Rady School of Management – 2026 Laptop Guidelines

Welcome!

We know you're here to earn a Master's degree — not become an IT expert. But having the right laptop will make your life much smoother, whether you're in class, collaborating with peers, or completing projects. This guide outlines what kind of laptop and software setup you'll need for success at Rady.

When to Buy

We recommend buying your laptop within 30 days of your program start date — ideally in July or August for fall-start students. This ensures:

- Access to back-to-school discounts

- You get the latest generation technology

What to Buy: Laptop Requirements

We support both Windows and macOS systems. Focus on hardware capability rather than operating systems, your laptop should be fast, reliable, and ready for multitasking.

Important: Avoid ultra-thin or ultra-budget laptops that use low-power CPUs (like Intel Core i3 or "Core M" processors). These can't handle the workload.

Older MacBook Airs with M1, M2 processors, even with 16GB RAM, will struggle with MSBA program requirements. Older Apple laptops with Intel processors are no longer supported.

☑ Recommended Specs (2026)

Component	Recommended	Minimum	Notes
Processor	MSBA (AI/data-heavy) Intel Core Ultra 9/X9 (Series 3) OR Apple M5 Pro	MSBA (AI/data-heavy) Core Ultra 7 (Series 3/2) or Apple M3	MSBA (Avoid List) Below Ultra 7; M1/M2/M3 MacBook Air; Apple-Intel Macs
	MBA, MPAc, MQF Core Ultra 7 (Series 3) or Apple M5	MBA, MPAc, MQF Core Ultra 5 (Series 3/2), Ryzen AI 300, or M3	MBA, MPAc, MQF (Avoid List) Below Intel Ultra 5; Apple-Intel Macs
Storage	1 TB SSD (NVMe preferred)	512 GB SSD	No spinning drives (HDDs). SSD is essential.
Memory (RAM)	32 GB (esp. MSBA students)	16 GB	Do NOT buy a new laptop with 8 GB of memory. It is not sufficient.
Battery Life	8–12 hours real-world usage	6 hours minimum	Not all classrooms have outlets for every seat.
WiFi	WiFi 7 (WiFi 6E acceptable)	WiFi 6	UCSD uses high-speed wireless.
Warranty	3-year + accidental protection	3-year parts/labor	Extended coverage is highly recommended.
Region	U.S. English model		Support is only available for U.S./English systems.

Software Requirements

Requirement	Details
Windows OS	Windows 11 (Version 25H2 or newer). Windows 10 reached the end of life in Oct 2025 and is not recommended.
macOS	macOS Tahoe (26.5.x). Upgrade during a break, not mid-quarter.
Office Suite	Microsoft 365 — Provided free to you. Don't purchase it separately.
Antivirus	Windows Defender (PC), Sophos or Avira (Mac) — any reputable antivirus is fine.

💡 To check your OS version:

- Windows: Click Start → type `winver` and then Enter

- Mac: Click the Apple menu → 'About This Mac'

Course Materials & Note Taking

- Printed handouts are no longer provided. Instructors share materials on Canvas (PDF/PowerPoint).

- If you prefer printed copies, you'll need to print them yourself on campus or use your own printer.

- Some instructors do not allow laptops during lectures. Consider:

  • iPad with Apple Pencil

  • Convertible PC (e.g. Surface Pro, Lenovo Yoga with pen support)

🚫 Unsupported Devices

- Netbooks, Chromebooks, tablets do not meet minimum specs.

- These may be used as secondary devices but not for coursework.

- Rady Technology Services does not support smartphones, third-party peripherals, or home network issues.

🛠️ Rady IT Support – What We Cover

✅ We Can Help With:

- UCSD email setup, VPN, wireless, Office 365, printers

- Software installs and troubleshooting

- Account access issues

- Virus/malware troubleshooting (best effort)

❌ We Don't Provide:

- Hardware repairs or shipping support

- Data recovery or OS reinstallation

- Support for personal devices like cameras or phones

- Help with non-English systems or software

❓ Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

- Q: Do I need to buy a new laptop?

A: Not necessarily. If you bought a laptop within the last year that meets the minimum specs, you're likely good. But make sure you have an extended warranty.

- Q: Can I use a work laptop?

A: We don't recommend it, but it can work. Corporate devices often have restrictions (e.g. no admin access) that interfere with Rady systems like VPN, email, or software installs.

- Q: What versions of Office are supported?

A: Microsoft 365 (Excel, Word, PowerPoint). You'll get it free as a student. Don't use older or unsupported versions. You should be able to download and install on your first day at the school.

- Q: What language should my OS and Office be in?

A: English only. We support only U.S. English versions for both Windows/macOS and Office to ensure compatibility.

- Q: Where can I buy a laptop?

A: You can buy from any vendor, but the UCSD Bookstore offers student discounts.
Examples:
- Dell Laptops
- MacBook Pro

- Q: Is there a brand recommendation?

A: No. Choose any brand you would like to use as long as they match at least the minimum hardware and software requirements.

- Q: Is it true that MSBA students would need higher performance laptops?

A: Yes. The MSBA program involves data-heavy and computationally intensive tasks. Older MacBook Airs with M1 or M2 chips — even with 16 GB of RAM — may experience performance limitations. Additionally, Apple laptops with Intel processors are no longer supported by Apple and do not meet the program's performance expectations. The differentiator for MSBA isn't clock speed. It's **NPU TOPS and core count**, since local AI/ML workloads (model inference, data pipelines, occasionally lightweight local training) lean on both. A Core Ultra 5 handles Excel/PowerPoint/Canvas fine but will bottleneck on MSBA's coursework in a way it won't for other programs.