Why can't I buy a cheap computer?

Why do I have to purchase a computer, tablet, printer, etc. through a Purdue approved vendor when I can get what I need for less through an online retailer or a big box store?

While the initial purchase price of IT equipment through online vendors or big box stores is often less, the total cost of ownership is higher. The low cost items are consumer grade models designed for light home use. The business class equipment we purchase is superior in terms of durability and stability. Our units are designed for corporate clients, governments, etc. whose computers run 24x7x365. They have better cooling and tier 1 components and as a result, they last longer. Our business class machines have a 3 or 4 year warranty that covers the expected life of the machine. The online retailer/box store models come with a 1 year warranty - or only 90 days! If you want to upgrade the warranty on a big box store machine to 3 years it will typically be over half the initial purchase cost.

The biggest benefit to you is more uptime. When we standardize computers across campus, we can use a standard image so in the event of a hard drive failure, virus, or malware, it takes us just a few minutes to re-image your machine, rather than the several hours it takes to install Windows from CD and track down the drivers for all of the components. With standardized systems, we can support more computers with fewer staff. When you have a problem, we can troubleshoot it faster on a machine we are familiar with. Our approved vendors stock spare parts for our systems for 5 years after purchase. If you have a component failure, we probably have a spare already onsite. If something major happens, a support rep will come to campus to do the repairs under contract. Machines from consumer sources have none of these advantages.

So in short, the initial cost of a computer is just part of the total cost of ownership. Cheaper computers save a little money up front, but cost more to keep running. The total cost of ownership has a big impact on the campus community due to the hidden support costs caused by the time required to set up, maintain, and repair non-standard computers. This hidden overhead decreases the efficiency of the IT staff and the customers they support.