

## Spotlight on ACAOM's New Chair: An Interview with Terry Courtney, LAc, MPH

Editorial Staff

In June, Terry Courtney, head of the Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine department at Bastyr University, was elected chair of the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (ACAOM), the first woman to hold that position in the Commission's history. A 1983 graduate of the New England School of Acupuncture, Dr. Courtney recently spoke with *Acupuncture Today* about her involvement with ACAOM and what role she and the Commission hope to play in the future of acupuncture and Oriental medicine in the United States.

*Acupuncture Today* (AT): Good morning, Dr. Courtney. Congratulations on being named the new chair of ACOAM.

Terry Courtney (TC): Thank you.

AT: I understand that you're the first woman to be named chair of the Commission.

TC: I am! We had a good laugh about that. The whole election process and discussion took about 30 seconds. There wasn't too much of a glass ceiling on that one.

AT: That's great. That's a big step, not just for you, but other female practitioners.

TC: Yes.

AT: How did you first get involved with the Commission?

TC: When I started as chair of our acupuncture and Oriental medicine program at Bastyr, I was approached about doing a site visit. Through that site visit process, which I thoroughly enjoyed doing, I began to become curious about the Commission and what the Commission did. There was an opening for an institutional member, which is somebody who represents the school community on the Commission, and I decided to pursue that opening.

My background is in public health, and I've run a number of community-based acupuncture programs that have to follow certain public health department criteria and requirements. I was struck by the similarities between a lot of what ACAOM looks for and how schools are run, and also what I had to do to in terms of following public health guidelines, so it sort of piqued my interest and seemed like a natural fit.

The Commission has nine commissioners, and three seats are specifically for school or institutional members. I'm actually one of three institutional members. The others are Tim Chapman and Yi Ciao.

AT: When did you join Bastyr?

TC: In the fall of 1996, I was hired by Bastyr to be the clinical director of the acupuncture and

Oriental medicine clinic. I ran the student clinic for about a year, and then I was asked to become chair of the department roughly a year later. I officially began in January 1998, in terms of assuming the chair.

AT: We understand that you also recently took a trip to China. What was that like?

TC: The president of the school, Dr. Tom Shephard, put together a two-week trip to China, looking at models of integrated care. The trip involved visiting four cities: Beijing, Xi'an, Chengdu and Shanghai. What we were able to do was visit a number of different clinics and hospitals and meet with a number of people at the government level to look at China's development and growth with their TCM training programs. It was a fascinating visit. It was great to see the different models of care that China's offering, and also to see how China is trying to position itself for 21st century medicine. It was a very eye-opening trip.

AT: Did you learn anything on the trip that you might be able to apply to the programs at Bastyr, or to ACAOM?

TC: I think that if anything, it deepened my already pre-existing respect and appreciation for the medicine. It was great to see the level and depth of care being offered in the hospital programs. It was great to see the training facilities that Bastyr students attend, which are at both the Chengdu University of TCM and also at the Shanghai University of TCM, and I think that, while I've always been a strong believer in students having the opportunity to train in China, this visit really helped to re-enforce that.

AT: How would you compare the type of training that students in China receive to the type of education that's offered here in the states?

TC: I think in some ways they're a little bit like apples and oranges because the medicine is placed differently in our health care system than it is in China, i.e., it's a much more acceptable form of medicine in Chinese health care. As a result, when a student starts training in China, you're seeing a very high volume of patients per day and having a very high level of clinical exposure to a broad variety of conditions and diseases. I think that kind of clinical training is really invaluable; it's almost like a residency in some ways, that many students don't experience here. I think the training programs in the U.S. are also excellent, but the pace of patients through the clinic, and the variety of the conditions and diseases in student clinics is obviously a little bit more limited than they would be in a hospital setting in China. I think for a student who has completed their preliminary studies in the U.S. and is able to take advantage of advanced training in China is a great experience, and I think really strengthens clinical skills tremendously.

AT: Getting back to ACAOM: are there any projects the Commission is currently working on?

TC: We are just completing a survey to assess validity, reliability, and overall clarity of the accreditation standards. That's an important part of our mission and vision as a commission, which is to provide an opportunity for our constituencies to give us critical input regarding the accreditation standards in terms of where they are clear and workable, or where they may need further development. This survey was sent to a number of groups, including students, practitioners, faculty, college administrators and regulatory agencies. We have actually just completed the first stage of that review, and the data is currently being analyzed. This survey process, looking at the different accreditation requirements, will be taking place on an ongoing basis over the next couple of years.

AT: What's your role in looking at the standards?

TC: The Commission helps to basically select the standards being reviewed; helps to define what some of our internal questions or concerns might be about some of the standards; and then helps to give input and feedback to the design instrument itself. We have an outside consultant who has been hired that actually sets up the survey tool itself, and also helps with the data analysis. We have several commissioners specifically with research backgrounds, so their involvement's been very important.

Other big projects going on at the moment have to do with the doctoral programs. As you know, the schools have been given the green light to proceed with planning for doctoral level programs. We of course will be reviewing these programs and also developing site teams to go out and review doctoral programs, but we have a lot of internal work to be done to really be able to provide that oversight on the doctoral programs.

ACAOM is embracing technology! Our website will hopefully be up and running this summer, which I think will really help increase access to ACAOM in terms of information and documents, and also I think help reduce staff workload by having a lot of these documents available online. We've made a big push to get that going, so our goal is to really have it up and going this summer.

We are continuing to build and strengthen our site visit teams, and we're working towards providing additional training for site visitors, including the chairs. And we'll be working on evaluating and renewing our five-year strategic plan. We're just ending our last cycle of strategic planning which was a very full cycle that included working to get re-recognition from the Department of Education. In fact, this past November, we did receive the full maximum five-year re-recognition status from DOE, which is a real accomplishment. We also received outstanding reviews for our application, so we were very pleased with that process. In essence, it's ACAOM going through its own reaccreditation, that's the context for it, but we were very pleased with the feedback we received from the DOE and the fact that we got the maximum five-year re-recognition status.

AT: Is there a vision or certain set of goals that you'd like to see accomplished while you're the chair of ACAOM?

TC: I think in some ways a goal for us over the next couple of years as part of the strategic plan is to help strengthen the infrastructure of the Commission. We've had tremendous growth over the last couple of years, which is reflective of our profession. And since we have been able to get our re-recognition status addressed, and we've been able to get the doctoral standards out so that the schools can begin their planning, and we've been able to get our own internal survey on the standards out and up, I think it's also time for us to look at our own administrative structures and make sure that we have the infrastructure that we need to be able to support the work. I think in some ways, some of the work may be more internally focused for the next year or two, as we look at building the infrastructure. Part of that will be bringing on another staff person at the Maryland office to help us through some of the workload.

AT: What's your message for the profession about where the Commission is going and what ACAOM can do to help strengthen acupuncture and Oriental medicine in the U.S.?

TC: I think that ACAOM is the profession. Many of the commissioners also work directly in the field. We obviously have three public members as well, but we are very much a part of the field, in addition to being an oversight group. I think that ACAOM very much looks forward to continuing to work closely with the school community and the other national associations in terms of trying to move forward and help address some of the issues facing our profession over the next few years. The school community has grown phenomenally over the last few years. We're really proud of our

schools and the work that's going on there. We'd like to continue to work with the schools to really help continue to increase the quality of education being provided.

AT: Thank you, Dr. Courtney.

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*Editor's note:* The Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine is a specialized accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. ACAOM's mission is to assess compliance with established minimum educational standards for acupuncture and Oriental medicine schools in the United States. Forty-two schools are currently accredited or are candidates for accreditation. For more information, please contact ACAOM at (301) 313-0855.

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