a handful of computers that the College Help Desk has not been able to connect successfully. Computers must meet the minimum hardware requirements and be free of viruses, spyware and conflicting applications such as other network configurations.

Can I configure my computer myself to connect to the campus network?

We do not recommend this for students who are not thoroughly familiar with installing and configuring computers and able to handle problems that might occur during the configuration process. It is very important that the computer be cleaned of all applications such as viruses and spyware prior to connecting to the *VWCNET* network.

Can I use Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition?

No. As the name implies, Microsoft designed XP Home Edition for use at home on a standalone computer or in a small, simple network environment, not with business-style networks such as *VWCNET*.

What should I do if my computer does not meet the minimum requirements?

Upgrades will be necessary to meet minimum requirements. If a computer has a non-supported operating system such as XP Home Edition, connection issues will not be supported by the College or the College Help Desk until the operating system is upgraded to XP Professional. Other requirements such as having a proper network card or supporting the accepted wireless standard must also be met before any attempt will be made to address issues of connectivity. Most upgrades to correct these problems can be purchased from the Virginia Wesleyan College bookstore. Also, no student computer will be allowed to operate on *VWCNET* without the College's current anti-virus application installed and active. Aside from protecting the student's, the anti-virus software helps protect the rest of the campus network as well.

A local computer store told me the computer they sold me would work on the campus network but it doesn't. What's the problem?

This is merely one example of similar statements that we receive in which someone not familiar with our network configuration makes a claim about what will work on Virginia Wesleyan College's network. They might be making their statements based upon an erroneous assumption (for instance, assuming *VWCNET* is a Novell-based network instead of a Windows-based network); or they might not understand the differences between using computers at home and using them in a business network environment. Be careful in accepting as true any claims about *VWCNET* capabilities from individuals not familiar with our network. Our recommendations are based on what we know works best on our network. We know what versions of software are being used and we have experience with problems and limitations of both the network and the computers connected to it. In making recommendations to students about computers, our only motivation is to have students be able to connect their computers to the network as easily as possible and to have the network run with as few problems as possible. Virginia Wesleyan College receives no remuneration or other direct benefits from vendors who sell recommended laptops to students.

How does the cost of the recommended laptops compare to prices of other laptops? Why shouldn't I buy a cheaper laptop?

The recommended Dell laptop models are not the cheapest laptops that you can find to purchase. In selecting a laptop to recommend to students we consider the following factors to be important: a name-brand product of recognized quality backed by a company that will be around in the future to provide continuing service; a model with components based on industry standards to avoid problems with substandard parts; a comprehensive warranty and service program; a workable purchase and delivery process; and features that extend the functionality of the laptop so it will be useful to students during their years at college. These features include a fast processor, more than adequate

memory, large hard drive, re-writable CD or other removable media device, and wireless connectivity. Professional level software is also important, including the Windows XP Professional operating system and an anti-virus application. The laptops recommended this year meet these requirements. The price in dollars is not the cheapest but we think the cost for this collection of features is a very good value. When comparing different laptops, it is important to make sure the comparisons are equivalent and include costs for all features, add-ons and services. The Dell Latitude models are specially priced only for education customers and additionally they will be delivered ready to use on *VWCNET*.

To provide the best possible support, Virginia Wesleyan College computer services staff is authorized to work on Dell computers, they have been trained to handle all warranty repair work right on campus, we will handle contacting Dell and all of the warranty repair work for you: if you run into a problem on a non-Dell computer, we will do our best to help you with it, but we can't guarantee ready availability of replacement parts or software.

What causes the most problems in trying to connect computers to *VWCNET*?

Perhaps one of the least recognized causes of connection and operational problems with student computers on campus networks is the presence of peer-to-peer programs and other applications classified as spyware. Spyware is known to decrease computer and network performance and spread viruses and worms throughout the entire network. It can also interfere with your *VWCNET* installation and use. Some of these known programs are Kazaa, Weatherbug, Imesh, Morpheus, Bitt Torrent, Emule, WinMX, Bonzi Buddy and Gator. The best way to ensure proper computers and network operation is not to install these and other spyware programs at all. Sometimes uninstalling these programs does not fix the problem; only a reinstallation of the entire operating system and software takes care of all problems due to spyware being installed on a computer. Another issue can be settings from home or office networks to which your computers might have been connected previously. Make sure that all remnants of previous network configurations have been completely removed from your computer.

Macintosh Computers

Macs will work on our campus network, but you must have Mac OS X or later. We'd also recommend having a G4 or faster processor (all iMacs, iBooks and PowerBooks are fine in this respect). It would also be a good idea to pick up Microsoft Office X, which will help you greatly in case you need to turn in assignments to professors with a different operating system.