

PORTABLE COMPUTERS

Berea College



Berea College places a laptop computer in the hands of every student to confront the "digital divide" that separates Berea students from others who may have had greater access to technology.

Data show that this initiative is paying dividends. Berea students are now 5-10% more likely than other students to use technology to complete assignments, make presentations, and work in teams. Berea seniors are 14% more likely than the national norm to use the library's Web site to obtain resources. Students in

many classes now receive homework assignments, take tests, and download resources online.

The program is meant not only to assist students during their time on campus but also to give them a running start after graduation. Incoming freshmen receive slightly used laptops that are replaced during their junior year with new Dell laptops fully equipped with word processing, spreadsheet, database, presentation, Internet, and E-mail software. Upon graduation, students take their laptops with them, ready to enter a technology-rich workplace or a graduate program.

For Berea's faculty and staff, the laptop program has opened new avenues for teaching and redefined the work environment. Patricia Isaacs, Business and Economics Professor (pictured right), gives quizzes and exams online. On exam day, students bring their laptops, connect to the network, and are given access to the exam. Upon submission of the completed exam, they receive immediate feedback.

"When I began giving exams this way, I quickly saw the learning that takes place when students immediately see which answers are correct. Students are much more interested in why a particular answer is incorrect immediately after taking the exam than after a day or more has passed and paper exams are returned."

Judith Weckman, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, finds having a laptop helps her to coordinate work and family obligations. On a day when her son was sick, she was able to spend the rest of the day at home with him, while completing an important project.

"I spent four uninterrupted hours and by day's end had accomplished even more than I could have in my busy office. And my son was comfortable and feeling better. ... It is very hard to walk away from work that needs to be done; it is harder still to ignore the needs of one's family. I find every day it is difficult to be both a mother and professional worker, but on that day I was able to be both."



With the help of her laptop, sophomore Tiffany Yates is able to do much of her research at her home in Berea's Ecological Village while also caring for her 3-year-old son.

A busy nursing major, wife, and mother, Tiffany used the library Web site to find e-books and nursing journals for a recent class presentation on second-hand smoke. "Having the library on the computer helps a lot," she says.

Her son, Tekaury, is learning about computers, too, as he visits Web sites for preschoolers while his mom studies.

Tiffany also found the laptop helpful when she became ill and could not leave home to attend classes. She e-mailed her professors, who sent her assignments online.

Laptops At Work

- WebCT Vista course management system allows for electronic discussion groups, online homework assignments, resource distribution, and testing.
- In nursing, economics, physics, and other classes, students can peruse lecture presentations prior to class and after for review.
- Chemistry students can attach their laptops to external probes to collect temperature, pH, pressure, absorbance, and electrical current levels to chart and analyze.
- German students can download recorded songs, radio plays, spoken poems, and video clips from the campus server.
- Students involved in summer internships can take their laptops with them for greater mobility and flexibility.

Quick Facts

- More than 7,000 connections across campus enable students to access information resources 24 hours a day.
- Laptops are self-maintained by Berea's Information Systems and Services staff and students, through an agreement with Dell.
- The Help Desk provides technical support, troubleshooting, and training.
- Berea saw a 50% reduction in paper use in the first year of the program.

Funding Needs

Funding Goal: \$8 million to endow the program

Funds Raised: \$7,850,000

Remaining Need: \$150,000

Endow one laptop: \$40,000

Purchase one laptop: \$2,000