



CHAFFEY HIGH SCHOOL

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Dear Students and Parents of Students in Honors Pre-Calculus,

Welcome to Chaffey High School. I am pleased that you and your student are part of our class for the 2011-2012 school year. The following describes what our class is about and what I expect from your student this year. On the next page is a brief acknowledgment that I would like you to sign and return with your student tomorrow.

Pre-Calculus is designed to engage your student in the advanced study of mathematics leading to the Calculus (next year). It is a demanding course requiring dedication and perseverance. The course of study covers topics of function notation and modeling, trigonometry, advanced algebraic techniques, combinatorics and introductory Calculus.

Accordingly, your student's Pre-Calculus course will combine a variety of teaching strategies to help your student succeed. I intend to provide a consistent structure involving students, parents, and myself in order to promote your child's success. Thus, I stress the following with my students:

THIS COURSE TAKES WORK: Not more work than the standard Pre-calculus, but work that is more conceptual and involves less manipulation of formulas and equations. The problems in this course, like problems in real-life, cannot be solved by looking in the book for a worked-out example that almost matches. They will have to understand what they are doing. This is not always easy! I encourage students to form teams of three or four students in order to work together. Part of the reason for our doing many group exercises in class is to get used to this type of work. Several people thinking together about a problem can often see around a difficulty where one person might get stuck. Among our goals is to actually do some Calculus in the fourth quarter.

CALCULATORS: The graphing calculators are a very important requirement of the course. For mathematicians and scientists, the graph is as important as the formula in understanding a function. A graphing calculator will provide convenient access to the graphs of a huge collection of functions. The ability to see immediately how a change in the formula affects the graph will give training in how to visualize functions reliably. Your child will be able to solve "graphically" equations that would be completely intractable otherwise. Zooming in on a curve will enable her/him to "see" local linearity vividly and convincingly. We are fortunate at Chaffey to be able to issue TI-83 Graphing Calculators in a similar manner as we issue textbooks.

HOMEWORK: Homework is an integral part of our class and **completion of all assignments is essential to student success.** Each student should expect daily assignments as well as longer term investigations. I will inform your student about the particular requirements for the class.

CLASS DISCIPLINE: In any worthwhile endeavor, personal and collective discipline are essential to success. Our class is no different. I expect students to maintain proper and ethical conduct at all times. Respect of others and of me at all times is non-negotiable. Any failure to show proper respect or any behavior that disrupts the teaching or learning process will result in 30 minutes detention in my room after school. Additional offenses will result in a parent conference with the execution of a Student Performance Agreement (“Contract”).

COMMUNICATION: Students and parents can reach me at 988-5560 ext. 2434, by e-mail at tajames@tajames.net and at our class web page <http://tajames.net>. These resources are also linked to School Loop. I can be reached in person after school almost any day until 4 or 5 p.m. Any issue that develops that affects your child’s progress in the class should be discussed promptly with me.

Please help me provide the best educational experience I can for your student by:

- discussing my expectations,
- monitoring your student's progress during the year (regularly ask your student what he or she is learning -- the answer is *never* "nothing!" – and ask them to explain to you what they are learning), and
- communicating your concerns with me.

A little about me:

I live in Upland with my wife and our eighteen-year-old daughter who will begin studying at UC Berkeley this fall. We also have a married daughter who graduated from Westmont College in 1999 and completed a PhD in Environmental Sciences at UC Riverside in 2006. I like astronomy, camping and backpacking, playing guitar, gardening, computers and sports. After graduating from South Pasadena High School in 1972, I earned bachelor's degrees in Physics and Astronomy from the University of California at Berkeley. After working for a number of years in private industry as an electronic engineer and production manger, I entered teaching. I earned my Master of Arts degree in Education from the Claremont Graduate University in 1992. I have studied chaos theory and dynamical systems and have pursued research astronomy having co-published articles in the October 1994 *Astrophysical Journal Supplement* and June 20, 1999 *Astrophysical Journal* reporting research in which I utilized the Hubble Space Telescope in 1996. This is my twenty-first year teaching at Chaffey.

Teaching is something I truly love to do. I enjoy helping students understand and discover new things. It is important to me that your student succeeds in this class. This class may be easy at times and quite challenging at other times. This means they have to work at learning the material. This means they have to try every day to do their best. Above all, mathematics is an essential, important and beautiful skill. Like all skills, students will need to **practice** this skill to perfect it.

There is a poem by Robert Frost that says, “*Two roads diverge in a wood, and I -- I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.*” For us, the road less traveled leads to education, personal growth and satisfaction, while the other road does not. It is my hope that your child will do well this semester and continue traveling the road less traveled by.

Please **keep** this letter for future reference.

Sincerely,

Tom James

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have read the expectations of the class and have discussed these with _____.
(student's name)

The best time to reach me by phone is:

(time)

(phone number)

Signed _____

Date _____

Please print name _____

Please list any concerns or comments in the space below:
