Dear Prospective Fall 2014 Online History Students:

This is John Varga and I look forward to being your instructor for one or more of the online History courses I will be teaching this fall semester. The courses I am teaching fulfill several different requirements and are transferable to the CSU and UC systems.

The online courses I teach differ from traditional on campus courses in a number of ways. First, there are no face-to-face meetings. Second, there are no formal instructor delivered lectures. Third, classroom discussions among and between students are conducted in a largely asynchronous environment. Fourth, exams and quizzes are conducted solely online. Fifth, all writing based assignments are done outside the “classroom” and submitted through either the Blackboard System’s anti-plagiarism tool “Safe Assignment.”

While these are salient differences, the academic rigor expected is no more and no less than a traditionally formatted course. The expectations that students will keep pace with the readings, provide thoughtful analysis about the readings and their related discussion topics, and devote significant time each week to their academic endeavors are no different than what is expected of students who take History courses in the traditional classroom setting at the Valencia or Canyon Country campuses.

The online courses I teach require students to meet all established deadlines. This is imperative. While online classes do offer more flexibility with respect to the hours that students devote to their studies, there is one particular aspect of online learning where flexibility is virtually non-existent: meeting deadlines. My online classes will have established and consistent deadlines so that students may develop a structured pattern and predictable schedule from which to organize their efforts and manage their time. Accordingly, students must answer the following question: “Am I willing to make the effort to manage my time effectively so that I may succeed in this course and the other courses I am taking?”
Online learning requires self-discipline, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, consistency in effort, and a strong sense of commitment to the self-edification process. Online classes offer tremendous freedom, but necessitate significant personal responsibility. If you are not a self-starter, have trouble developing your own structured learning environment beyond the virtual classroom, and prefer the habit and custom of going to class then online education may not be suited to your learning style.

Online education is clearly an important academic trend. That being said, online education is not an entertaining alternative to the traditional “boring” on campus class. Online education is not “edutainment” and does not and should not connote more relaxed or casual intellectual demands and standards. Accordingly, students should not view online courses as being “easy,” a short-cut to a degree, a license to cheat, or lacking intellectual merit. Ostensibly, online classes seem more convenient. Please do not allow this perception to distract you from the truth about what online education entails: effort and commitment. Hence, it is important that students not allow themselves to turn online education’s advantage into a disadvantage by failing to be mindful as to the effort and commitment required to achieve success in the online education environment.

I anticipate an excellent class and I hope you decide to join our learning community. If you have any questions email me at john.varga@canyons.edu

Regards,

John Varga