Two hours from Wall Street’s mayhem, in a quiet suburb of Philadelphia, some students are holed up in a room filled with stock tickers, LCDs, and Bloomberg workstations, biting their nails as they make trades with real bucks (over a hundred grand), in real time.

It’s all in the name of education, and thanks to Villanova University’s commitment to technology, these young brokers-in-training—both undergraduates and graduate finance majors—are cutting their teeth in a state-of-the-art trading floor that doubles as a classroom.

Villanova’s famed finance lab gives students access to all the tools that a stock trader on Wall Street would use to manage an actual fund—thanks to a generous donor. “It’s a socially conscious fund, and the returns are good,” says Stephen Fugale, chief information officer at Villanova.

The finance lab is the first thing Villanova administrators and students mention when explaining why their school tops the list of Wired Colleges. But dig a little deeper and you’ll find that the school’s commitment to technology is intrinsic to academic and student life as a whole.

For starters, all entering freshmen receive Dell laptops, preloaded with standard software—such as security and productivity suites—plus any specific applications they’ll need for their own areas of study. The laptops are wirelessly enabled, so students can log on to Villanova’s wireless network, which covers more than 60 percent of its campus.

At the end of their sophomore year, students once again receive new laptops, which are theirs to take with them upon graduation. And the tech gear doesn’t end there: Nursing students each receive PDAs, and engineering students receive tablet PCs, all preloaded with the appropriate software.

Villanova believes that keeping the hardware and software uniform for all students makes it easier to service the equipment. That’s one of the reasons the university can guarantee a 24-hour turnaround time on all tech-support calls.

As for course work, students can do all of the following online: register for their classes, access the library to receive reading assignments, download lectures or receive them via podcast, take exams, submit papers, and receive grades. If they need to contact a fellow student from one of their classes, they can call up an online album with photos and contact information for each student in that class.

“It’s a lifesaver when it comes down to missing a day and not knowing where to get the notes,” says Liz Patitucci, a junior.

Patitucci says she wasn’t aware of Villanova’s unique tech offerings when she applied to the school, but she discovered them soon after she enrolled.

“When I was a senior in high school, I told my friends that my laptop had arrived in the mail, and everyone was like, ‘What are you talking about?’” she recalls. “I don’t think any of my friends at other colleges has a program like this. I use the different online advantages here every day; it’s really made life a lot easier.”—Stephanie Chang

In November, Villanova launched an online basketball ticket lottery system for students. Less than two days after the launch, the system had received 2,000 submissions.

**VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY**

Villanova, Pennsylvania

- New laptops for all students distributed at the start of freshman year and at the end of sophomore year (included in tuition)
- Tech support calls with guaranteed 24-hour turnaround time
- State-of-the-art trading floor that doubles as a classroom for business students, who manage an actual mutual fund

**TUITION**

- $28,760 per year