Important Note: In order to avoid being dropped from this class, you should read this entire orientation letter very carefully. If you decide to take the class, once you get access to Blackboard, you should read the syllabus very carefully too. If you are unwilling to take the time to do both of these things, this may not be the right class for you!

This course is completely online. All material related to the class is located on the class webpage which can be accessed using Blackboard. To access the class webpage, you must first log on to Blackboard at: http://bb9.canyons.edu. Your username is your seven digit Student ID number. Your password is: student. When you log on to Blackboard, you will see a link to POLISCI 150 listed under “My Courses” on the right hand side of the screen. To access the class webpage, click on the link.

When I designed this course, I wanted students to experience something similar to what they would experience if they took a class on campus. To do that, I videotaped over 100 ten-minute mini-lectures on a variety of subjects related to American and California government. In order for you to succeed in this class, you MUST be willing and able view these videos. As I explain in more detail below, simply reading the textbook will not suffice or getting information from other internet sources will not suffice. You MUST watch the lecture videos.

Given the importance of viewing the lecture videos, as soon as you have access to the class webpage, you should click on the “Lecture Videos” tab (on the left hand corner of the page), then click on one of the folders, and then click on one of the links. A lecture video should play on your computer. If you have any problems viewing the videos, you should contact Blackboard Support immediately at (661) 362-3344. You can also email them at: bbsupport@canyons.edu. In order to provide access to hearing impaired students, there is also a folder of lecture videos that have been closed captioned. They upload more slowly than the non-closed captioned videos, so you may want to save them to your computer before attempting to view them.

Along with the lectures, there is a required textbook that can be purchased at the COC Bookstore. It is a custom book, published specifically for College of the Canyons. You should have the textbook by the first day of class. The textbook includes two books:

We The People by Ginsberg, et. al. & Governing California by Anagnoson, et. al.
ISBN: 9780393137903

The requirements for this course can be found in the syllabus. You can access the syllabus by clicking on the “Syllabus” tab on the left hand side of the class webpage. There are also other important tabs with which you will need to become familiar: Orientation Letter, Lecture Videos, Lecture Notes, Reading Questions and Quizzes, Assignments, Exams, Study Guides, and Discussion Boards. I describe the contents of each of these tabs below. Understanding them will give you a good idea of how the class is structured and what you will need to do to be successful.
Orientation Letter: You are reading the orientation letter.

Lecture Videos: As noted above, you will be viewing videos of me giving my regular lectures. Some of the videos were recorded during actual on-campus lectures. Others were recorded at various locations around campus or at my home. As I have noted previously, you cannot do well in this class without viewing the lecture videos. Eighty percent of the questions on your exams will be based directly on the lecture videos. While other classes often encourage and reward students who do outside research, this class is structured differently. If your answers to the essay questions on the exams reflect a good understanding of the material in the textbook or any source of information other than my lectures, I will assume you did not watch – or understand – the lecture videos and will grade you accordingly. Moreover, if you do not cite your source, not only will you receive a low grade but you might also be guilty of plagiarism. So be advised! You MUST watch the lecture videos in order to do well in this class. Must! Relying on sources other than my lectures can only create problems. Don’t do it!

Lecture Notes: For each lecture, there is a matching set of lecture notes. When you watch the lecture videos, you should have the lecture notes readily available. I leave blank spaces in the lecture notes for students to fill in information that I discuss during lecture. When I grade your exams, I look specifically to see if your answers include the missing information. So when you watch the videos, you have to pay attention, just as you would if you were sitting in a classroom.

Within the lecture notes, I indicate which video corresponds to each section of the lecture notes. For example, at the beginning of the lecture on Assessing Democracy, you will see the following notation: (Assessing Democracy.01). That indicates the point at which the first video begins. A little farther down in the lecture notes, you will see (Assessing Democracy.02). That refers to point at which the second lecture video. These notations will allow you to determine where you are in the lecture notes at any given time. So, if you get tired of watching me lecture – a highly unlikely occurrence – you can take a break and know exactly where you are in the lecture notes.

Reading Questions and Quizzes: For every chapter in the book, I have compiled a set of multiple choice questions. I refer to these as the “Reading Questions.” They are listed on the webpage as Chapter 1, Chapter 2, etc. You should have the reading questions available – either on your computer or printed out – before you begin reading the chapter. As you read the chapter, answer the questions. If you are unsure about an answer, you can post a question on the Reading Questions Discussion Board. The rules for posting such questions are described below in the section on Participation. Be sure to read it carefully. Once you’re confident in your answers, you are ready to take the quiz.

The quiz will be found right below the link the Reading Questions. For example, the link to the quiz for Chapter 1 is directly below the link to the Reading Questions for Chapter 1. To take the quiz, just click on the link. Be sure to have the answers to the Reading Questions
close by when you do. You have twenty minutes to complete each quiz! And once you click on the link, the clock starts ticking and can’t be stopped.

Assignments: For each video lecture, students will submit some questions and comments about the topics discussed. I will provide more details about these assignments in the syllabus.

Exams: There are four exams. To take an exam, click on the link. Each exam includes twenty multiple-choice questions (selected at random from the Reading Questions), three short essays, and two longer essays. You have ninety minutes to complete each exam. Once you click on the exam, it cannot be stopped. The exam will become available for twenty-four hours. You MUST complete the exam within the twenty-four hour period.

Discussion Board: There are a variety of ways of earning participation points in this class. You can email me with questions about the lecture material, you can arrange online office hours (via Skype), or you can participate in discussions on the Discussion Board. There are two discussion boards for the class. The Reading Questions Discussion Board allows students to ask questions specifically about the readings. If you are not sure if your answer is correct, you can earn participation points by posting a question about it. However, you may not simply ask fellow students to provide you with the correct answer. You must identify the answer you believe is correct and provide your reasoning. Therefore, you should not post questions like, “What is the answer to Question 3 in Chapter 1?” or “Is ‘D’ the correct answer for Question 3 in Chapter 1? If you want to ask about Question 3 in Chapter 1, you should explain which answer(s) you think is correct and why you think it’s correct. Students can also earn participation points by responding to questions. However, responses cannot simply identify the correct answer. For example, you should not post answers like, “The correct answer for Question 3 is D.” You must explain why a particular answer is correct. Alternatively, you can answer the question by directing the student to the place in the book where the answer can be found. Comments that fail to meet these guidelines will be deleted from the discussion board and will NOT count towards your participation grade. You can also earn participation points by posting comments on the Current Events discussion board. As with discussions in class, all views are welcome. Incivility will not be tolerated!

Note: If a student is close to the next highest grade and has a high participation score (i.e., 95% or better), I will often give them the higher grade. If a student is close to the next highest grade and has a low participation score, I have never given them the higher grade.

In order to avoid being dropped from the class, students must complete the Syllabus Quiz posted on the class webpage. You can find the Syllabus Quiz by clicking on “Reading Questions and Quizzes.” You MUST take the quiz as many times as necessary until you get 100%. Students who fail to complete the Syllabus within the first week of class will be dropped from the class.

It is important to understand that this online course is not easy. In many respects, online courses are more demanding than face-to-face courses. Students must be computer and internet savvy. Students must also have the technological capacity and the willingness to view over 100 lecture videos. By enrolling in the class, you are indicating that you possess the skills, hardware, and
software necessary to fully participate. Online classes require students to be comfortable in an online environment. This can be challenging for new and returning students. Distance Learning has created a comprehensive list of Computer Skills Tutorials that may be useful in developing the necessary skills.

Let me know if you have any additional questions. If so, feel free to e-mail me at phil.gussin@canyons.edu. Please note that while I frequently and consistently return e-mail, a delay in any response is possible. Please allow me a reasonable amount of time to respond as your inquiry might not be the only e-mail I have to address. I hope you enjoy the course. Good luck.

If you did not read this very carefully and skimmed down to the bottom to see how it ended, this class probably isn’t right for you.

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