Dear Prospective Students:

Welcome to COMS 260 Communication and Gender – ONLINE CLASS

This course never meets in a classroom. You access this course only by computer. The only times you come to campus are the days on which you take the Midterm and Final Exams in the TLC.

Sound good? Well, you need to read this entire letter carefully before you decide whether this course is for you. Here we go:

REQUIREMENTS: DO YOU HAVE WHAT YOU NEED?

Technology:

- You need a computer with Internet access that you can use regularly, almost daily, and for as long as you need. If you do not have what you need at home, you can use the computers on campus or perhaps in a local library. You can use multiple computers – you do not need to be on the same computer each time you log in to the course. The key here is that you have enough time on a computer, often enough, to participate fully in the course and complete all the assignments and exams.

You do not need the “latest and greatest.” Your computer should meet the following requirements:

  PC - Pentium IV Processor, 800 MHz or higher, 1 GB MB RAM, a sound card, 8X DVD-ROM drive or higher, 40 GB hard disk or larger

  or

  MAC - Apple Macintosh G3, 1 GB MB RAM, sound card, 8X DVD-ROM, 40 GB hard disk or higher, OS X or higher

- You need software as follows:

  Internet Browser with JAVA, Flash enabled  
  (e.g., Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, Chrome),
  Microsoft Word XP or higher that creates .doc and .pdf files  
  (MAC users: sorry, but file-type converters are problematic)
  Adobe Acrobat Reader 8.0 or higher
  Archiving software that makes .zip files
  Multimedia software that plays video and audio files  
  (e.g., Windows Media Player, QuickTime Player)
• You need proficiency as follows:

Use of web browser software, including configuration of browser preferences for security, printing, JavaScript, Java, Cache, Multimedia, and other advanced settings. This sounds a bit daunting, but it refers to such things as knowing how to modify the options in case you can’t see or print a web page, a video isn’t playing in the web page, etc.

E-mail sending, receiving, forwarding, saving, printing, attaching files, and retrieving attachments.

Use of web-based communication tools, such as discussion forums, chat, and webinars. (You will need to use the Blackboard tools for this class. Similar tools outside of Blackboard are optional for your group work, according to your group’s preferences.)

Word processing software including creating, modifying, saving, retrieving and designing .doc files, with complete control over font color and size, page layout and orientation, margins, tabs, bullet lists, hyperlinks, and media file insertions.

Troubleshooting and getting assistance. Online students must know where to go, and have the impetus to do so immediately, when outside assistance is needed. “I couldn’t log in [upload my file, find my document, see the video, etc.]” are never acceptable assignment replacements in an online course. All resources have support, and online students must be proficient and expedient at obtaining support when needed. I am not your Technical Support resource.

Scholarship:

• Self-starter – online classes are quite different from on-ground classes. Many classroom students are passive learners. They wait for learning to “come” to them. Students who avoid being called on, neglect to read ahead for class, sit mute during class discussions, and otherwise remain inactive will not succeed in this online class. Online students are not “called on,” nor is there the possibility of being “passed over” in discussions and activities. Online class participation is proactive.

• Disciplined, especially at time management – it is simply not possible to fall behind, and then scramble to catch up in this online course. Failing to meet deadlines is the equivalent of failing to take the class, and too many missed deadlines result in an instructor drop or a failing grade (see syllabus for specific deadlines and policies.) Only students who can discipline themselves to participate regularly and frequently should consider taking this online course.

• Comfortable with working outside a classroom environment – most of this course occurs asynchronously. You might be watching me give a mini-lecture on video at midnight, while I’m off playing my bodhran in a ceilidh somewhere. (I’m sure that will come up in class. You don’t need to look those terms up for now.) On-ground students often express a need for immediate, face-to-face interaction with the instructor and
classmates, to maximize their learning potential. If the thought of an online class makes you feel empowered by your control over time, location, distractions, etc, you might be a great candidate for an online course. If the whole idea makes you feel isolated and unsupported, you might not want to stay in this class. (Do keep in mind that there are synchronous tools available. If you just think you might need to “chat” with students sometimes, see if you can encourage classmates to form “chat” groups.)

- Writing proficiency. You need to be both comfortable expressing yourself almost entirely in writing, and proficient at writing with regard to grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Are you permitted to drop the occasional smiley into a discussion board post? Certainly. Does spelling, grammar, and punctuation “count?” Oh, yes, it does. I don’t expect perfection, but I do expect college-level skills in all submissions, including discussion posts.

**DID I SCARE YOU AWAY?**

I hope not. Now that you see what you need to take the course, I hope you can make the best decision for your learning preferences and current abilities.

So, again I say, to those who choose to stay in this course:

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**WHAT’S NEXT?**

On the first day of class, according to the COC Schedule and Course Calendar, log in to Blackboard. You should already see this course listed in your course list. Click on this course, and read the Welcome Announcement. That announcement will give you further instructions. You will also want to click on the Content and Assignments links in the menu on the left-side of the page, and get the syllabus and handouts. There will be assignments already, so begin those and complete them by the deadlines specified.

Routinely, log into Blackboard a minimum of three times per week (M-F), check the announcements and assignments, and make sure you are on schedule.

To contact me, e-mail me at kerry.osborne@canyons.edu. Don’t hesitate to e-mail me with any questions or comments. The mistake would be not to e-mail me. You won’t “bother” me. This is what I do. You can e-mail me through Blackboard, if you like.

**IMPORTANT!!** I require all students to use their COC e-mail address for all e-mail correspondence in this course. This means I require you to e-mail me from your COC e-mail address, and I will ONLY send e-mail to you at your COC e-mail address. I do this in part for your own protection. Using only COC e-mail makes it possible for COC to retain records of all e-mail communication. You will have to decide how you are going to access your COC e-mail, and you are going to have to be diligent in checking that e-mail frequently. COC Computer Support can help you set up your outside mail clients to process e-mail from multiple accounts if you like. Tell them I sent you. They’ll love that.
I'm looking forward to class with you. This is about Communication, Gender, and Culture, by the way. We'll get to that.

Getting Started Links I Recommend:

**COC Distance Learning General Orientation Letter**
http://www.canyons.edu/offices/distance_learning/DL_oldsite/letters/generic.asp

**Readiness Assessment**
http://www.canyons.edu/Offices/Distance_Learning/DL_Oldsite/info/assessments.asp

**How to Succeed in Distance Learning**
(I'm a little uncomfortable with the section on “When in class discussions”– avoiding excessive grammar and commas, and using emoticons. Use my rules for this.)
http://www.canyons.edu/Offices/Distance_Learning/DL_Oldsite/info/success.asp

**Mandatory Online Tutorial – (That's its name. I'm not making it mandatory.)**
http://www.canyons.edu/offices/distance_learning/DL_oldsite/OnlineOrientation/

**Computer Skills Mini Tutorials**
http://www.canyons.edu/offices/distance_learning/info/minitutorial.asp