College Corner

The Technology Guidance Counselor Answers Computing Questions

(NAPSA)—Wireless connections are everywhere on college campuses, according to Kenneth Green's Campus Computing Project. The study showed roughly 90 percent of public universities use wireless networks. This trend helps make notebook computers popular with students seeking freedom and mobility. Notebook computers can even record music, show slide shows or TV.

"Colleges and universities increasingly are recognizing the need for mobile computing and are installing wireless access points not just in libraries and dorm halls but also in student unions, activity centers and even outdoor areas," said Gretchen Miller, Dell's school technology expert. "Notebook computers are no longer the simple, underpowered business machines they previously were thought to be. Picking the right notebook can increase productivity, provide enjoyment and enhance a student's overall experience."

Miller advises that students check with their school about specific hardware as there may already be a student computing program in place. Here she also answers the five most frequent questions Dell gets when parents and students consider notebook computers:

1. What's the difference in notebook sizes?

A desktop-replacement system is a notebook computer typically equipped with a 15- or 17-inch screen, a large hard drive, significant memory and a full-size keyboard. These systems can provide the most power available in a

Many students say a notebook computer can be a fun and useful part of campus life.

notebook but, at up to 13 pounds, weigh more than others. An ultraportable system typically weighs four pounds or less. They're easy to carry and good for cramped spaces, with the trade-off being greater technology limitations and smaller keyboards and displays.

2. What about processors, memory and hard drives?

Processors, the "brains" of the computer, dictate how quickly the notebook performs tasks and executes instructions, so it matters how you use the computer. Mobile processors in notebooks use less battery power and typically come in smaller machines, while desktop processors in notebooks use more energy and require a larger system.

Pay attention to the memory and hard drive size. A minimum of 256MB of memory lets you do basic computing such as browse the Internet or use e-mail. Consider 1GB to 2GB of memory for extreme gaming, managing a music collection or playing movies.

Buy a hard drive based on

information you plan to store. Between 20GB to 30GB of disk space is adequate for documents and spreadsheets. For digital music, photos or videos, you need more hard drive capacity. Today's notebooks can accommodate up to 100GB for high-resolution photos, TV programs or data-intensive applications.

3. What does my notebook need to connect wirelessly to the Internet?

Today's notebook computers typically have a built-in wireless antenna or slot for a wireless card. Ask your school if there's a required wireless configuration.

4. How long is the battery life?

This depends on the type of notebook and how you use it. A desktop-replacement model needs more power than smaller ones and that normally means shorter battery life, sometimes as little as under an hour. Some ultraportable models run five hours or more. The amount of wireless activity and screen brightness are user-configurable variables that can significantly affect battery life.

5. What services should I buy?

A notebook computer may frequently travel between classes and to and from home, so there's more wear and tear and occasion for damage. Because it's an investment that can bring years of service, it's worth considering an extended warranty or coverage against accidental damage. The investment up front can help avoid or offset potentially costly repairs in the future.

You can learn more from www.dell.com.