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First step in LSAT prep: choose the right "Master"

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Two test preparation companies that both offer classes for the Law School Admissions Test are currently involved in a court battle over their near-identical program names.

The two companies, one based in Texas and the other in California, use the names Test Masters and TestMasters respectively for their test prep programs. The California-based company is affiliated with Robin Singh Education Services and is the second largest test prep program in the country behind Kaplan, while the Texas-based company is owned by Test Masters Educational Services.

The California-based company, founded in 1992, teaches only LSAT prep courses, while the Texas-based company was started in 1991 as an SAT and Graduate Record Examinations prep course service but began offering LSAT courses in 2003.

The companies entered a court battle in 1999 after Robin Singh's company tried to buy the internet domain name www.testmasters.com and discovered it was already in use by the Texas-based company. Judges must now determine whether "testmasters" has a secondary meaning, the consumer association of a name with a particular product, according to court documents.

Robin Singh Educational Services now owns the domain names Testmasters180.com and Testmasters.net.

According to an Oct. 18 appeal, neither company has been able to establish a secondary meaning and thus neither one has exclusive rights to the name anywhere in the country.

"The people being damaged the most are the consumers," said TestMasters president and founder Robin Singh. "Something needs to be done to stop the confusion. It doesn't make sense for two companies to be functioning in the same market under the same name."

Much of the struggle between the two companies has arisen because Robin Singh's TestMasters is a more well-known and rigorous test pre-program compared to the Texas-based program, students said.



ARIEL ROSNER/WSN

A shelf of standardized test preparation books at The Strand bookstore.

NYU alumna Jennifer Cha signed up for the Texas-based Test Masters LSAT course offered at Hunter College last October thinking it was the noted California-based TestMasters course. She said she had trouble differentiating Robin Singh's TestMasters website.

"I thought Testmasters180 was part of Testmasters.com," she said. "I asked specifically if they were affiliated and they said they didn't know what [the other company] was."

She also said the Texas-based company offered poor services, adding that she's also taken a Kaplan LSAT course.

"It was just photocopied materials," she said. "It wasn't anything special. It wasn't anything new." Jennifer said she plans to enroll in Robin Singh's course to prepare for the June LSAT, and offered advice to future students.

"Be careful and be sure you're taking the right one," she said.

NYU law student Edgar Cho, who scored a 172 out of 180 on the LSAT test, taught one of Robin Singh's courses last summer and said the training Singh's instructors receive is rigorous.

Teachers must score in the 99th percentile on the LSAT exam and complete an intense week-long training session.

"What set TestMasters [and Robin Singh] apart initially is that they bought the rights to duplicate questions from the previous LSAT tests," Cho said.

Roger Israni, the president of Test Masters Educational Services, said students taking his courses sign two release forms acknowledging they understand that Test Masters is not affiliated with Robin Singh.

Though Israni said the company has the right to use the Test Masters name in all 50 states, the most recent appeal made by Robin Singh's company last October said "[Test Masters Educational Services] has established no rights to the mark outside Texas."

Israni said all of his LSAT instructors took the LSAT test and passed with a score of at least 170.

Robin Singh Educational Services representative Sharon Naim refutes that claim and said Israni's company has no localized faculty and must use Texas-based teachers for courses taught across the country.

The Texas-based company began offering LSAT courses under a similar name to "usurp the identity and reputation," Naim said.

"They're using that to pretend that they're us and take our students," she said.

Though courts have allowed the Texas-based company to use the Test Masters name, an appeal is still pending, Naim said.

NYU School of Law does not endorse a specific LSAT prep course.

"Each particular type [of course] is designed for a particular type of student," said Mercer Crenshaw,

administrative aide in the CAS pre-professional advising office. "We don't sanction any particular course."

Consumer Protection Board representative Jon Sorenson said students should "read the fine print" before choosing a test prep course.

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