PLEASE NOTE: The Fall, 2016 semester begins on August 29, 2016, but your doing as much preparatory work as possible before the start date will help make everything easier for you.

Dr. Steven Mark Sachs

Professor Emeritus of Computer Applications Office Technology, Counseling, and Psychology

Welcome to our Computer Applications Office Technology Online Class for the Fall, 2016 Semester!

Hi. I'm Dr. Steve Sachs ("Professor Steve"), and I will be your online instructor. I am happy you have chosen to enroll in this course, and I am looking forward to working with you this semester!

This Welcome Letter has tons of significant information about our class. For example, it has information on your required textbook and supplementary materials. Please ensure that you read all of the Welcome Letter very carefully. You'll be glad you did.

IMPORTANT WELCOME LETTER PREAMBLE

If you are reading this Welcome Letter as a PDF or on a piece of paper rather than within the “Canvas” system online, you need to know a few things about the letter. The letter is actually
extracted from part of the online course, and it makes reference to several things in “Canvas.”
Canvas is the online system that forms the backbone of our class.

So, for example, if this Welcome Letter tells you to do something in a Module (like the “Supermodule”) or a Unit, it’s assuming that you are currently online in the Canvas system. And if you’re looking at a PDF or at a printed page, you are not in Canvas at the moment, and your clicks generally won’t work.

Even outside of Canvas, you can see an image of the class Syllabus at the URL I’ll note at the end of this paragraph, but much of the functionality of that Syllabus, and its links and link bar, will not function since you won’t actually be in Canvas. The URL is: https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/1033875/assignments/syllabus.

How do you get into real Canvas? The Los Angeles Community College District will put all registered students for our class into Canvas soon: Usually, it happens during the two weeks preceding the semester start date. At that time, you will be able to see and do everything in the system.

The way to see if you are already active in Canvas is to first go to the Canvas website by typing this into your browser: https://ilearn.laccd.edu/login/canvas. The first letter of the URL is a lower-case “i,” which may be hard to see. If the thing were in capitals, it would read “ILEARN.”

This takes you to a login page, and there is a section part-way down the page called, “FOR STUDENTS,” which tells you how to deduce your loginID and your Password. Then go for it and see if you get in. If not, try again the next day. Eventually, it’ll happen if you are a registered student in our class.

So following is the Welcome Letter that is actually in our class in Canvas, complete with some directions that you won’t be able to follow yet since you won’t actually be reading it in Canvas. Still, there is a TON OF STUFF that will be important for you to know, even if you’re not in real Canvas yet.

What’s the Class About?

It’s about Microsoft Excel (usually just called, “Excel”).

Excel is a great program for figuring things out and for displaying information. One of Excel’s main strengths is called “what-if analysis.” For example, Excel could be tweaked to answer this kind of inquiry: What if our photography company’s mark-up for all 8×10 and 5x7 pictures we sell were to change from 10% to 12.5%? What effect would that have on our overall monthly sales of both picture sizes if we simultaneously experience a decrease of 6.23% of all wallet-size photo sales?
In CAOT 85, the version of Excel we will study is Excel 2013. Although there’s a later version of Excel available on the market, later versions have very little “industry penetration,” which is a fancy way to say that almost nobody is using the newer versions. Importantly, Excel 2013 is very similar to the newer version(s), so if you become good at what we’re learning in this class, you’ll be in fine shape even if you work in a place with a newer version (or a slightly-older version, for that matter).

By the end of the semester, I intend to have empowered you to use Excel at a significantly higher level than 99% of people who use it on the job, and you should be able to list Excel 2013 confidently on your résumé and other skills lists.

Excel is also wonderful and powerful in displaying information in graphs (which Microsoft calls “charts”). For example, we could create a chart showing the changes in monthly college enrollment extremely easily within Excel. Done by hand before Excel, it could take hours to do a good job of this. But it would take a knowledgeable user (like you will become in our class) maybe 15 seconds to make this kind of chart, after the data were already figured out. Then you could go on to customize the chart as much as you wanted with very easy, visual tools. It’s fun!

**Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Office are Different**

Microsoft Excel is a part of most versions of Microsoft Office (sometimes just called, “Office”). Office has lots of different components (like Excel, Word, PowerPoint, and other stuff). That’s why Office is called a “software suite.”

There are various versions of Microsoft Office, too. These differ in version (newer or older versions) and what components they have, but, to the best of my knowledge, all versions of Office include Excel. Another issue is that the version of Office you get or already have may or may not have Excel 2013, which is the version we study in our class.

On the market now is a version of Microsoft Office called “Office 365.” It includes a later version of Excel. Don’t worry: Excel 2013 and the currently-available later versions are extremely similar. So when you learn Excel 2013, you’ll be able to transition to a later version easily, if you want or need to.
Your Skills Coming into the Class

I want you to be aware that students taking online courses are expected to already have considerable general computer literacy (not necessarily with Excel, of course). This is true despite there being no formal prerequisite computer class to take this one.

Following is a list of some computer skills you should already have. If a lot of these mystify you, then you are probably not ready to take any online computer class yet. In this case, have a friend or a basic computer class teach you all of these things before the semester begins. There is also considerable help available in the textbook’s first chapters. They’re not about Excel, but rather on Microsoft Windows software and such. Still, you really need to be proficient before, not after, the semester begins. If you’re quite unfamiliar and still want to take the class, get someone knowledgeable in Windows and the internet to teach you these things ASAP.

Here’s most of what you should already be able to do before the semester begins:

Start and exit Windows
EXTRA IMPORTANT: Copy, move, rename, organize, and delete files, and create and organize folders, using either the “Windows Explorer” (this is different from Internet Explorer) or the “My Computer” functions
Download and upload files
Send and receive e-mails
Use the Firefox browser (similar to Internet Explorer, Chrome, and Safari).
Search the internet
Use a mouse’s buttons, including the roller button (if your mouse has one)
Use passwords
Start and close software
Maximize, minimize, restore, and resize windows
Move windows to different locations on your screen
Use the Ctrl and Alt keys effectively
Control sound (voice, music, etc.) coming out of your computer
Print

What Should I Do Immediately?

While you’re working through this introductory Module, you should also be doing the "SuperModule" above it. It’s about using Canvas. You will need to be very proficient in using Canvas to have an
easy time with this course. So I believe you should do go back and forth between the SuperModule and Module 1 until you have completed both of them. Once you have, you'll be empowered to take on the class with ease.

How important is it to go through everything in the SuperModule and in Module 1? It's vital. Policies that can make you or break you are listed here. Also, you will not be able to get into Module 2 or later modules until you have completed the SuperModule and Module 1. Although you will be able to read and work in the textbook chapters and in SAM (you'll read about SAM later), you won't be able to take any of the Minor and Major Exams without having completed the SuperModule and Module 1.

What does it mean to "complete" these two Modules? For the SuperModule, it just means that you open it and read through it. For Module 1, which has several "Units," you need to pass the very easy Quizzes after each of Module 1’s Units. So, even if you decide to get into the textbook and the online SAM training before you finish both the SuperModule and Module 1 (ths is NOT a good idea), you'll still need to complete them very soon. Again: YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO TAKE THE REAL EXAMS UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED BOTH MODULES. FYI, I plan to put the passwords for all of these exams directly in the Chapter modules, beginning with Module 2 (which is for Chapter 1).

PC VS. MAC OR APPLE: Your Computer Equipment for This Class

This course teaches the Microsoft Office 2013 “PC” (“Personal Computer”) version of software. IT IS NOT APPROPRIATE TO TAKE THIS COURSE USING A “MAC” OR “APPLE” OR MINI-LAPTOP COMPUTER. LAVC does not teach the Mac version of MS (Microsoft) Office. While the online exams and online assessments in the SAM system (see the upcoming "Your SAM Account" Unit) could be taken on a Mac, the textbook work cannot be done on a Mac properly unless you have super-expensive, battle-tested, bulletproof Mac PC emulation software. I cannot recommend any such emulation software; I recommend that you stay away from Mac PC emulation software. Also, you'll need a full PC or laptop rather than a tablet or other minimized computer equipment.

Your Computer Screen Resolution

The Syllabus (Links to an external site.), which is available at http://www.SachsAcademics.com (Links to an external site.) (or by clicking at the link at the top of this screen if you're reading this Welcome Letter on the internet now) will direct you to ensure that
your screen resolution is at absolute minimum 1024 x 768 for optimal display. You should use this resolution or higher any time you use any Microsoft Office application/software unless you have a super-resolution screen that can do higher numbers. I will provide you with a Resource that teaches you how to change the resolution for PC-type computers, in case you don’t already know how to do it. This Resource is part of the Etudes system, which is the online system we use for communications. Etudes is described below and elsewhere in our online course materials.

You will need your own individual PC-type computer and your own SAM account (see the upcoming "Your SAM Account" Unit).

Use Your Own Resources

Sometimes students try to “share” textbooks, computers, and other resources. Bad, bad idea. For one thing, exams have time limits, and there is just enough time for one person to complete each exam. So having your own computer for exclusive use is vital. For another thing, if you don’t have your own, individual SAM code (with which you will be creating a unique SAM online account), you will not be able to take any of the exams and you won’t have access to the online training. You get your SAM code in the textbook bundle, or it can be purchased at higher cost directly from the publisher. See the upcoming "Your SAM Account" Unit for details.

Also, the textbook is a resource to which you will need to refer frequently, and trying to share it would really backfire. Get your own textbook bundle or separate materials (described elsewhere in the course requirements), and work on your own, separate PC-type computer, and ensure that you have high-speed internet access, even if you’re living with someone else who’s taking the same class at the same time.

A Little about the SAM Account

We use the SAM system for online training and for all grading-relevant exams. You need to create a SAM 2013 account. You will read about this in an upcoming Unit in this module. It's called, "Your SAM Account."

Even if you already have an active SAM account, it must be with a SAM 2013 code; earlier code versions won’t work. And, after creating your account, you will still need perform the additional step of enrolling in our specific class within SAM. There are instructions on how to do all of this in the SAM Unit, but you won’t be able to do that Unit until you have completed its preceding Units.

General Note

This online course will be taught 100 percent online. All quizzes, tests, and training assignments will be completed online. There are no required on-campus meetings and there will not be any on-
campus meetings. While you will enjoy greater flexibility in scheduling your study time, you will need to be solidly self-motivated and disciplined in setting your study schedule and completing course requirements.

Important: Please note right away that the three Major exams will be scheduled to take place on Sunday evenings! If this does not work with your life schedule, then this is not the class for you. **DO NOT TAKE THIS CLASS IF YOU CANNOT BE AVAILABLE ON SUNDAY EVENINGS TO TAKE MAJOR EXAMS.** Other exams (Minor rather than Major exams) will be available on multiple days and dates.

All Major Exams are scheduled to take place somewhere within the time window between 7:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. on certain Sunday evenings. Whenever you go into Canvas, you'll see a link with a calendar icon and the words, "View Calendar." You can always see what's coming up in the near future by checking on that link. Other parts of Canvas will also note due dates, deadlines, and such.

If you cannot take exams during these date/time combinations, then you should not take this class since you cannot pass without taking the Major Exams. THE TIMING OF THE MAJOR EXAMS IS SET INvariably. If you have an “emergency” at the time of one of these, you will simply need to skip that exam. There are no make-ups and no re-scheduling.

**Textbook BUNDLES (not an individual textbook) and Excel 2013**

A “textbook bundle” is a package of a textbook plus other materials that are typically sold as a group. You will need to choose between two different textbook bundles for our class.

Both bundles include the textbook itself and a unique SAM code. You'll need that unique SAM code to do some of the homework and take exams.

The textbook is Microsoft Excel 2013 Complete, published by Cengage. You can see detailed information on the book itself and how to obtain it using the information below.

The big-deal difference is that one bundle includes Excel 2013 and the other does not, as you'll see.

**EXCEL 2013 AND THE BUNDLES**

If your PC does not yet have Microsoft Excel 2013 (usually just called, “Excel 2013”), either as stand-alone software or as part of Microsoft Office 2013, then you will need to get the bundle that includes the 180-day trial version of Excel 2013.
If you decide instead that you want to get a “permanent” copy of Excel 2013, an alternative to this is to buy the full, unlimited Excel 2013 or Microsoft Office 2013 software separately from a commercial establishment. This latter way to get Excel 2013 is more expensive, but the full version of Excel 2013 (or Microsoft Office 2013) does not expire 180 days after you install it onto your PC. Before deciding whether or not to buy a full version of Excel 2013 or Microsoft Office 2013, make sure you read the section below about Office 365.

If you already have Excel 2013 on your PC, you will want to get the bundle that does not include Excel 2013 since it’s a little cheaper.

**GETTING THE BUNDLE**

There are two main ways you can obtain whichever bundle you need.

One way you can obtain the bundle is to get it directly from the publisher (Cengage). There is a website specifically for our class materials: It’s: www.cengagebrain.com/course/1591011 (Links to an external site.).

Good to know: If you decide to get your bundle directly from Cengage Publishers, you will have immediate access to a free, online copy of the textbook that will remain available to you until you physical (paper) textbook arrives in the mail.

The alternate way to get the bundle is that you can get it from the LAVC Bookstore. You can order it from the bookstore online at http://www.lavcbookstore.com (Links to an external site.). Ordering online from the bookstore instead of going in person to the bookstore can save hours since the lines to buy books are often very long.

An "ISBN" is a special, unique number that identifies individual textbooks or textbook bundles. The ISBNs for the CengageBrain website bundles differ from the ISBN for the LAVC bookstore bundles, but that’s okay: as long as you get the correct bundle (with or without Excel 2013 180-day trial), you’ll have the right stuff.

If you buy directly from the publisher, you don’t need to know the ISBN. But for buying from the bookstore, you should know it:

The ISBN for the bookstore textbook bundle that includes Excel 2013 is: 9781337146036.

The ISBN for the bookstore textbook bundle that does not include Excel 2013 is: 9781337147057.

**Microsoft Office 365: A Special Note**
You might have heard of Microsoft Office 365, which is an online-only version of Microsoft Office that is available free for students. The problem with this for our class is that the version of Excel that one gets with Microsoft Office 365 is different from the version we'll be studying in this class. This is why I have not recommended or given more information on Microsoft Office 365. You might want to get this version at the end of the semester, after you have completed our class.

Free Adobe Reader and Adobe Flash Player Software

For many of the files you'll need to read in this class, your computer will need to have free Adobe Reader (Links to an external site.) software installed. You can download this free, safe software here: http://get.adobe.com/reader/ (Links to an external site.). You will also need Adobe Flash Player (Links to an external site.) from the same company. When you go to the website, read the screen carefully. Your browser may already have Flash Player. You should check this from within Firefox. You can get Adobe Flash Player here: http://get.adobe.com/flashplayer (Links to an external site.).

I recommend taking care of these downloads right now. Then come back and continue reading this Welcome Letter.

Getting Closer to Ready

The upcoming "First Steps" Unit is quite important. It will help you get ready and will help explain the rest of the course.

Virtual Valley Resources

There is a great Virtual Valley website for all online students (if you’re taking a class online from LAVC, you are a part of “Virtual Valley”), and you should check it out thoroughly. Here’s the URL: http://www.lavc.edu/virtualvalley/index.html (Links to an external site.). An especially important part of that site can be reached by clicking on the STUDENT RESOURCES drop-down near the top of the page; then click on Things You Need to Know. Please take all the stuff there very seriously; it’s there to make your life easier!

I would also like to recommend strongly that you take the Readiness Assessments on the Virtual Valley website (http://www.lavc.edu/virtualvalley/studentGettingStarted.html (Links to an external site.)). Look in the lower right corner for the Technical Skills Quiz, the Student Skills Quiz, and the Online Learning Success: Self-Paced Tutorial. At the end of these, you will either feel fully prepared for taking an online class, or you will know what to do to get yourself fully prepared. Either outcome is so worth it!
SUPREMELY CRITICAL ITEMS FOLLOW!
This Volume of Material Gets Smaller Soon, I Promise!

Please don’t be put off by the volume of written material there is to digest in the first phases of the semester. My approach is to explain as much as possible so there are as few questions – and the lowest amount of confusion – possible. The volume of support and informational material will decline after the first couple of weeks of the semester. Of course, at that time the volume of instructional material will increase.

How to Communicate with Me (and Other Student[s])

To communicate directly with me (or other students), please use instead the "Inbox" you can see at the far left linkbar on any Canvas screen. Once you’re there, click on the Compose icon near the top of your screen. Don’t know what I’m talking about? Here is a Canvas article showing you how to compose a note to me or to any other student(s) in our class:

https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-2670 (Links to an external site.).

Computer Lab

I want you to know that there is a good computer lab available on the LAVC campus in the library building that you may use. If you want to use the on-campus lab(s), you’ll need to have your student ID card with you. Check with the Admissions office about how to get one. You are never required to come on campus for this class, though, and you don’t need to have you student ID card with you just to set foot on the campus. BTW, students need to pay for parking on campus.

Required Communications: Extremely Important!
Early in the semester, you will see an Announcement in Canvas that will require you to send me a pre-written **Affirmation**. You can see the text of that required Affirmation in the Pages section of Canvas. (You can get to all parts of Canvas by using the area on the left side of your screen.) The Affirmation basically says that you will not use any resources, other than your brain and hands, when you take any of the exams. **IF YOU DO NOT SUBMIT YOUR AFFIRMATION WHEN REQUIRED, YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO TAKE ANY EXAMS AND WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO CONTINUE WITH THE COURSE.** Please watch and respond to all of the Announcements very carefully and appropriately.

From time to time, you will also see an Announcement requiring you to send me an “I am In” message. This is my way of taking roll, since, in an online course, there is no traditional “roll call.” **IF YOU DO NOT SEND ME THE “I AM IN” MESSAGES WHEN REQUIRED, YOU WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO CONTINUE WITH THE COURSE.** Please watch and respond to all of the Announcements very carefully and appropriately.

**Are You Ready? Once you are, things flow easily!**

Once you have gone through the SuperModule (about Canvas) and Module 1, you will be fully ready for the class. I am looking forward to an enjoyable semester with you and I wish you good luck in the course!

All the best,

Dr. Steven Mark Sachs

“Professor Steve”

*Professor Emeritus of Psychology, Computer Applications Office Technology, and Counseling*