



NCCAOM Response to All Stakeholders Regarding 2019 and 2020 Exam Administrations

May 31, 2018

Introduction:

During the Spring meeting of the Council of Colleges for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (CCAOM), the NCCAOM announced that in 2019 adaptive testing would be temporarily suspended and the NCCAOM examinations would be administered in linear format during four pre-set testing windows. Since that announcement there has been a magnitude of concerns expressed by students, school officials, and other practitioners about NCCAOM's announcement and the potential adverse impact on the time it will take for graduates to obtain licensure as an acupuncturist in 2019.

NCCAOM has heard your voices and we have decided to reconsider the timeline for administration of the linear exams. Adaptive testing will continue throughout 2019 and implementation of the updated content outlines, developed during the 2017 Job Analysis study, will be delayed until January 2020.

The NCCAOM Customer Relations Team and senior staff have fielded questions regarding these changes and have compiled this set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

The FAQs provide:

1. More in-depth information to candidates and stakeholders about the 2019 exam administrations and what is planned for 2020 related to the updated content outlines;
2. Rationale why the NCCAOM must switch the examinations to linear format and temporarily suspend adaptive testing at the commencement of these administrations.

FAQs:

Q1. Are there any changes to the current content outlines based on the results of the 2017 Job Analysis?

Answer: Yes. NCCAOM completed a survey-based Job Analysis (JA) study in November 2017. The purpose of a JA Study is to update the content of the NCCAOM examinations, which supports the relevance, validity, and legal defensibility of the NCCAOM® examination programs. In accordance with best practices and Standards in the testing and certification/licensure industries (i.e., National Commission for Certifying Agencies [NCCA] Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs), NCCAOM conducts a JA study at minimum every 5 years. Please note that the 2017 JA study was conducted a year earlier than planned as the prior JA study concluded in 2013. See FAQ Q2 for more information.



New content outlines were developed for the NCCAOM® Foundations of Oriental Medicine (FOM), Biomedicine (BIO), Acupuncture with Point Location (ACPL), and Chinese Herbology (CH) examinations, based specifically on the survey results from the 2017 JA study.

The major outcomes affecting the content of the new exam content outlines from the 2017 JA are:

- The individual domain percentages (weightings) changed for all examinations – ACPL, BIO, FOM and CH;
- **The FOM content outline** includes a new subdomain: *Lifestyle changes and self-care modalities*;
- **The BIO content outline** includes:
 - Clarification and additions to the lists of pharmaceuticals, nutrients and supplements, and medical conditions
 - Addition of a new subdomain: *Integration of acupuncture and Chinese medicine with biomedicine*;
- **The ACPL content outline** includes:
 - *Extra Points* relevant to entry-level practice
 - *Treatment Techniques* which is now a separate domain; and
- **The CH content outline** includes a published list of single herbs along with an increased number of herbal formulas.

To provide sufficient time for candidates and schools to adjust to these changes, the new content outlines have been published to a separate section on the NCCAOM website: <http://www.nccaom.org/exam-content-outlines-2020/>.

Q2: When will the content outlines based on the outcomes of the 2017 JA study take effect?

Answer: The new content outlines will take effect beginning January 1, 2020, which is when they would have been implemented if the most recent JA study was conducted on-schedule in 2018. The reason for conducting the JA study one year early was because the California Acupuncture Board (CAB) had recommended use of the NCCAOM examinations in 2019. However, since there is no statutory legislation in place yet to have the CA Department of Consumer Affairs' (DCA) Office of Professional Examination Services (OPES) conduct its second content review of the NCCAOM examination programs, this gives more lead time to introduce the new content outlines to the AOM community. Please refer to the NCCAOM website for further updates and information: <http://www.nccaom.org/jasurvey-information/> .

Q3. Will there be any exam administration changes? If so, what are they and why?

Answer: Yes. Due to the content outline changes, NCCAOM will temporarily suspend adaptive testing and administer all examinations in linear format during 2020.

Linear testing is necessary for a period of time after the implementation of new content outlines. This is because the passing standards for the examinations must be evaluated before making candidate scoring decisions, as the current passing standards may no longer be appropriate



once content has been removed from or added to the exams. This prevents the ability to provide preliminary score results to candidates at Pearson VUE, which is a key feature of adaptive testing. In addition, any questions based on new content must be statistically validated before exams are scored. As part of the scoring process for linear examinations, candidate responses are reviewed after conclusion of the exam window to ensure that new questions perform to psychometric standards. Adaptive testing requires that all scored items be previously statistically validated, which means linear format must be used to gather data on the new questions.

This temporary change to NCCAOM exam format is in accordance with best practices and NCCA Standards and helps ensure the fairness of the examination scoring process for all candidates. NCCAOM's Acupuncture, Chinese Herbology, and Oriental Medicine certification programs are accredited by the [National Commission for Certification Agencies \(NCCA\)](#), an independent commission within the Institute for Credentialing (ICE) Excellence organization that enforces testing industry standards to help ensure the health, welfare, and safety of the public. The NCCAOM must adhere to the strict national standards outlined in the *Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs*.

Q4. How is a linear testing different from adaptive testing?

Answer: Candidates will notice several changes associated with the switch to linear testing:

- Candidates will answer more questions, which will require them to spend more time at the Pearson VUE test center;
- Candidates will be able to return to previous questions and change their responses once all questions have been answered;
- Preliminary pass/fail results will not be available at the test center after candidates complete the exam;
- Official Results letters will be mailed to candidates approximately 6 weeks after conclusion of the exam administration period;
- Examinations will be offered during pre-set testing windows and continuous, year-round testing will be suspended.

Q5. Why does NCCAOM have specified testing dates with linear and but not adaptive testing?

Answer: Pre-set testing windows are necessary with linear testing to ensure a sufficient number of candidates answer each new question on an exam, which is required for statistical validation. If candidates could choose any test date they wanted, as they can with adaptive testing, NCCAOM would not be able to guarantee when exam results would be ready. Only after a minimum of 300 candidates answer a new question can it be validated. Limiting testing opportunities allows NCCAOM to gather sufficient data during a short period of time, which are needed to conduct statistical analyses and ensure the exams meet psychometric standards before making candidate scoring decisions.



Q6. When will the linear exams be offered?

Answer: The NCCAOM plans to gather dates of graduation from all the ACCAOM accredited programs in Acupuncture and OM and then work closely with our Pearson VUE test center vendor to finalize 2020 dates. NCCAOM will try to set a series of test administration windows that provide minimal delay in new graduates being able to take the exams.

School officials need to send NCCAOM staff the expected graduation dates for 2019 and 2020 so we can plan accordingly. NCCAOM school liaison Jennifer Nemeth will be reaching out to all school registrars. NCCAOM hopes to have the CCAOM facilitate the gathering of this information from the school Presidents and other accredited program administrators.