Dear College of Art Incoming First-Year Students and Parents:

Welcome and congratulations on your admission to the College of Art! As you begin planning for arrival on campus in a few months, you will also want to start thinking about a laptop computer that will be a critical tool for your college education. Whether you already own a computer, or are considering acquiring a new one, I hope the attached information will help clarify our expectations, the decisions you need to make, and the resources we have to help.

Professional designers and artists today rely heavily on digital technology. Technology is also central to much of the work that our students create while in school. The College of Art integrates significant digital technology into its studio classes, starting in the first year and moving to the more individualized projects of the senior year. In the first semester or two, students take a required course called Digital Studio that relies on regular access to a laptop equipped with a software package called the Adobe Creative Cloud.

The enclosed materials include specifications for a recommended computer package, which we use in the classroom. All first-year students are required to purchase Adobe CC through the University. The University has secured a highly reduced annual cost of $56.50 per license (regular retail cost is $240 per year). This cost will be billed to your WashU student account and a license will be issued to you at the beginning of August to your wustl.edu email. You will continue to billed each year while you are a student for this license.

These two components are the digital foundation for all majors in the College of Art. Once you select your major during your second year, specific supplemental purchases (monitors, scanners, tablets, etc.) may be requested. Communication design, fashion design, and photography, for example, ask that all students acquire additional equipment the summer before the junior year. Further details about these expectations are included in the enclosed materials as well.

One of the challenges of the contemporary digital environment is that the average life of a laptop equipped for work in art and design is three years. Machines tend to wear with use and abuse; students working in video or with other large files will find that their machines operate more slowly and need more frequent upgrading. Each student’s work is different, but typically, juniors and seniors make projects with greater digital intensity than first and second-year students and require more computing power from their machines. I mention this because it is possible that a student who starts college with a working laptop will need a new machine by senior year, particularly if the first-year machine is not new. I recommend thinking about the four-year cycle and your first-year post-college, and timing your investments in a new, high-end machine accordingly. One option would be to arrive on campus with a used, mid-level laptop able to run the Adobe Suite, and then invest in a new high-end machine a year or two later. Another option would be to invest in the high-end machine at the beginning and expect some maintenance or replacement issues by senior year.

We advise students to use the local and national sources described in the enclosed materials to purchase hardware and software. In addition, please keep in mind that computers should be added to your homeowner’s or renter’s insurance policies. Note that particular pieces of equipment should be locked down in the studio once students move onto campus, for safekeeping.

Students also have access to digital equipment through the Sam Fox School’s shared media teaching labs, as well as satellite labs, printing nodes, and computer workstations throughout the School. We regularly upgrade all equipment and software. Students have full access to online, School-level software support through our national partner, LinkedIn Learning. This helps ensure that students can learn important aspects of technology on their own, on demand.

We understand that these are significant, weighty purchases for many families and we request them only because of their critical relevance to the fields of design and art. We are here to help you work through this, both in strategizing the timing and also the financing. For timing/strategy/technology questions, please contact Richard Viehmann, at viehmann@wustl.edu or 314.935.9286. For assistance with finances related to these purchases, please contact a counselor in Student Financial Services at 314.935.5900, 888.547.6670, or financial@wustl.edu. Finally, if I can be of assistance, please contact me at ahauft@wustl.edu. Washington University wants to help all students have the tools that they need to take full advantage of their college education in art and design, and to be prepared for excellence in their field.

Thank you for the trust you have placed in us for your college education. We are excited that you are coming and look forward to working together to make sure you are well equipped for what lies ahead.

Sincerely,

Amy Hauft
Jane Reuter Hitzeman + Herbert E. Hitzeman, Jr. Professor of Art
Director of the College and Graduate School of Art