You've passed the exams and sorted your room in halls. Now you just need the kit to do your course work

University Challenge

opefully you're over the UCAS jitters and clearing panics by now. If you've secured your place at university, your hard work has paid off – you can now prepare yourself for the wanton hedonism associated with full-time higher education. And the occasional essay, or seminar or something.

Taking your own computer to college is increasingly important, particularly if you're going to be studying design or computing, obviously. These days though, a computer will be a massive help whatever you study – tutors will use email constantly, and even post lecture notes online.

Unless you fancy queuing up to use a library (invariably Windows) computer whenever you want to write an essay or send an email (or check MySpace, or IM your mates), you'll

probably want your own computer. And if you choose a shiny new Mac, your hall room will instantly become a place of interest for your new peers.

Since no one going to college is going to have an extravagant budget, our particular university challenge has been to show you what you can do as cheaply as possible. Over the next few pages, we're going to show you the must-haves – as well as some nice-to-haves – for university life, from a Mac to iPod speakers, and software you might need for your course. We'll also look at some of the internet services available that can help you organise your new working life more effectively – as well as Facebook, which should also help with your social life. And we've been watching the pounds so you don't have to.

Which Mac?

It's going to be the centre of your working world, so make sure it does what you need it to do

Picking the right Mac is usually down to finding what gives you the power you need with the budget you've got – and the space you'll have. It's all very well deciding you need a Mac Pro with a 30in monitor, but what if your pokey accommodation won't even fit the boxes in through the door?

For most people, a MacBook is going to be the best bet. They're small yet powerful, have a MagSafe power adaptor that will save them from plummeting to their doom during multiple parties, have WiFi as well as Ethernet for connecting them up to university networks and come in at less than £900, depending on how much you add to the base specifications.

The best news is that Apple does offer a student discount as long as you are at one of Apple's affiliated UK higher education institutions. It works out at about a 6 per cent saving across the range, and you'll also get a free three-year parts and labour warranty on your new Mac.

You can call 0800 039 1010 to order or visit the Apple Store for Education website – but you will need to be on your university's network in order to make purchases.
www.apple.com/uk/education/store

Choose your Mac

Mac mini

If space and money is limited then consider a Mac mini. Its tiny size (16.5cm square by 5cm tall) and bargain pricing sets it apart from Apple's other desktop computers. But beware, it doesn't come with a screen, keyboard, mouse or speakers, so if you don't have those already that's an extra investment. There are two models, the cheaper £374.83 Mac mini can't burn DVDs and has a smaller hard drive though.
Mac mini, 1.83GHz – £374.83
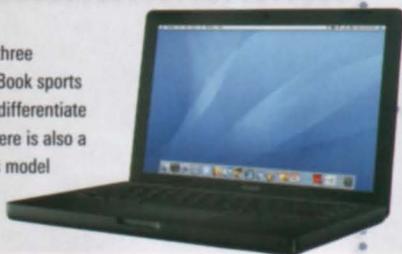Mac mini, 2GHz – £468.83

MacBook

Apple's entry-level laptop comes in three configurations. The £891 black MacBook sports a bigger hard drive but little else to differentiate it from the £779 white MacBook. There is also a less pricy £656 MacBook. While this model lacks the DVD-burning SuperDrive and has a slower processor and smaller hard drive, it would leave you some spare cash to buy everything else you need.
MacBook, white 2.0GHz – £656.83
MacBook, white 2.16GHz – £779.03
MacBook, black 2.16GHz – £891.83

iMac

Apple's iMac has been updated with a new look and new specs this month. There are four configurations. The entry-level £750 20-inch model is a great price, but its graphics card isn't as good as the next model up. The top-of-the-range iMac offers 2.8GHz processors, 2GB RAM, and a 500GB hard drive.
iMac, 20-inch, 2GHz – £750.83
iMac, 20-inch, 2.4GHz – £891.83
iMac, 24-inch, 2.4GHz – £1,079.83
iMac, 24-inch, 2.8GHz – £1,371.23

MacBook Pro

The MacBook Pro is a step up from the MacBook. It's got more memory, a better processor, faster SuperDrive, and a better graphics card. The screen is bigger too, coming in 15- and 17-inch versions. It's also a lot more expensive, with prices ranging from £1,194.98 for the entry level model, and going up to £1,655.58 for the 17-inch version.
MacBook Pro, 15-inch, 2.2GHz – £1,194.98
MacBook Pro, 15-inch, 2.4GHz – £1,471.10
MacBook Pro, 17-inch, 2.4GHz – £1,655.58

Mac Pro

The Mac Pro is the top end of Apple's computer offering. It is a workhorse featuring two dual-core processors – or in the case of the top of the range – two quad-core processors, an amazing 8 cores. You'll need big pockets though since a Mac Pro prices start at £1,388.85, and that's a bare-bones model without a monitor. It's massively customisable when you order, so the price will depend on what you want. Be on the lookout for second-hand bargains – previous generation Macs aren't too shabby and come in a lot cheaper.

All prices shown are only available from the Apple Store for Education. The discounts are only available to students aged 18 and over with a valid student card, attending, or accepted into, a UK education establishment.
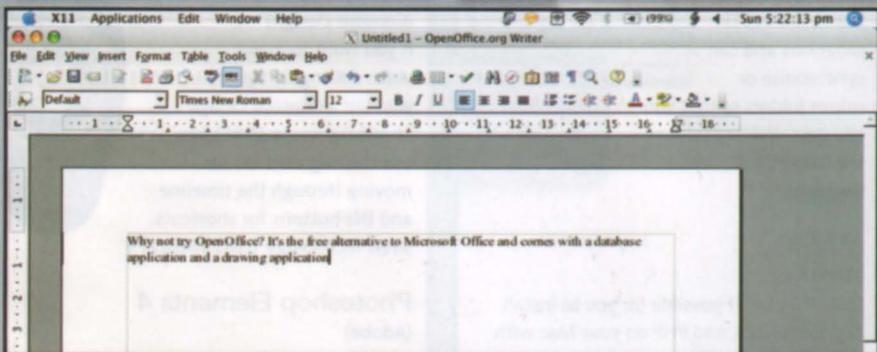
Free software

iLife '08

Buy a Mac and you'll get iLife with it for free. iLife lets you manage your photos, make music, create movies, build web pages and burn DVDs, all with the minimum of effort. Want everyone at home to know what you've been up to? Create a blog, send them a DVD, put a movie online, or create a photocast they can subscribe to. iLife is also great for your work life, since you can create audio-visual presentations for your projects. And if you're on a film-making course, well you've just got almost all you need.
www.apple.com/ilife

OpenOffice

Microsoft Office isn't cheap. Even the Student and Teacher Edition costs £84 or so on Amazon. But you're going to need a decent word processor and maybe some presentation software, so why not try an alternative, OpenOffice, which is almost as good as Microsoft Office, but has a much lower price tag and does some things even Microsoft's best can't.

It doesn't look as good as Office, but OpenOffice, available to download from www.openoffice.org, can open and save files in Office format as well as its own, comes with database and drawing applications, and won't cost you any of your student loan.
www.openoffice.org

Organise your life

Google Calendar
iCal is your Mac's built-in calendar program, but to get the most out of it you'll need a .Mac subscription, which costs £70 per year. So why not give Google calendar a go? It's as powerful as iCal, giving you multiple calendars for your different activities, and works online so is available wherever you have internet access. It also lets you coordinate your activities with other people's, letting you publish your calendar and subscribe to others, making it perfect for organising club events, even if you have to deal with poor unfortunates who don't have a Mac.
www.google.com/calendar

Remember the Milk
Time flies when you're at uni and before you know it, essays are due, projects need to be handed in and exams are just round the corner. If you're going to avoid the deluge, you need to plan carefully. One of the habits of "highly effective people" is the To Do list and frankly, there's nothing quite as motivating as ticking off items on the list. Remember the Milk is the ultimate online To Do list. It integrates with Google Calendar, will email, instant message or text you reminders, and let's you update it from almost anywhere in almost any way you choose.
www.rememberthemilk.com

Facebook
It started life on a university campus, so it's only fitting that every student these days has a Facebook 'presence'. Easily the most elegant social-networking site, Facebook lets you keep in touch with your friends online, share photos, join groups, let everyone know what you're up to, and catch up with people you lost touch with because you didn't really like them that much. If you become a Facebook addict, you can receive updates of your friends' activities via RSS feed or SMS, too.
www.facebook.com

Get your kit on

Here's the stuff we reccommend...

Artists and designers

Drawing pad
Graphics tablets make design so much easier

Graphire4 Studio A6 Tablet & Pen
(Wacom)
Designers are often sceptical about them at first, but invariably end up swearing by a graphics tablet. A6 sized tablets are reasonably priced (£63.80 at Amazon) to make your life easier.
Computers Unlimited, 020 8358 5858

Creative Suite 3
(Adobe)
It's a fact of life that you'll probably use all or part of Adobe Creative Suite wherever you work. Starting at £133 for Photoshop Extended to £240 for Design Premium, learn now to get the job you want later.
www.adobe.com/uk/education

Design wise
Creative Suite 3 is the industry standard software for designers

QuarkXPress Passport 7 (Education edition)
(Quark)
Still the industry standard page layout program, QuarkXPress' education edition is only £90, and Quark lets students use education licenses for commercial work.
http://euro.quark.com/en/education

Express yourself More than three million people around the world use QuarkXPress

Web & multimedia designers

Adobe CS3 Web Standard – Student Edition
(Adobe)
Dreamweaver, Flash, and Fireworks are tools familiar to every web and multimedia designer. You can get them all for £154.99.
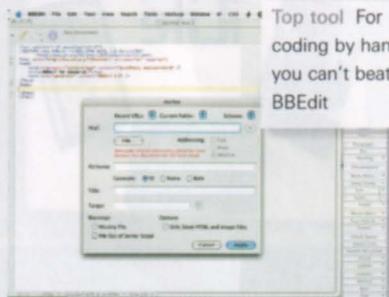www.adobe.com/uk/education

Internet savvy
The major web design tools, all in one box

BBEdit 8.6
(Bare Bones)
If you plan on being a handcoder or doing any coding work, BBEdit is the tool of choice and the educational version is $49 (less than £25).
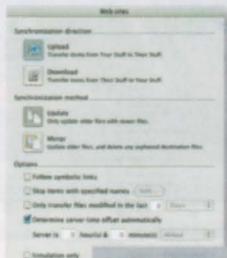www.barebones.com

Top tool For coding by hand, you can't beat BBEdit

Transmit 3.5
(Panic Software)
It's easy to use, cheap ($29.95/£15), supports more server types than built-in FTP programs and can synchronise or mirror folders so that your site gets updated with all the latest files.
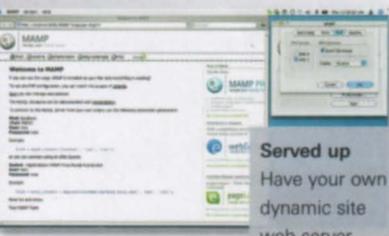www.panic.com

FTP it Transmit makes working with servers easy

MAMP 1.6
(Open source)
MAMP makes it possible for you to install and run MySQL and PHP on your Mac with just a drag and drop operation, letting you run, configure and test your web sites on your Mac.
www.sourceforge.net/projects/mamp

Served up
Have your own dynamic site web server on your Mac

Film & photography students

Editing tool
Start out in editing with Final Cut Express HD

Final Cut Express HD
(Apple)
Final Cut Studio (£849) is a bit pricey for most students – but at £199, Final Cut Express HD will let you capture and edit DV or HDV video, add dynamic titles and graphics, and score your movie using Soundtrack 1.5.
www.apple.com/uk/education

Aperture 1.5
(Apple)
Aperture is the premier all-in-one production tool for digital photographers. It has an advanced RAW workflow, professional project management, compare and select tools, nondestructive processing, versatile printing and publishing, and costs £138.65 for students.
www.apple.com/uk/education

In sight
Aperture is the tool for professional photographers

ShuttleXpress
(Contour Design)
If you want to make video editing fly by, get yourself a Contour Design ShuttleXpress (£39.95). You use the ring controls for moving through the timeline and the buttons for shortcuts.
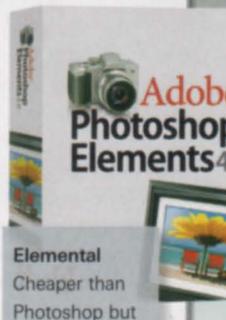Siren Technology, 0161 796 5279
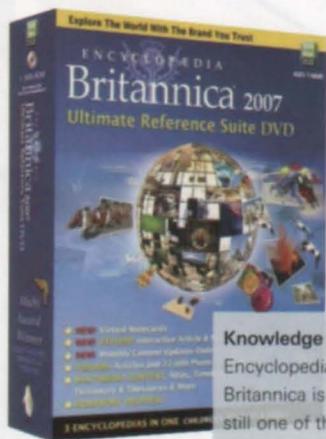
Photoshop Elements 4
(Adobe)
Cheaper than Photoshop (£57.11), yet with most of the features you'll need for touching up and improving photos, Photoshop Elements is a great budget-friendly purchase and a nice way to learn Photoshop's basics.
www.adobe.com/uk/education

Elemental
Cheaper than Photoshop but with most of the power
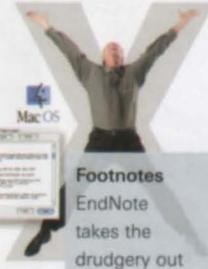
Arts & humanities students

Encyclopædia Britannica 2007 Ultimate Reference Suite DVD

(Encyclopædia Britannica)
The Internet and Wikipedia don't have all the knowledge in the world on them yet, so the Encylopedia Britannica (£29.99) is still a worthwhile reference for many students.
www.amazon.co.uk

Knowledge The Encyclopedia Britannica is still one of the best sources for research
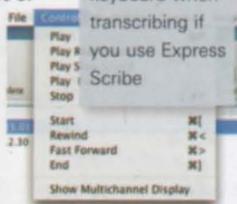
EndNote X1

(Thomson ResearchSoft)
Managing bibliographies in your essays and theses can be hard, so why not try EndNote (£135), which automates the whole process, connecting to online databases where necessary.
www.adeptscience.co.uk

Footnotes EndNote takes the drudgery out of bibliography compilation

Express Scribe

(NCH Swift Sound)
If you need to transcribe lectures, interviews or other speeches, Express Scribe is a full-featured and free piece of transcription software that makes it easy to control playback or recordings.
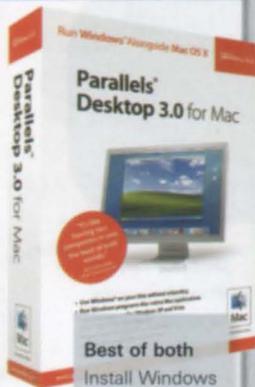www.nch.com.au/software/mac.html

Scribbler No need to leave the keyboard when transcribing if you use Express Scribe

Business students

Parallels Desktop 3.0

(Parallels)
With Parallels Desktop (£39.99), you'll never feel left out of the business world by having a Mac. It lets you run Mac and Windows software at the same time on the same machine.
www.avenquest.co.uk

Best of both Install Windows software on your Mac with Parallels Desktop

Pointing The Easy Presenter comes in its own travel pouch for on-the-go presentations

Easy Presenter

(Keyspan)
You and your classmates are going to be PowerPointing with the best of them, so make sure you're ahead of the others with this combined wireless remote control and laser pointer (£22.95). Expansys, 0161 868 0868
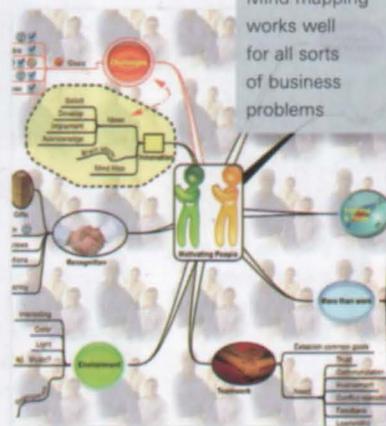
NovaMind Express

(NovaMind)
Brainstorming and mental maps are some of the best creative tools for solving business problems and NovaMind (£25.67) is one of the best applications for mind mapping.
www.nova-mind.com

Brainstorm Mind mapping works well for all sorts of business problems

Music students

Compose Apple's Logic Express offers affordable, professional quality audio

Logic Express 7.2

(Apple)
Logic Express (£129.25) is Apple's feature-packed software for music composition and production. It has professional-quality audio and MIDI tools plus a core collection of software instruments and effects.
www.apple.com/uk/education

Record Get your music into your Mac directly with the FireWire Solo

FireWire Solo

(M-Audio)
The FireWire Solo is a high-quality interface to record guitars, vocals and more on your Mac. It has a 1/4in guitar, an XLR microphone, and dual line inputs for effects, drum machines and more. Studioground, 0870 360 4600

Keystation 49e USB midi keyboard

(M-Audio)
The M-Audio Keystation 49e is a 49-note keyboard that plugs straight into your Mac. You can control software synthesisers, external sound devices, and more with its assignable slider and pitch bend and modulation wheels.

Studioground, 0870 360 4600

Play time The Keystation 49e works with GarageBand and Logic Express

Don't leave home without...

Cheap talk Use a handset to get the most from Skype's Internet phone service

iPod and Dictaphone
iTalk Pro
(Griffin)

If you fancy recording your thoughts or even your lectures, the Griffin iTalk Pro lets you convert your iPod into a stereo CD-quality Dictaphone. Costing just £26.99, it has a built-in microphone, but you can also plug in your own.
AM Micro, 01392 426473

Dictator Turn your iPod into a voice recorder with the iTalk Pro

Skype phone
Cyberphone W for Mac
(VoIPvoice)

Save money on those calls to your gap-year friends using Skype (www.skype.com), the free internet phone service. To get the best call quality, you'll need a decent handset like the Cyberphone W for Mac.
www.maplin.co.uk

Listen in Good sound quality needn't cost the earth thanks to Sennheiser

Earphones
Sennheiser PMX 100
(Sennheiser)

Don't get a reputation for being the noisy one in your halls of residence: get some headphones. A set of noise-isolating Sennheiser PMX 100s should help keep out the noise of any less considerate neighbours and are a snip at £17.45.
www.sennheiser.co.uk

External hard drive for backups
Freecom Hard Drive 400GB 3.5in external drive
(Freecom)

The last thing you want is your work, music or photos to vanish in a puff of smoke. Mac's are free of viruses and rarely go wrong – but if you do have a problem or you save over your dissertation, you'll wish you had a backup. Be sure to create backups of all your work with a large, reliable hard drive like this £80 one from Freecom.
www.freecom.co.uk

Crisis management An external hard drive can prevent disaster if things go wrong

Sign up to iTunes U
iTunes U
(Apple)

Fed up with your own course and wish you could be doing another one? iTunes U, part of the iTunes Store, provides free content such as course lectures, language lessons and lab demonstrations provided by US universities including Stanford University and UC Berkeley.
www.apple.com/itunes

Swot up Get free course material through the iTunes Store

Speakers
iHome iH8 Clock-Radio iPod Speakers
(SDI Inc)

Make sure you don't oversleep, with a clock-radio that also doubles as a set of iPod speakers. The iHome iH8 also charges your iPod, and costs £72.99.
www.datakits.co.uk/store
Cancom, 01483 500 500

Get up Wake up to an alarm, radio or iPod music with the iHome iH8