SAT Workshops Help Students Realize Dreams

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Nancy Fausto wants to be the first member of her family to attend college. With a 3.8 grade-point average at Estancia High in Costa Mesa, the 16-year-old is well on her way. But she knows good grades go only so far these days. That’s why Nancy and 30 classmates devoted two Saturdays in November to an SAT workshop and another two weeks to after-school tutorials that reinforced the eight-hour prep classes.

“It’s a sacrifice,” Nancy said. “It’s a lot of time. But for what I’ve gotten out of these sessions, it’s well worth the investment.”

Nancy’s SAT prep classes are part of the UC Irvine Community Outreach Partnership Center, which received $20,000 this year from the Los Angeles Times Holiday Campaign. The Times holiday campaign raises money for nonprofit agencies in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties.

The partnership center provides SAT test workshops on the west side of Costa Mesa, a predominantly Latino area. Victor Becerra, director of the partnership center, said the UC Irvine program is geared toward areas experiencing rapid demographic change. So far, the partnership center appears to be paying dividends for Costa Mesa’s Latino students at Estancia and Costa Mesa high schools.

Becerra said the number of students registering for the SAT exam has increased at both schools. After two sample tests at Estancia, each student beat their score the second time around, some improving as much as 300 points. At Costa Mesa, where 36 students participated, the sample test scores jumped by an average of 100 points.

The 50 students from the Costa Mesa area had their first crack at the SAT Dec. 6.

“Ultimately, we’re trying to improve the college culture at each school to increase the college preparedness,” Becerra said. “That’s especially important at those schools with historically underrepresented groups.”

Jackie Alvarez, a UCI undergraduate conducting afternoon tutoring sessions at Estancia, said: “A lot of these students are looking for that something extra to push their score higher. So they’re very energetic and willing to participate.”

For Estancia junior Betzabeth Vazquez, the afternoon tutorials added up to two weeks of long school days. Betzabeth had school until 3 p.m., then SAT tutoring and finally drama practice.

“I never go home,” she said. “I didn’t really want to be here in the beginning. But it’s very helpful and I’m glad I stuck it out.”

Betzabeth has her eyes on New York University’s theater department. To get there, she realizes a 1,200 or higher SAT score is a must.

“This course has really helped give me a lot of strategies on how to take the test,” she said. “It’s kind of stressful taking the SAT. This has definitely helped relieve some of that stress.”

Joel Cornejo, 16, was feeling a lot better about his chances of qualifying for admission to UCI after his sample score shot up 270 points within five days.

“I’ve learned when to guess, when not to guess and how to eliminate possible answers,” said Joel, a native of El Salvador who hopes to major in aerospace engineering. “Before this course, I really had no idea how the test worked. I think I would have been lost without the workshops and tutoring sessions.”

HOW TO GIVE

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