



ECU Interior Design & Architecture Computer Guidelines (2025)

College of Health and Human Performance

Department of Interior Design and Merchandising (IDMR)

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Introduction

For students entering the Interior Design and Architecture program at ECU, having the right computer and software setup is essential for coursework from freshman to senior year. Many software applications used in the industry require high processing power, dedicated graphics, and sufficient memory.

This guide outlines the hardware and software recommendations for students, explaining the importance of each program, why a Windows PC is recommended over a Mac, and additional tools that can enhance workflow.

Recommended Software for Interior Design Students

These are industry-standard programs that students will use from their first year through senior projects:

Software	Purpose	Website	Student Pricing
AutoCAD	2D Drafting, Space Planning	Autodesk 3D Design, Engineering & Construction Software	Free for students
Revit	BIM (Building Information Modeling)	Autodesk 3D Design, Engineering & Construction Software	Free for students
SketchUp Pro	Conceptual 3D Modeling	3D Design for Educators 3D Modeling Software for Students SketchUp for Education SketchUp	Pro Student Price
Twinmotion	Real-time Rendering & Visualization	A cutting-edge real-time visualization tool - Twinmotion	Free for students
Enscape	Real-time Rendering & VR Features	Enscape Student & Educational Licenses Enscape™ Enscape	Discount Student Price
Adobe Photoshop	Image Edition, Renders, Presentation	Adobe Creative Cloud for students and teachers Adobe Creative Cloud	Adobe CC Student Plan
Adobe Illustrator	Vector Graphics for Plans & Diagrams	Adobe Creative Cloud for students and teachers Adobe Creative Cloud	Adobe CC Student Plan
Adobe InDesign	Presentation Layouts & Portfolios	Adobe Creative Cloud for students and teachers Adobe Creative Cloud	Adobe CC Student Plan

Additional Programs for Organization & Productivity

Software	Purpose	Website	Student Pricing
Microsoft 365	Documents, Spreadsheets, Presentations	Free Office 365 for Students and Educators Microsoft Education	Microsoft 365 Free for students
Procreate	Digital Sketching, Rendering	Procreate – Art is for everyone.	Procreate \$12.99 (One-time)
Miro	Concept Boards, Digital Pin-Ups	Miro The Innovation Workspace	Free Version
Matto Board	Mood Boards, Color Plans	Matto Board	Free Version

Recommended Hardware (2025 Edition)

Why a PC Over a Mac?

- Windows is an industry standard for AutoCAD, Revit, and Enscape.
- Macs do not natively support Revit (it requires Bootcamp or Parallels, which is inefficient).
- PCs have better GPU options for rendering.
- Gaming laptops or Workstation PCs provide the best performance for architecture students.

Minimum vs. Recommended Specs for an Interior Design Laptop

Component	Minimum Requirements	Recommended (2025) for 3D, Rendering, & CAD
Processor (CPU)	Intel i7 / AMD Ryzen 7	Intel i9 / AMD Ryzen 9
Graphics Card (GPU)	4GB VRAM (NVIDIA RTX 3060)	8GB+ VRAM (NVIDIA RTX 4060/4070/4080 or higher)
RAM	16GB	32GB+
Storage (SSD)	512GB	1TB or higher
Screen	15" FHD (1920x1080)	17" QHD+ (2560x1440) or 4K
Battery Life	4-6 hours	8+ hours recommended

Best Laptops for Interior Design & Architecture (2025 Models)

1. Dell XPS 17 (2025 Edition)

- Processor: Intel i9
- GPU: NVIDIA RTX 4060
- RAM: 32GB
- Price: ~\$2,500

2. Asus ROG Zephyrus G16

- Processor: AMD Ryzen 9
- GPU: NVIDIA RTX 4070
- RAM: 32GB
- Price: ~\$2,300

3. Lenovo ThinkPad P1 Gen 7 (Workstation-Grade)

- Processor: Intel i9
- GPU: NVIDIA RTX A4000 (better for CAD)
- RAM: 32GB
- Price: ~\$3,000

4. MacBook Pro 16" (M3 Max) (Only for Adobe & SketchUp Users, NOT Revit)

- Processor: Apple M3 Max
- GPU: 38-core Apple GPU

- RAM: 64GB
- Price: ~\$3,500

What is a Dedicated Graphics Card & Why Does It Matter?

- A dedicated GPU (Graphics Processing Unit) improves performance in 3D modeling, rendering, and VR walkthroughs.
- Architecture software like Revit, Enscape, and Twinmotion requires NVIDIA RTX graphics cards for optimal performance.
- Avoid integrated Intel UHD graphics (common in budget laptops) as they cannot handle CAD & rendering.

Should You Get an iPad or a Tablet?

An iPad (Pro or Air) with an Apple Pencil is a great secondary tool for sketching, Procreate, and quick presentations. A Windows Tablet runs full AutoCAD & Revit compatibility (Unlike iPads).

However, it does not replace a laptop for CAD & modeling.

Best iPads or Tablets for Interior Design Students

Models	Best for	Price
iPad Pro 12.9" (M2)	Digital Sketching & Procreate	~\$1,200
Microsoft Surface Pro 10	Full Windows Compatibility, Digital Sketching, AutoCAD Use	~\$1,500
Samsung Galaxy Tablet S9 Ultra	High-Quality Android Alternative, Great for Sketching	~\$1,200
iPad Air (M2)	Budget-Friendly Sketching	~\$800
Lenovo Yoga 9i (2-in 1)	Flexible Design, Can Run Full Adobe Suite & AutoCAD	~\$1,400

FAQ: What Should a Freshman Buy?

Can I use a Mac?

- If you only plan to use Adobe & SketchUp, yes.
- If you need Revit, Enscape, AutoCAD, NO—use a Windows PC.

Can I get a gaming laptop?

- Yes! Many gaming laptops have powerful GPUs, but make sure they have at least an NVIDIA RTX 4060 for long-term use.

Can I use a desktop instead of a laptop?

- Yes, if you plan to work from home, a desktop with a higher-end GPU (RTX 4080 or better) can be a longer-term investment. However, some studios require collaboration.

Purchasing a computer is OPTIONAL for students enrolled in one of the programs listed here. However, any student can take advantage of the special pricing and available support.

Chromebook devices are currently **not a recommended choice** by any academic programs at ECU due to several limitations:

- Many required software applications cannot be installed on a Chromebook; only apps available through the Google Play Store for Chrome OS and Chrome browser extensions through the Chrome Web Store are compatible.
- Microsoft (Office) 365 limitations – You can only run the Microsoft 365 web apps on a Chromebook by navigating to pirate365.ecu.edu through a browser. You cannot install the full offline versions of these apps and the standalone Android apps cannot be installed on Chromebooks.
- LockDown Browser limitations – Some Chromebooks have had issues running the LockDown Browser extension for the Chrome web browser.
- Students should consider their intended major and contact that department for information before making a decision on a new computer.
- *For programs requiring a PC, this means a Windows PC and NOT a virtualized/dual-booting Mac.

For any questions on compatibility or purchasing, students can contact ECU Pirate Techs or visit the Interior Design Lab for guidance.