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Two identical-sounding companies have different LSAT prep reputations

by Ketul Patel
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Northwestern pre-law students should be careful about which LSAT preparatory course they register for, because they might not be signing up for the class they expect.

TestMasters and Test Masters offer LSAT classes nationwide. Test Masters' Web site lists courses that will be offered at NU in preparation for the June LSAT.

That company, Test Masters of Houston, has been accused by the New York State Consumer Protection Board for misleading students into thinking that it's the same as TestMasters, a California-based company. Both companies offer LSAT preparation classes, which cost more than \$1,000 each.

The California-based company — TestMasters — has offered the courses nationwide since 2000. Test Masters began offering classes nationally in 2003.

Dineil Diaz, a Pace University senior, took a Test Masters class at Hunter College in New York City and complained it was inadequate in preparing her for the LSAT. Students also said the name was confusing and they thought they were taking a TestMasters course.

Alex Elson, Weinberg '01, took the Hunter College course. He wanted to take a TestMasters course, but he accidentally registered for Test Masters online through testmasters.com, which is owned by the Texas company. The California company's Web site addresses are testmasters.net and testmasters180.com.

During the second session of the course, a student told the entire class they were actually taking a course by the Texas company. Most students thought they were taking the California organization's course, Elson said.

Elson received contradictory replies when he contacted Test Masters about a refund.

"I was very frustrated," he said. "The whole process was unprofessional on their side. They led me along because they were nice on the phone, but there was no substance behind the promise."

The Consumer Protection Board issued a warning Oct. 25 that Test Masters was not adequately disclosing that it was a different company from TestMasters. Test Masters, in refund-waiver agreements students signed, referred to the California company by its formal name, Robin Singh Educational Services.

Elson filed a complaint with the New York Attorney General's Office and was offered a settlement, which he said he plans to reject.

John Elson, Alex Elson's father and an NU law professor, said he is collecting evidence in preparation for a lawsuit he is considering filing on behalf of Chicago-area students who signed up for the Texas company's class. He said he is not yet ready to file the suit.

"It seems to me that the students were understandably misled when they signed up on the (Test Masters) Web site," John Elson said. "There was no disclosure that their name is similar to the older, more established TestMasters."

Clint Woods, public relations consultant for Test Masters, said the company is a legitimate test-preparation company.

"We won rights to the name and we are not out to get anyone," he said.

He also said that the company is working with the Consumer Protection Board to give refunds to students who were dissatisfied with the class. The company is also changing the student agreement to note the name difference between the two companies, Woods said. The students have not yet received the refunds.

Robin Singh, CEO and author of the course for TestMasters, said that he felt the Texas service was trying to use his company's reputation for its own gain.

"It's unnerving that I put 12 years into this company, and it has grown nationally, but people are signing up for the other course because they look at the domain name, testmasters.com," Singh said.

Reach Ketul Patel at ketul-patel@northwestern.edu.

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