



## **Q & A on Follow-Up Questions Submitted to the NCCAOM Based on the Audit, and How the NCCAOM Can Provide Exam Development and Administrative Services to the CAB for Purposes of Licensure: *A Presentation to the CAB***

**Provided by Dr. Kory Ward-Cook, Ph.D., CEO NCCAOM®  
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### **Q1. How do pre-graduation candidates perform on the NCCAOM exams compared to those candidates who have already graduated?**

**A1.** Candidates for licensure by the CAB are required to have graduated from an approved program before they sit for the CALE. The NCCAOM allows both pre-grads and grads to sit for the NCCAOM exams if they meet the “minimal accepted competency criteria”. A question has arisen as to the difference in the pass rates for first time test takers (FTTTs) and repeat test takers (RTTs) who are pre-grads or grads, who have taken the NCCAOM exams. The NCCAOM researched the comparison of the pass rates of those candidates who have graduated prior to testing vs. those who were still pre-graduation during the time interval of January 1, 2013 through December 31, 2015 (the last 3 years). The data in **Attachment #1** of this Q&A shows that the pre-grads, who are first time test takers actually perform better as a group than those who have graduated; there is no difference between the pass-rates of repeat test takers who were pre-grads or were grads during the time of the exam administration.

### **Q2. What is the “Minimum Acceptable Competency Criteria” used for pass score setting for the NCCAOM Examination.**

**A2.** The “**Minimum Acceptable Competency Criteria**” is a concept that subject matter expert (SME) committees are led to explore and establish while working with a Psychometrician during standard setting. As part of the initial training at the most recent NCCAOM Cut Score Study, performed on the Acupuncture and Point Location (ACPL) examination, a Psychometrician from NCCAOM’s testing contractor led the SMEs through a discussion of the ACPL program eligibility requirements. This helped the group to conceptualize the minimum set of education and experience requirements a candidate must have to be eligible to begin the certification process.

Then the committee was led in a discussion of the concepts of entry-level and minimal competency. The discussion began by focusing on the fact that minimal competence does not mean low or poor levels of competence, but instead a high level of professionalism and skills representing the point of demarcation between the competent practitioner and those who are not. Likewise the committee discussed that the term entry-level that does not mean an entry-level job, but the minimum level of training that represents the competent professional. The committee was led in discussion of the relationship among skills that are common among



practice settings. The Committee also discussed the fact that the ACPL credential represents a comprehensive body of skills that are expected to represent transferable competency among practice settings and locations throughout the world. With those concepts in mind, the content outline of the examination was reviewed (as a reflection of what practitioners do on the job), allowing the SMEs to formulate a conception of the minimally-competent entry-level candidate and what this candidate would do on-the-job to practice in a safe and competent manner. For the ACPL program, the committee agreed that the typical entry-level minimally-competent practitioner works in a private practice, has a minimum of 250 patient visits, and has completed a minimum of 1,600 hours of education (didactic and clinical), from which he/she would achieve competence with the tasks on the ACPL content outline.

**Q3. The NCCAOM completed its last Job Analysis (JA) (i.e. occupational analysis (OA)) in 2013; the CAB just completed its OA in 2015. a) When will the new JA, i.e. OA be conducted by the NCCAOM and how will?**

**A3.** The next NCCAOM JA will begin in 2017.

**Q4. Considering that CA has the highest number of licensed acupuncturists compared to the other U.S. states, how will the NCCAOM ensure wider participation by both national and CA practitioners throughout all areas of the exam development process, to include - the JA (OA) content validation study for the NCCAOM exams; linkage to the NCCAOM exam content outlines, standard setting process (cut score studies), ongoing exam item writing, reviewing and selecting of the pre-calibrated items for the exam, as well as the development of the examination forms (i.e. serve as SMES on an Exam Development Committees)?**

**A4.** Licensed CA practitioners will be welcomed to join the OA Panel as part of the recruitment of subject matter experts (SMEs) in good standing, who represent the demographic diversity of the profession, nationwide. The NCCAOM will also invite additional qualified CA SMEs to participate in item development, i.e. to serve on an NCCAOM Exam Development Committees (EDCs). NCCAOM currently has at least one licensed CA practitioner on each examination committee. In fact we have two licensed CA SMEs on the ACPL EDC. We would welcome adding CA SMEs to the exam committees in the future to best represent California practice.

The NCCAOM currently offers a mentoring program that allows training virtually first, followed by an invitation to an item writing event where they partner with a seasoned item writer. NCCAOM has at least one item writing event (IWE) annually. Item writing events are given in different regions of the country. For example, during 2013, we had an item writing event in Los Angeles for area Diplomates; 2014 in Portland and 2015 in Chicago. We are willing to open the invitation to licensed CA SMEs and to offer additional IWEs in California.

NCCAOM currently identifies SMEs and other Diplomates to participate in standard setting (i.e., cut score) workshops. The goal is to have diversity in geographic regions, years in practice, and practice setting. We usually will have at minimum one SME from CA participating. We could invite licensed CA practitioners in the future.



**Q5. In 2008 the NCCAOM validated both task and knowledge/skills statements on its JA (i.e. OA); however, only task and competency statements were validated on the 2013 JA. Will the NCCAOM be validating both task and knowledge/skills statements on its 2017 JA?**

**A5.** In addition to the tasks performed that will be rated for criticality to entry-level practice, the elements that survey respondents will be asked to consider will include knowledge, skills and abilities, and will run the range of cognitive thinking with the professionally-appropriate range of Blooms taxonomy. The Biomedicine (BIO), Acupuncture with Point Location (ACPL) and the Chinese Herbology (CH) exams all currently have reference lists that are also validated through the JA. These are: Pharmaceuticals, Nutrients & Supplements, and Clinical Conditions for the Bio exam; Extra Points List for the ACPL exam and Chinese Herbal Formulas for the CH exam. The NCCAOM also plans to validate a list of raw herbs on the 2017 JA.

**Q6. How will the NCCAOM assure that it will have a representative sampling of licensed acupuncturists for the next JA (OA) survey?**

**A6.** The NCCAOM plans to conduct its next JA (OA) using a *scatter-shot method*, where all potential practitioners are identified and welcomed to participate. NCCAOM anticipates that the California Licensing Board (CAB) will assist the NCCAOM exam development staff and psychometric consultant in identifying all practitioners who are actively licensed acupuncturists in CA and encourage them to participate in the survey. Rather than trying to drive the results by sampling, a comprehensive battery of subgroup analyses will be conducted on the survey results to ensure that all respondents have a voice, and that no practitioners have an undue influence on the final content outline and content area weighting. We anticipate with a targeted invitation to all licensed CA practitioners, that the respondent group will warrant consideration as a separate demographic subgroup with which the rest of the respondents can be compared. Analyses will be conducted to ensure that licensed CA practitioner opinions are appropriately reflected in the survey results and resulting content outline and test specifications.

**Q7. Will there be an additional/increase in cost for applicants to take the Chinese or Korean exams in the future (California prospectively adds almost 360 more foreign-language candidates)?**

**A7.** No, there are no plans to increase the cost for Foreign Language exams. In fact, there are no current plans to raise the examination fees for the English exams.

**Q8. How will NCCAOM accommodate additional score reporting requirements if identified/requested by the CA Acupuncture Board and what score reports will NCCAOM provide to the CA Acupuncture Board?**



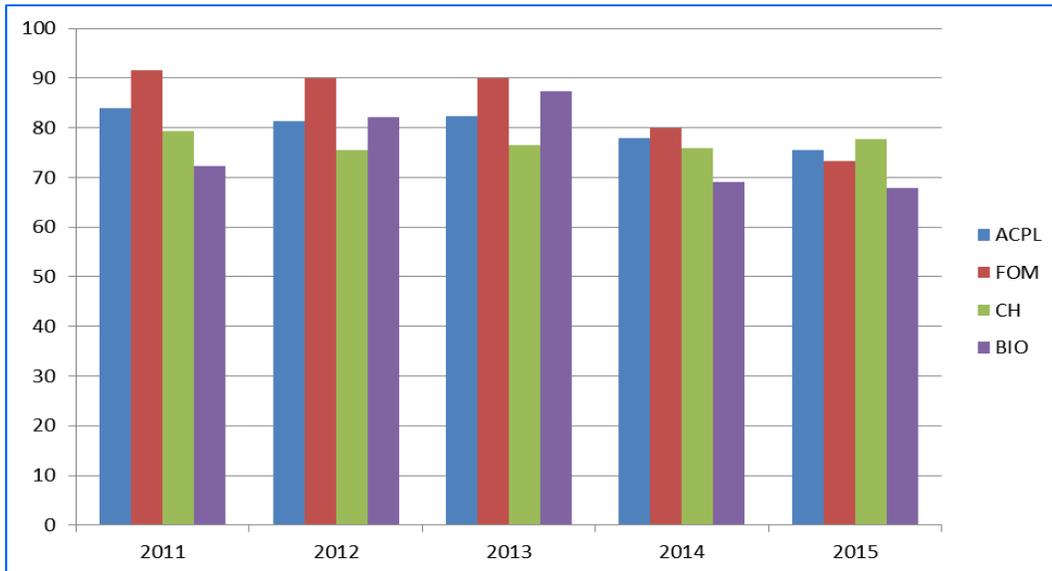
**A8.** NCCAOM would enter into a memorandum of understanding or contract with the CAB or other entities (e.g., OPES) designated by the CAB to provide additional reports as requested. NCCAOM currently provides School/Program Performance Reports, which include national benchmark report and individual candidate detailed score reports (see **Attachment # 2- School Performance Report - Sample**), to all schools that have an ACAOM accredited/candidate Acupuncture and/or Oriental Medicine program.

**Q9. If the CAB requires a supplemental exam for its licensees, in addition to the NCCAOM exams, how could the NCCAOM be of service in administration of the supplemental exam?**

**A9.** The NCCAOM would be happy to facilitate the administration of any multiple-choice exam that the CAB may require of its candidates for licensure. NCCAOM has an ongoing contract with Pearson VUE to administer multiple-choice tests at their professional test centers. The NCCAOM would be open to providing any other exam development or administrative function for supporting the requirement of a supplemental exam.

**Q10. The CAB and other interested parties have asked about the pass rates on the NCCAOM over the years. There was concern that the NCCAOM examinations had very high pass rates. Is this the case?**

**A10.** The pass rates for all test takers have remained consistent within the testing program, averaging in the mid- to high-70s for ACPL, BIO, and CH. There have been higher pass rates for FOM that have since lowered (i.e., 91.7% in 2011 vs. 73.3% in 2015). First time test takers (FTTTs) and repeat test takers (RTTS) also continued to be consistent within the testing program across time. The pass rates and other exam statistics for 2014 and 2015 can be seen in **Attachment #3a and 3b – Exam Statistics for 2011 – 2013 and Exam Statistics for 2014 – 2015**. The graph below shows the exam pass rates for each of the NCCAOM examinations (Foundations of Oriental Medicine - FOM, Acupuncture with Point Location - ACPL, Chinese Herbology - CH, and Biomedicine - BIO exams) for 2011 through 2015.



**Q11. Can candidates take the NCCAOM exams in various locations throughout CA and are the exam sites secure?**

**A11.** Candidates for the NCCAOM examination(s) can schedule and take their examinations as soon as they are approved to test by the NCCAOM, any day, year-round at over 260 locations throughout the U.S. and abroad (with 22 locations in California). NCCAOM examinations are offered in a computer adaptive format, which minimizes testing error and improves examination reliability. In addition, computer adaptive testing (CAT) provides candidates with a preliminary pass/fail screen after completion of the examination giving them a preliminary indication of how they performed on the examination. The NCCAOM is able to offer these candidate friendly exam administration services because it is assisted in its examination administration by [Pearson VUE](#), one of the leading testing services in the United States and the world. In addition, candidates are ensured a safe and secure examination site thanks to Pearson VUE's state-of-the-art security systems, which has virtually eliminated cheating by test-takers. Since contracting with Pearson VUE, the NCCAOM has had zero incidents of cheating or examination compromise owing to the extremely secure system that exist at the Pearson VUE Professional Test Centers.