

Shortening Your Path To A College Degree In An Uncertain Economy

(NAPSA)—It's the higher education equivalent of the "perfect storm"—students of all ages are seeking more education to help them weather the rocky economy at the same time tight state budgets are forcing colleges to increase tuition and cut back on financial aid. But help is available, according to the College Board, through CLEP, the College-Level Examination Program that saves students both time and money.

CLEP provides thousands of students of all ages with a unique opportunity to demonstrate academic achievement through a program of rigorous exams in introductory college-level subjects. The 35 CLEP exams range in subject from English Composition to U.S. History, and include Biology and Spanish, among others. The exams are 90 minutes and are made up primarily of multiple choice questions.

James Ownby, 34, is a victim of the high-tech bust who used CLEP to advance himself. For years, Ownby enjoyed a successful career with a Fortune 500 company even though he had never earned an undergraduate degree. But when tough times hit, his employer cited his lack of a degree as the reason he was chosen for termination. "Time was of the essence in getting a degree because in the computer industry, it's crucial that you don't stay away for any length of time so your skills don't become outdated." Ownby earned 35 credits and estimates he saved \$16,000 through CLEP. As a result of CLEP, he was able to finish a four-year degree program in 18 months. "The CLEP exams are rigorous and challenging, but I recommend them to other professionals who may find themselves in my situation."

CLEP exams are offered at 1,300 college and university test centers at universities throughout the United States. Because the exams are computer-based, students obtain instant score reports upon completion of the exam. The exams cost \$55 each and test centers usually charge a small test administration fee. Passing a CLEP exam can save students hundreds or thousands of dollars on college tuition and fees.

CLEP gave 27-year-old Jackie Kim the boost she needed to graduate from college. Kim recently returned to school because she felt her job chances were being hurt



Taking a CLEP exam can provide the boost needed to graduate from college.

by her lack of an undergraduate degree. "My goals were to get a degree as quickly and economically as possible and CLEP helped me do that. I earned 44 credit hours and saved \$33,000 in tuition costs through CLEP. Because I finished early, I was able to start my job search that much sooner."

CLEP also appeals to students who are beginning second careers. Olga Karlatos Rankin was a Broadway actor when she decided, at age 55, to return to the classroom for her bachelor's degree. She passed five CLEP exams that she says saved her nearly \$25,000 in tuition costs. "I always wanted to return to school but never had the chance. CLEP gave me the opportunity to earn credit for all the things I had learned throughout my life so I could spend time concentrating on the essentials I needed from higher education."

There are 2,900 colleges that grant credit for CLEP exams. A student considering taking a CLEP exam should first check with the college to learn more about its CLEP policy and how much credit a student can earn through CLEP. However, it is not necessary to be enrolled in college in order to take a CLEP test.

CLEP is administered by the College Board, a not-for-profit membership organization whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity with a commitment to excellence and equity in education.

For more information about CLEP, including exam descriptions and the colleges and universities that accept and/or administer CLEP exams, visit the College Board's Web site which is located at www.collegeboard.com/clep.