Position Paper Title: ACAOM-Accreditable Doctoral Programs

Approved By: ACAOM Executive Committee

Document History: Initial Publication Date: 26 July 2019

Last Updated: 06 March 2020

Related Policies: ACAOM Glossary; ACAOM Accreditation Standards; ACAOM Program Naming Policy

References:

Responsible Official: ACAOM Executive Director

Background:

The Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (“ACAOM” or “Commission”) currently accredits or pre-accredits the following doctoral programs (see ACAOM-Accreditable Programs definition in ACAOM’s Glossary):

Entry-Level Degree Program:

**Professional doctoral (PD) degree program:** a graduate-level program, leading to a doctoral-level degree, that provides additional and expanded knowledge and skills beyond the master’s-level requirements (see criterion 7.04 Professional Competencies) necessary for professional recognition, credentialing, or licensure required to practice in the fields of acupuncture and/or Oriental medicine (AOM).

*Notes:*

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).”

Minimum requirements for program admission include the satisfactory completion of at least three (3) years of undergraduate-level education (defined as 90 semester credits or 135 quarter credits).

PD programs may have academic tracks that enable master’s-level graduates to achieve the entry-level doctorate professional competencies and earn the PD degree. A PD completion track for graduates of an ACAOM-accredited/pre-accredited master’s-level program is considered by the Commission as a component of the overall professional doctorate, rather than separate and distinct programs (see ACAOM accreditation criteria 5.08 and 7.02 for details).

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 programs apart from a full start-to-finish PD program.
Advanced Practice Degree Program:

**Advanced practice doctoral (DAOM) degree program:** a post-professional program, leading to a doctoral-level degree, that provides advanced, in-depth education in AOM clinical specialty areas and research literacy.

**Notes:**

Programmatic accreditation standards were promulgated in 2000. Inaugural DAOM 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 ACAOM-accredited or pre-accredited entry-level program (i.e., master’s or professional doctorate).

**Degree Names/Titles:**

**Professional doctorate:**

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

At its February 2020 semi-annual meeting, the Commission finalized its [Program Naming Policy](#) requiring that no later than 31 December 2022, all ACAOM accredited/pre-accredited PD degree programs must designate the PD degree as Doctor of Acupuncture (DAc).

**Advanced practice doctorate:**

Since the initial promulgation of accreditation standards, the only title recognized and accredited by ACAOM for the advanced practice doctoral degree is Doctor of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (DAOM).

**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.

An academic doctorate (i.e., 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 ACAOM’s DAOM programs emphasize research literacy and require completion of a clinically oriented research project (see ACAOM criterion 7.08 for details) they are not equivalent to an academic doctorate.

ACAOM’s scope of recognition from the U.S. Department of Education includes the accreditation and pre-accreditation of professional doctoral programs. ACAOM’s scope does not currently provide for the accreditation and pre-accreditation of academic doctoral programs. ACAOM-accreditable PD and DAOM programs are considered professional/clinical doctoral degree programs, as opposed to academic doctoral degree 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 (i.e., DAOM programs) from entry-level programs at the master’s level or professional doctoral degree level. DAOM 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 particular field (i.e., doctorate). Some sources consider all professional doctorates terminal degrees. ACAOM does not incorporate the “terminal degree” designation in its accreditation standards or policies to differentiate ACAOM-accreditable doctoral degrees. The Commission acknowledges that some ACAOM accredited institutions/programs have utilized the “terminal degree” nomenclature to describe their respective doctoral programs and graduates of ACAOM accredited/pre-accredited doctoral programs are encouraged to seek further clarification from potential employers that include terminal degree qualification requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Revised</th>
<th>Summary of Revisions</th>
<th>Approved By</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>06 March 2020</td>
<td>reference to ACAOM’s Degree Structure and Naming Convention Policy (retired) with</td>
<td>ACAOM Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACAOM’s Program Naming Policy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>