

# OREGON DAILY EMERALD

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## News



COURTESY

Two similar Web sites offer test-preparation classes: Test Masters is based in Texas and offers courses in various standardized tests.

## Dueling masters tangle with student test-taking plans

*Test preparation companies sharing the same name clash because of issues such as how students can distinguish between them and the quality of their services*

By Kelly Brown

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What a difference a space makes.

The New York State Consumer Protection Board has issued a warning against Test Masters, a test preparation company based in Texas, saying the name is too similar to TestMasters, a California-based company that offers Law School Admissions Test preparation courses.

Seventeen students who took the Test Masters prep course at Hunter College in New York said they thought they were enrolling in a TestMasters course, according to a press release from the NY CPB. They have since filed complaints with the NY CPB, according to the release.

TestMasters offers classes here in Eugene, and Test Masters has advertised classes in the area.

Jon Sorenson, the spokesman for the CPB, said that although CPB did not examine what each program offered, the names seemed similar enough to cause problems.

"We never did try to evaluate one product over another, but it's clear that the one company has the reputation and is the one that students, at least the ones that we talked to, were seeking when they enrolled," he said.

He added that the board issued its warning to help with consumer awareness, and that although he doesn't feel the Texas company is fraudulent, he wants students to know the difference.

"It's not our impression that they're running a scam," he said. "We're just trying to make people aware, which the company is not doing a good job of."

The Texas company owns the domain www.testmasters.com, while the California company owns www.testmasters.net.

Clint Woods, who does public relations for the Texas company, said the California company has seriously overstated claims of fraudulence, adding that the company has always had students sign a form that clearly notes they are separate companies.

"We've revised this to be even more thorough, and honestly we wish they'd do the same," he said.

But Sorenson said the wording of the agreement that students must sign before taking the Texas company's prep course was misleading. The document previously read, "I am aware that there are other companies that have a name similar to Test Masters, and that these other companies have no affiliation with us."

"When they use the word 'similar' in describing the other company name, it's not similar, it's identical," he said. "To use the name of the California outfit is somewhat misleading and not fully informative."

The company's revised agreement reads: "I am aware that there are other companies that operate under the name Test Masters."

Several students who filed statements said that after hearing about the California company from friends they logged onto www.testmasters.com, not knowing that it was a different outfit.

Sharon Naim, the vice president and in-house counsel for the California company, said the company's troubles started in 2003, when a Texas court ruled that the Texas company had the rights to the name in the state, but she added that the case was decided on a technicality.

She said that after the lawsuit the Texas company expanded their offerings — previously only the SAT and engineering tests — to LSAT prep in an attempt to cash in on her company's good name.



COURTESY

Two similar Web sites offer test-preparation classes: TestMasters, from California, offers classes on the LSAT.

Since then, the California company has been contacted by several students who mistakenly thought that they were enrolled in TestMasters, only to find that they were actually in Test Masters.

Naim said in a telephone interview that the Texas company has a history of scheduling classes only to cancel at the last minute, leaving students unable to enroll in another LSAT prep course.

"It's a disgrace," she said. "A lot of students are getting their lives destroyed. ... They have to travel because there's not enough instructors to teach them."

She also was upset by the Texas company's 10-point score increase guarantee, which she said does not function as a guarantee should.

"To most people, a guarantee means you can get your money back, but not with these people," she said. "It means you get to take their stupid course again."

James Shrader, who is in his second year of master's work at the University of Chicago, mistakenly enrolled in a Test Masters course after his friends recommended TestMasters. He said in a phone interview that after his scheduled class in Philadelphia was canceled, he was forced to drive to New York to attend the classes at Hunter College.

He found the classes "sub-par" and was "immediately disillusioned," but he didn't find out it was a different company until a classmate came in and announced that it wasn't the real TestMasters course.

"Then the instructor, whose name was Sean, said, 'No, no, we're the real Test Masters; they're the fake TestMasters,'" Shrader said.

Shrader said many of the students stormed out and some looked "shell-shocked."

"One girl was crying in the corner, because the LSATs are so important," he said.

Although the company refunded \$600 of the \$1,100 he paid for travel expenses because of the cancellation, he wants the balance of \$500 back.

"It's put incredible stress on my life and has been one of the worst things that's ever happened to me lately," he said.

Woods said the allegations of class cancellations are false.

"Ninety-five percent of the classes that are scheduled go through," he said.

He said classes are only canceled if fewer than six students are enrolled.

He said the California company is now waging a public relations war against his company.

"We have won in court twice, and he's trying — because he can't win in court — he's trying his case in the media, and the people that lose are the students," Woods said .

Sorenson said he doesn't feel this is a clear-cut case of a company acting unethically.

"It's not entirely the fault of the Houston company," he said. "These students might have done better in checking this out, getting to the bottom of it. But they, like us, were surprised that there were two companies out there with the same name."

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Contact the higher education reporter at [kbrown@dailyemerald.com](mailto:kbrown@dailyemerald.com)

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