

ACAHM Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine

Position Paper Title: ACAHM-Accreditable Doctoral Programs

Approved By: ACAHM Executive Committee

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Related Commission Policies: [Glossary](#); [Comprehensive Accreditation Standards and Criteria](#); [Program Naming Policy](#); [Standards Review Policy](#)

References:

Responsible Official: ACAHM Director of Accreditation Services

BACKGROUND:

The Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine (“ACAHM” or “Commission”) currently accredits or pre-accredits entry-level doctoral programs and advanced practice doctoral programs (see *ACAHM-Accreditable Programs* definition in ACAHM’s [Glossary](#)).

Professional Entry-Level Doctoral Degree Program:

Professional entry-level doctoral programmatic accreditation standards were promulgated in 2013. Inaugural PD programs were initially accredited in 2018.

The degree program was formerly referred to as “First Professional Doctorate (FPD)” and “Professional Doctorate (PD).”

Professional entry-level doctoral program accreditation standards include an option for programs to offer a doctoral degree completion track (see *Doctoral Degree Completion Track* definition in ACAHM’s [Glossary](#)) providing an opportunity for graduates of an ACAHM-accredited/pre-accredited master’s-level program to pursue the entry-level doctoral degree.

While a doctoral completion track has distinct admissions and program length requirements (see ACAHM accreditation *criteria* [5.08](#) and [7.02](#) for details), it is considered by the Commission as a component of the overall professional entry-level doctoral program, rather than a separately accredited program. While some institutions have chosen to advertise such degree completion opportunities as “transitional doctorate” or “bridge” programs, the Commission will not review and accredit these completion tracks separately from a full start-to-finish entry-level doctoral program.

Advanced Practice Doctoral Degree Program:

Advanced practice doctoral programmatic accreditation standards were promulgated in 2000. Inaugural advanced practice doctoral programs were initially accredited in 2007.

The degree program was formerly referred to as “post-graduate doctorate” and “post-professional doctorate.”

Minimum requirements for program admission include the satisfactory completion of an ACAHM-accredited or pre-accredited entry-level program (i.e., master’s or professional entry-level doctorate).

The advanced practice doctorate is the most advanced ACAHM-accreditable doctoral program.

DEGREE NAMES/TITLES:

Professional entry-level doctorate:

Prior to 2019, ACAHM did not mandate a degree title for entry-level doctoral programs, thereby allowing institutions to name the conferred degree based on degree-granting approval from their state higher education authority. Common entry-level doctoral program degree names included Doctor of Acupuncture, Doctor of Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine, Doctor of Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine, Doctor in Traditional Chinese Medicine, and Doctor of Acupuncture and Integrative Medicine.

At its February 2020 semi-annual meeting, the Commission finalized its [Program Naming Policy](#) which required that no later than 1 January 2024, all ACAHM-accredited/pre-accredited entry-level doctoral degree programs must designate the degree as:

- Doctor of Acupuncture (DAc)
- Doctor of Acupuncture with a Chinese herbal medicine specialization (DAcCHM) or
 - Doctor of Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine
 - Doctor of Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine

Advanced practice doctorate:

Since the initial promulgation of accreditation standards, the only title recognized and accredited by ACAHM for the advanced practice doctoral degree is *Doctor of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (DAOM)*. Effective 2022, the Commission has undertaken a review of advanced practice doctoral accreditation standards, including the program name, consistent with its [Standards Review Policy](#). The naming designation remains in process.

DIFFERENTIATING DOCTORAL DEGREE PROGRAMS:

“Professional/Clinical” versus “Academic” Doctorates:

Doctoral degree programs in the United States are generally differentiated as either professional/clinical or academic.

A professional/clinical doctorate focuses on skills and knowledge necessary for success in a profession and

distinguished practical performance. Professional/clinical doctorates are often qualifying components for licensure in a profession. ACAHM-accreditable entry-level and advanced practice doctoral programs are considered professional/clinical doctoral degree programs, as opposed to academic doctoral degree programs.

An academic doctorate (i.e., Doctor of Philosophy/PhD) is a postgraduate research degree awarded to students who complete an original scholarly work offering a significant new contribution to knowledge in their subject. While ACAHM’s advanced practice doctoral programs emphasize research literacy and require completion of a clinically oriented research capstone project (see ACAHM [criterion 7.08](#) for details) they are not equivalent to an academic doctorate.

ACAHM’s scope of recognition from the U.S. Department of Education includes the accreditation and pre-accreditation of professional doctoral programs. ACAHM’s scope does not currently provide for the accreditation and pre-accreditation of academic doctoral programs.

“Advanced Practice” versus “Terminal”

The Commission utilizes the “advanced practice degree” designation to differentiate doctoral programs that provide advanced specialty training and emphasize research literacy from entry-level programs at the master’s level or professional doctoral degree level. Advanced practice doctoral programs are expected to deliver education that enables students to expand their expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills, and clinical competencies for advanced professional practice.

In the United States, the term “terminal degree” is used primarily in reference to degree qualifications for professorships in higher education and research-oriented positions. Most commonly, “terminal” refers to the highest academic degree **level** that can be awarded in a field (i.e., doctorate). Some sources consider all professional doctorates terminal degrees. ACAHM does not incorporate the “terminal degree” designation in its accreditation standards or policies to differentiate ACAHM-accreditable doctoral degrees. The Commission acknowledges that some ACAHM accredited institutions/programs have utilized the “terminal degree” nomenclature to describe their respective doctoral programs and graduates of ACAHM accredited/pre-accredited doctoral programs are encouraged to seek further clarification from potential employers that include terminal degree qualification requirements.

Revision History

Date Revised	Summary of Revisions	Approved By
200306	reference to ACAOM’s <i>Degree Structure and Naming Convention Policy</i> (retired) replaced with ACAOM’s <i>Program Naming Policy</i>	ACAOM Executive Director
201202	added information regarding professional doctoral degree completion tracks; corrected required implementation date for ACAOM’s <i>Program Naming Policy</i>	ACAOM Executive Director
220204	Adjusted terminology throughout for ACAHM name change and removal of “Oriental” term; updated naming deadline; added reference to DAOM standards review	ACAHM Executive Director
240220	Removed PD and DAOM acronyms; specify adv. pract. doctorate is the most advanced ACAHM-accreditable doctoral program	ACAHM Executive Director