

Student-Loan Debt: Recent *AT* Article Creates Misconceptions

We are distressed by the December 2019 *Acupuncture Today* [article](#), republished in the February 2020 issue,* titled "How Does Your Student-Loan Debt Stack Up?" Although ostensibly about "average student loan debt for graduates of AOM programs" in Oregon, the information does not directly reflect that, and effectively compares apples to oranges.

The actual data cited is from a report on loan debt of Oregon graduates across multiple graduate and professional programs at the time their grace period for loan repayment ended in 2015-2016. It is not specific to AOM programs, nor does it reflect the cost of an education at Oregon's AOM schools.

The number reported for Oregon College of Oriental Medicine (OCOM) does indeed reflect the debt load of AOM graduates, as OCOM is a single-purpose institution. In contrast, the number reported for National University of Natural Medicine (NUNM) reflects the debt load of graduates of a multiple-purpose natural medicine university, including graduates having achieved a combination of two four-year degrees (ND and MSOM) over a six-year period. Unless the reader understands what the numbers actually represent, a cursory review readily leads to the false impression that an NUNM AOM education is significantly more expensive than an OCOM AOM education.

At current tuition levels, OCOM's four-year MACM program (212.61 credits, 3,227 hours) costs \$92,801, while NUNM's four-year MSOM program (219 credits and 3,372 hours) is \$98,112—a difference of approximately 5 percent.

The article also falsely leads the reader to believe that an AOM education in Oregon costs more than a medical education at Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU). At current tuition levels, OHSU's MD program costs \$168,500 for in-state residents and \$254,728 for out-of-state students. It is important to note that institutions like OHSU are endowed and can use their resources to offset the costs of their students in ways that Chinese medicine schools currently cannot.

It is imperative that *Acupuncture Today* take serious action toward correcting the misimpressions created by the article, and commit to taking much more care in the communication of data that can put not only individual schools, in this case ours, but also our entire profession at an undue disadvantage. We implore the editors to address these misrepresentations, at a minimum in the form of a clarifying article and the publication of this letter.

Editor's Note: Letter submitted by Laurie Regan, PhD, ND, Dean, College of Classical Chinese Medicine, NUNM; Andy McIntyre, LAc, Associate Dean of Clinical Education, College of Classical Chinese Medicine, NUNM; and Christine Girard, ND, MPH, President / CEO, NUNM.

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