Calling All Loaner Laptops!

UNH Laptop Loaner Program Paused due to high demand of laptops at the start of the 23-24 school year leaving students without the ability to do most of their work.

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DURHAM, NH- As the school year is underway, students nestle in spots around campus with their laptops to get busy with their schoolwork. As midterms approach the plethora grows. What some may lack to see are the students struggling to nestle away with their laptops due to the simple fact that they don't have one.

Many reasons may cause a student not to have a laptop, whether that’s financial needs, screen shattering, or because they spilled the entire contents of their water bottle on their laptop. Thankfully the university has its own IT department as well as desktops in the library and of course the Laptop Loaner Program.

According to the Dean of Students Michael Blackman, the Laptop Loaner Program was started around three years ago during the pandemic. It was largely funded by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security or the CARES Act, which is an educational economic stimulus that contains provisions meant to help individuals and organizations. One of the subsidiaries was known as the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) which helps undergraduate and graduate students alike.

With HEERF, UNH was able to buy about 300 laptops for students to loan out. Over time, many of the laptops went out of commission either because their shelf life was up or because they went missing. Starting this year, UNH has around 150 laptops which are all currently loaned to students.

The Laptop Loaner Program is first come, first serve. However, students need to answer questions in their application that will tell them if they qualify. These questions are based on a financial aid check to ensure that students have financial need, which is required in all UNH's basic need programs.
“We’re in the process of developing a sustainable system for the maintenance of the program as we know that laptops can’t last forever,” said Dean Blackman. Two solutions that were brought up were either to secure regular funding to purchase laptops or to implement a system that receives and utilizes used laptops.

Dean Blackman, in talking with some other students on this topic, thought of a new sustainability initiative with the utilization of used laptops. “It seems like the best idea possible, but this requires infrastructure that we don’t currently have. I’m hopeful that we can make something happen, but it’s definitely a work in progress,” said Blackman.

Patty Mathison, who is the Basic Needs Coordinator and Case Manager “We recognize there is a need for this program and we are working closely with Enterprise and Technology Services (ETS) to seek sustainable solutions,” said Patty Mathison, the Basic Needs Coordinator and Case Manager. “Our partners in Enterprise and Technology Services have been wonderful in trying to maximize the laptops that we do have to go to students in need and finding creative ways to continue to support students’ technology needs.”

In the question of what to do, Dean Blackman said students should never hesitate to reach out.

“Food, housing, and financial insecurity can sometimes come with feelings of shame or guilt. It can be difficult to reach out for help with those feelings. But, it’s in those moments that it’s more important to access support,” he said.

Students can reach out to Dean.Students@unh.edu or basic.needs@unh.edu to answer any questions. The website listed below also has information for students navigating technology concerns: https://www.unh.edu/dean-of-students/getting-help/basic-needs/technology