Frequently Asked Questions: Cavalier Computers Offerings

Supplement to the:
Recommendations on Computers for Incoming 1st Year Students
Arriving in August 2016
U.Va. School of Engineering and Applied Science

Q: I have read all the materials posted on the UVA website but I am curious if you had a recommendation on a specific computer listed at Cavalier Computers. Your advice is greatly appreciated.

Response by Prof. M. C. Rosen, Director of Information Technology, U.Va. SEAS Posted: 25MAY2016 [rev. 2]

A: I want to point out that there is no obligation that students purchase their laptop from Cavalier Computers (CavComp).

CavComp offers some strengths as a retail outlet:
- Have a good track record. -Understand the market and academic calendar. -Offer quality models. -Provide a comprehensive set of services and coverage.

CavComp sells a variety of laptop brands and models, and is also an authorized repair shop for many of them. They can also provide an array of coverage plans.

There is also a special program known as the CAV Program, and formerly as Back-to-School (BTS). These are specifically chosen laptops with a bundled package of software, support, and warranty coverage. The purchase price for the package can look expensive compared with other outlets where you can also buy a laptop that meets the SEAS recommendations-- but there’s a lot included in the CavComp package to account for the price.

Key attributes of CavComp’s CAV Program are: (1) enterprise-class models; (2) multi-year warranty with accidental damage coverage; (3) on-site, service department, and (4) loaner laptops are provided when servicing requires that a student’s unit be left for repair.

Approximately 25% of the students who purchase computers at CavComp make a claim under the accidental damage coverage. In case a laptop slides off a table or it is dropped, the repair is covered at no additional cost. A repair for an incident such as a cracked screen is covered with no out-of-pocket expense under their CAV Program plans.
Comments on the Specific Models

I looked over the model choices available this May, and there are Dell, Lenovo and HP choices under the CAV Program that look like good candidates. Both Dell and Lenovo have been part of CAV Program for a number of years and their laptops have a solid track record at U.Va. HP now in its third year of participation has also come forward with competitive offerings.

CavComp sells the enterprise Latitude line from Dell, the enterprise Thinkpad line from Lenovo, and the enterprise Elitebook line from HP. They are the same type we purchase for faculty and staff. These products typically have a higher build quality and better durability than consumer lines of laptops. CavComp's experience show that the consumer models, even from these same firms, do not hold up as well. This may not matter as much if your strategy is to find a less expensive laptop to serve a year or two, and you aren't shopping for the longer-term.

From the available choices in the CAV Program lineup, I would consider the:

(These configurations are found on the CAV-SEAS page.)

- 14” Lenovo ThinkPad T460s 20GB RAM/256GB SSD (Weighs 3.15 lbs.)
- 14” Dell Latitude E5470 16GB/500GB (Weighs 4.02 lbs.)
- 14” HP EliteBook 840 G3 8GB/500GB (Weighs 3.76 lbs.)
- 14” HP EliteBook 1040 G3 8GB/256GB SSD (Weighs 3.15 lbs.)

All are enterprise quality choices. They are configured with the FHD screen (sometimes listed as HD+ or higher) resolution, and touch capability which is recommended for use with Windows 10. The track records for the earlier versions of these products is very good. The configurations of these models can be used as a guide if shopping for a laptop at other retailers.

I'd expect that all four laptops will have quite similar computational and graphics performance due to their similar Intel 6th Generation ‘Skylake’ Core i5-6200U or 6300U processors. The two laptops with solid state SSD drives will be faster to load programs and write files, but have half the capacity of the two with conventional hard drives. Students who like to store their music collections, video or other large files sets on their laptop hard drive and not cloud storage should take this into consideration or add some external storage as needed.
I was especially impressed with the Lenovo ThinkPad T460s. Its touchscreen was more matte and not so glossy like the others. This display is less reflective and easier on the eyes. The rubber-like coating on the case makes it less slick than the others. Combined with the T460s’ low weight, it made it nicer to carry around.

The HP 840 G3 is offering good pricing for a nice system. The Dell Latitude E5470 is offering more RAM than the 840 at slightly higher price. The E5470 is from a line of systems that has a history of reliable performance. It is thicker (a bit bulkier and heavier) than the other choices. The HP EliteBook 1040 G3 is the highest screen resolution of the four and is lightweight. It is thin and sleek but the configuration has 8 GB RAM at that higher price point.

The CAV Program is also selling another laptop that goes above the guidelines, and is listed here for students with specialized needs whose own computing requirements exceed the school-work recommendations.

▷ 15.6” Dell Precision M5510 16GB/1TB (Weighs 3.93 lbs.)

The Dell M5510 is more powerful, has a larger screen, has an advanced graphics card, and is significantly more expensive. It was configured for Architecture School students.

Reference links:

Cav Program Site:  http://www.cavprogram.com/
Cav Program’s Page for Engineering:  http://www.cavprogram.com/shop_seas.asp

Information on Computers for Incoming 1st Year Students arriving August 2016
http://infotech.seas.virginia.edu/firstyear

U.Va. School of Engineering and Applied Science's web site
http://www.seas.virginia.edu

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