

Whither Windows? Windows Vista and Office 2007 - What is a poor student to do?

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Whither Windows? The reporters of *ENT News* sum things up quite nicely when they comment (<http://entmag.com/reports/article.asp?EditorialsID=110>) that the days of doing a simple Windows upgrade are long gone: there are now so many flavors of Windows and Office to choose from that knowing when and how to upgrade gets quite confusing. Since questions about what version of Windows (XP? Vista? What version of Vista?) to purchase and what version of Office (2003? 2007? What version of 2007?) to purchase comprise the majority of information that my colleagues and I in Academic Computing Services answer during the orientations in the summer, it is not too early to begin exploring these options for the UNT student community.

First of all, even though everyone knows who the father of Anna Nicole's baby is, no one - it seems - knows EXACTLY what version of Vista or Office to buy or where and when they will become available. However, I shall do my best based on communications I've had with our Microsoft representatives and articles from various websites and news services. I will review recommendations for students for Windows Vista and Office 2007 and then briefly describe hardware needs as well.

Windows Vista - Windows Vista comes in five varieties according to some articles and four varieties according to Microsoft so we shall simply go with Microsoft's versions: Vista Home Basic, Vista Home Premium, Vista Business, and Vista Ultimate. An easy rule-of-thumb ALWAYS is, do not buy anything with 'Home' in the title because your options for network connectivity are limited. Vista Business is recommended for UNT students because they will not have to be concerned as to whether or not they can use Eaglenet Wireless or ResNet with this version. Also Vista Business has significant backup and restore functions to save your data. As Vista is deployed on campus, Faculty and staff members will likely be using Vista Ultimate primarily because of its increased security functions such as file encryption. However, on-campus deployment will be done on a per-department basis as requirements dictate and resources allow. If you want to see all of the current features of each type of Vista, check Microsoft's official website, which has a handy chart summary (<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/windowsvista/editions/>).

Office 2007 - Office 2007 also comes in many varieties and it is not so easy to know which to buy. Much of that will depend on one's field and major. Microsoft's handy chart of features is here: http://www.windowsmarketplace.com/content.aspx?ctId=391&tabid=1&WT.mc_id=0207_09.

Many students may only *need* Office Home and Student or Office Standard, however, since one can *never* be sure what a professor might want, the best bet is to get Office Professional since it includes the versatile Publisher and also Access. Office Ultimate is a bit overkill for students since its additional features are geared more towards business users with applications for team collaboration, forms publishing, and high-level researching. It's best to check with your major department to be sure which version of Office is required for your courses.

Where and how to purchase these products? The UNT bookstore will be receiving student and faculty/staff versions (for personal use) of Vista and Office 2007 in a matter of weeks. According to Jean Probst of the UNT Bookstore, recent documentation indicates that they will be carrying Vista Business Upgrade for students at an educational rate and Vista Ultimate for faculty and staff. Office 2007 Professional also seems to be what will be available. Since these fall in with the recommendations given above, UNT community members should be able to get the software they need right here on campus. Probst added that Office and Windows XP and 2003 products will also continue to be available.

What about Macintosh users? Bask in your superiority and go buy an iPhone....just kidding! Office 2008 for Macintosh is slated to be released within the next month (or the next quarter according to what article one happens to be reading on a certain day) and will also be available at the bookstore at educational rates. The latest Mac OS X upgrade has been pushed back by the company until the Fall. Oh, and you Linux folks....well, just go back to enjoying free computing the way it ought to be - you have nothing to worry about! OpenOffice remains a viable option for the same functionality that Microsoft Office provides (and it's free <http://www.openoffice.org/>)"

A little about hardware requirements: the nice thing about buying a new Windows PC this year is that you really only need to be concerned about one thing if you are planning to upgrade to Windows Vista and that is **how much RAM you have**. While one can 'get away with' buying a new machine with only 1 gig of RAM, it is **strongly recommended** that one get 2 gigs of RAM for the best performance on a machine running Windows Vista Business, Office 2007 Pro and various and sundry multimedia and entertainment applications. In short, if you like multi-tasking, you need 2 gigs. Other things to look for include getting a dual-core processor (becoming increasing standard on consumer products), as large a hard drive as affordable and a DVD burner. Most computer manufacturers (Dell, Gateway, HP etc.) will bundle their hardware with basic Windows Vista and Office products preloaded but in most cases what they offer will be unsuitable for a UNT community member. However, when configuring a computer online for purchase, all of the manufacturer sites I researched allowed one to upgrade to the recommended Vista and Office 2007 versions for a nominal extra fee. Also, if you buy a laptop be sure to have both a standard network card and a wireless card for optimal connectivity on campus.

As an aside, I saw a demonstration of a cool product for laptop owners the other day: Computrace - described at <http://www.lojackforlaptops.com/>. Computrace is an application that reports the location of a stolen laptop via internet connection and has been found to help considerably in recovering stolen computers. It is certainly worth a look!

But my parents are sending me to UNT with grandma's old computer that has Windows XP and Office 2003 on it - how will I survive? You will survive just fine. Office 2007 is backwards compatible with older versions of Office (though you need to be careful about how you save your documents) and will open documents created on earlier versions. There is no problem switching between versions of the Windows OS and it looks like XP is going to be around and supported for quite awhile. The general access computer labs and the different colleges and schools on campus are taking a measured approach to upgrading Office and Windows software (meaning that they are taking it nice and slow....) and will have plenty of tools available to help students, faculty, and staff move smoothly between older versions of software that they might have at home or in the dorm, and newer versions that might be available in labs and classrooms.

Purchasing questions?

If you are thinking about upgrading your home computer and have purchasing questions about all these new varieties of software that Microsoft has thrown at us, I strongly encourage you to contact the UNT Helpdesk at 940-565-2324 or helpdesk@unt.edu. Additionally, contact the UNT Bookstore at 940-565-2592 or unt@bkstr.com to find out what they have in stock and at what price point. In short, don't sweat it - we are all just as confused as you are and you can be rest-assured that many upgrade options and prices will be available.