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, CTO, U.Va. SEAS Posted: 5/1/15; rev. 1

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 reasonable candidates. Both Dell and Lenovo have been part of CAV Program for a number of years and have a good track record at U.Va. HP now in its second cycle of participation has also come forward with a competitive offering.

CavComp sells the enterprise Latitude line from Dell, and the enterprise Thinkpad line from Lenovo. These products typically have a higher build quality and better durability than consumer lines. They are the same type we purchase for faculty and staff. 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:

▷ 14” Dell Latitude E5450 (configuration found on the CAV-SEAS page) 8GB RAM
▷ 14” Lenovo Thinkpad T450s (configuration found on the CAV-SEAS page)
▷ 14” HP Elitebook 840 G2 (configuration found on the CAV-SEAS page)

All are enterprise quality, conservative choices. They are configured with the FHD screen (sometimes listed as HD+ or higher) resolution, and touch capability which is recommended for use with Windows8. 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.

Comparing the Dell E5450 with the other two, it is $230 less expensive.

I’d expect that all three laptops though will have quite similar performance due to containing the same Intel Core i5-5200U processor, 8 GB of RAM memory, hard drive size, screen size and touch screen capability.
The CAV Program is also selling and supporting three other model laptops that go above the guidelines, and are listed here for students with specialized needs whose own computing requirements exceed the school-work recommendations.

▷ 14” Dell E5450 optionally configured with 16GB RAM and 500GB 7200rpm Hybrid Hard Drive

▷ 13.3” Dell XPS 13 Notebook with UltraSharp QHD+ Touch Panel

▷ 15.6” Dell Precision M3800 Mobile Workstation

Notes: The extra memory of the 16GB RAM equipped Dell E5450 is useful to have, but not all students will take advantage of it. The Dell XPS 13 is an ultrabook—lightweight and expensive. The Dell M3800 is more powerful, bigger, heavier, more expensive and has an advanced graphics card. 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 2015
  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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