Fall 2025 Tech Buying Guide for Incoming Ravin School of Architecture Students

Updated on June 2, 2025: this guide was edited on Monday, June 2, 2025, and it differs slightly from the previously issued guide for Fall 2025, and from previous information posted on the University's College Guidance website for laptop purchases; that website has been updated to match this guide.

The recent updates reflect the most current information and include some clarifying information, but they are not substantially different from the formerly posted recommendations.

If you purchased a laptop that meets the formerly posted recommendations, those specs are still valid, and you do not need to change your purchase.

Overview

Students studying architecture at the David R. Ravin School of Architecture work extensively on computers, and a personal laptop computer is an essential tool of that education. Students may use a laptop they already have or choose to buy a new laptop from any vendor.

UNC Charlotte's Niner Ready Laptop Initiative already requires all incoming students to have a laptop, but the standard build of Niner Ready laptops are not sufficient for our programs.

PC or Mac?

Most of the software used in architectural practice is PC-based, but the primary platforms used in the SoA (Rhino Version 8 and the Adobe graphics suite) are equally compatible (and cross-compatible) on Mac and PC. Students therefore may use either a Windows-compatible PC or a Mac computer, and the choice largely depends on personal preference.

Mac users, however, need to use a machine powerful enough to install a partition known as Parallels, which runs the Windows operating system and involves an additional expense over the standard price of the Mac (see specifications and links below). This additional platform on Macs is important because some advanced software is available only for PCs.

As AI technologies continue to develop at a rapid pace, future needs are hard to predict, and students in advanced studios with lower-performing processors may need to outsource their processing to cloud-based servers, involving an additional expense. More powerful processors (in any operating system) will increase the compatibility of machines with advanced processing demands likely to become more common.

Hardware Requirements

The recommendations below may be purchased in bundles prepared by NinerTech Store (see link below), which provides streamlined access to on-campus services and support, as well as an educational discount.

Students purchasing their computers at other vendors should use the provided information to ensure that their purchases meet the recommendations.

Recommended PC build for Windows Laptop:

- Processor comparable to 13th Gen Intel CoreTM i7-13700H
    - or (for higher performance) to 13th Gen Intel Core i9-13900H
- Graphics card comparable to NVIDIA GeForce RTX 3500
    - or (for higher performance) to NVIDIA GeForce RTX 4700
- 32 GB RAM
- 1 TB SSD hard drive
- 15" minimum screen size
- External mouse (three-button + wheel)

Recommended Macbook Pro build:

- M2 Pro, M3 Pro, or M4 Pro chip
- 32 GB of RAM (upgrade from standard amount)
- Parallels software (https://www.parallels.com/landingpage/pd/education)
- Windows OS for Parallels
- 1 TB SSD hard drive
- 16" screen size
- External mouse (three-button + wheel)

Note: Chromebooks, iPads, and mobile devices DO NOT meet the laptop requirement.

Storage Requirements:

Students are required to use the University's cloud-based backup platforms (Google Drive and OneDrive) instead of external drives for routine backups. This is the safest and most reliable way to store your day-to-day files.

External hard drives and private cloud-based storage accounts are useful for long term archiving and for some large file types used in certain elective classes. Students are therefore encouraged to have a private cloud-based storage account or a large external hard drive (1TB or more) on hand for those purposes.

Students should not rely on external hard drives for day-to-day usage.

Software Requirements

Foundational software suites required for all students:

- Microsoft Office: available to download FREE
- Virus Protection: available to download FREE
- Adobe Creative Cloud (full suite): https://www.adobe.com/creativecloud/buy/students.html
- Version 8 of Rhinoceros (Rhino) 3D Modeling

Student subscriptions are available for both the Adobe Suite and Rhino. Incoming students may sign-up for a 90-day free trial of Rhino, which will suffice for the first semester; after the trial ends, a purchased license will be good for the remainder of their education.

Additional software suites required for all graduate students and most upper-level undergraduate students:

- [Autodesk Suite](#): AutoCad, 3DS Max, and Revit are available at [Autodesk.com](#) .

Note: these additional software suites may not be used every semester, and students may wait for classes to begin before purchasing their licenses for these suites, depending on the requirements outlined in the syllabi of the classes in which they are enrolled; however, these suites are industry standards that are widely used by students in many classes.

Computer Labs and Loaner Laptops @ Atkins Library

The David R. Ravin School of Architecture has several computer labs that provide all of the software suites listed above. These labs complement students' laptops, offer spaces for group work, and provide backup hardware for when personal laptops are being serviced. Students should not consider the labs as their primary computing platform.

Students may borrow a laptop from [Atkins Library](#), the UNC Charlotte main library. Laptops circulate for a 24-hour period. AC adapters are also available. Only one laptop can be checked out per patron at any given time, and there is a four hour wait before a patron can check a laptop out again. Laptops are available for currently enrolled UNC Charlotte students only. UNC Charlotte ID must be presented for checkout (temporary IDs are not acceptable) and a student's library account must be in good standing (no fines or overdue items).

Important Links

OneIT (main IT services on campus, including tech support):
https://oneit.charlotte.edu/

Software Center (for anti-virus software and other free/discounted software):
https://charlotte.onthehub.com/WebStore/Welcome.aspx

Microsoft Word download instructions:
https://spaces.charlotte.edu/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=25199020

NinerTech Store (sales and service):
https://oneit.charlotte.edu/get-started/student/laptop-initiative/ninertech-store/