

UC Irvine Provides Free Online CSET Test Preparation Courses Responding To California Budget Crisis

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New Open Math Courses Provide CSET Preparation, Principles and Pedagogy to Help Teachers Earn Subject Matter Competency and Excel in Math Classrooms.

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IRVINE, Calif. (March 30, 2009) – The mounting severity of California’s critical shortage of qualified math teachers has been the impetus for the development of a free CSET preparation program at the University of California, Irvine. The program addresses the urgent need to help new and incumbent teachers prepare for and pass the California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET), a test which measures the subject matter competency of teachers seeking credentials to teach mathematics in California schools. Made available as part of the University’s OpenCourseWare initiative – which allows self-learners to view and utilize materials and resources, through the Web, free of charge – the new courses will serve as part of the solution to what many are calling a national crisis.

The Problem:

California’s shortage of fully prepared math teachers currently undermines the quality of the state’s education system — a problem that is anticipated to worsen. According to projections published by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger’s office, the teacher shortage will be compounded throughout the next decade, with over 100,000 teachers retiring — more than one third of the teacher workforce.

Not only are there not enough teachers, but many of those currently teaching math are serving out of their particular subject-matter expertise. Faced with a no-win situation, many districts are assigning English, history and art instructors, or even teachers with emergency credentials to math classes – a practice which ultimately impacts the quality of education students receive. In fact, it is estimated that nearly 1,500 mathematics classes were taught by teachers with no teaching credential. According to a recent report by the National Science Foundation, California scored seventh from the bottom in the comparison of the country’s eight grade mathematics students.

The Solution:

“It is essential that California’s teachers receive the education, tools and support they need to better educate our state’s K-12 mathematics students,” said Gary W. Matkin, Ph.D., dean of continuing education at UC Irvine. “Given that a significant number of teachers do not pass the CSET on their first attempt due to a lack of familiarity with the content and/or the format of the exams, our new Math CSET preparation courses will help teachers identify areas requiring further study, or serve as a content refresher, in an effort to help them pass the examination on the first attempt.”

The no-cost resource, available now at <http://ocw.uci.edu/courses/AR0111006/>, includes preparation courses for the following exams: CSET Mathematics Subtest I, CSET Mathematics Subtest II and CSET Mathematics III.

UC Irvine’s free courses should be used as a resource to help teachers identify specific gaps in their subject-matter understanding. Each lesson corresponds to a California Subject Matter Requirement and each topic corresponds to an individual or group of California K-12 Content Standards for Mathematics. The CSET exam is itself is tied to these standards. Each lesson follows the same pattern:

Diagnostic Questions - Diagnostic questions allow teachers to rapidly ascertain their level of comfort with the subject matter. As questions are answered correctly, teachers are allowed to move on to the next topic. In this manner, teachers will spend time only on areas where they need to strengthen their understanding.

Guided Examples - The guided examples are a second level of help. If the diagnostic questions are answered correctly, but teachers still have doubts as to the depth of their understanding, these step-by-step examples can help. Following this example, teachers are able to answer a new diagnostic question.

Content "Refresher" - The "refresher" is designed to provide just-in-time instruction to reinforce understanding, particularly if teachers have struggled with the diagnostic questions. These screens provide further examples and opportunities for practice along with an explanation of the topic. Another diagnostic question follows the refresher. These refreshers are intended for teachers who have some familiarity with the subject matter and are not intended to be a complete course in the subject matter for those without formal education in the subject. However, it may be enough for someone who previously learned the material through coursework and needs to brush up before taking the CSET exam.

Funded by a grant awarded from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, UC Irvine's initiative complements the "California Teach" plan by the University of California and Governor Schwarzenegger, which is designed to graduate at least four times as many new math and science teachers – from 250 to 1,000 a year – by 2010.

For more information about UC Irvine's OpenCourseWare CSET courses, please visit <http://ocw.uci.edu/courses/AR0111006/> or contact Kathy Tam at kstam@uci.edu.

About UC Irvine's OpenCourseWare Initiative: The University of California, Irvine was the first University of California campus—and West Coast University—to join the OCW Consortium. UC Irvine's membership in the OCW Consortium is consistent with its public- and land-grant missions and its desire to play a significant role in contributing to the social welfare of the state, the nation and the world. Open educational resources (OER) showcase the University's high quality education and makes courses and course materials free for everyone in the world. UC Irvine's OCW is a large-scale, Web-based resource that houses educational assets that are discoverable, searchable, modifiable, and, best of all, free and easily available. Through the OCW Movement, UC Irvine provides university-quality courses and learning assets to populations of self learners that are underserved and in many cases, unable to participate in formal education at a university. This site also offers access to UC Irvine's online continuing education offerings. For more information about UC Irvine's OCW initiative, visit <http://ocw.uci.edu/> or e-mail ocw@unx.uci.edu.

About the University of California, Irvine: The University of California, Irvine is a top-ranked university dedicated to research, scholarship and community service. Founded in 1965, UCI is among the fastest-growing University of California campuses, with more than 27,000 undergraduate and graduate students and about 1,400 faculty members. The second-largest employer in dynamic Orange County, UCI contributes an annual economic impact of \$3.3 billion. For more UCI news, visit www.today.uci.edu.

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