

2026 Certification Town Hall: Follow-up Q&A

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I. Cardiology

Q: How is ACVIM improving communication and collaboration between examination development committees?

A: ACVIM is implementing several changes to strengthen communication and collaboration throughout the examination development cycle. These include introducing a Past-Chair role, establishing formal handoff meetings between development stages, and conducting an annual debrief to identify opportunities for improvement.

These changes are intended to improve continuity, encourage collaboration among committee members, and ensure that feedback and lessons learned help inform examination development from year to year.

Q: Will examination committee members receive more feedback on the questions they develop?

A: ACVIM recognizes the value of providing more meaningful feedback to examination item writers. The changes being implemented throughout the examination development cycle are expected to create additional opportunities for feedback and discussion among committee members.

We are also exploring opportunities for advanced item-writing training and other resources to better support volunteers and contribute to ongoing improvements in examination question quality.

Q: Can examination committee members review retired examination questions to better understand item content and formatting?

A: ACVIM recognizes the potential value of reviewing examples of previously used examination questions to support item development. We are exploring whether opportunities to share retired items or other representative examples with committee members may be feasible while maintaining examination security.

II. LAIM

Q: Should ACVIM consider adjusting the timing of the LAIM General and Specialty Examinations to allow more time between administrations?

A: Yes, and adjustments are already underway. The LAIM Specialty Examination was moved to January many years ago to avoid conflicts with foaling season. More recently, the Certification Council has gathered member feedback on examination timing on three

occasions, including the past two years. That feedback helped inform planned adjustments to move the LAIM Specialty Examination slightly later in January and the General Examination earlier, increasing the interval between examinations to approximately nine months.

While no single schedule can accommodate everyone's preferences, the Council continues to balance the needs of Candidates, mentors, and training programs with broader examination administration considerations. Additional changes may be considered in the future, including earlier General Examination eligibility, but the Council intends to evaluate the impact of the current adjustments and survey members again after they have been in place for several years.

Q: Do LAIM Specialty Examination pass rates differ among Candidates from equine, food animal, and mixed residency programs?

A: ACVIM plans to incorporate residency program type into future pass-rate analyses, where data are available. Staff will also evaluate the availability and reliability of historical data to determine whether comparisons across previous examination administrations are possible. The Certification Council anticipates reviewing available data in 2027 to help inform further discussion and identify potential areas for additional investigation.

Q: How might clinical and on-call responsibilities affect LAIM Candidates' ability to prepare for examinations?

A: The Certification Council recognizes that clinical and on-call responsibilities may affect the time Candidates have available for examination preparation. As part of its ongoing exploration of factors that may influence LAIM examination performance, the Council may consider gathering Candidate feedback to better understand these potential impacts. While training schedules and clinical responsibilities fall outside Certification's scope, any relevant findings could inform future discussions and collaboration with the Accreditation team.

Q: What examination preparation opportunities are available to LAIM Candidates, and could additional resources be beneficial?

A: The Certification Council recognizes the potential value of broader, more collaborative examination preparation opportunities for LAIM Candidates. As part of its ongoing exploration of factors that may influence examination performance, the Council may consider gathering Candidate feedback about available preparation resources and how they compare across specialties. While ACVIM Certification cannot develop or coordinate examination preparation courses due to potential conflicts of interest, the findings could help inform future discussions and collaboration with the Accreditation team.

Q: Does the General Examination appropriately reflect the physiology knowledge expected of LAIM Candidates?

A: The General Examination blueprint is developed through a Job Task Analysis (JTA) involving subject matter experts across ACVIM specialties, including LAIM. This process

identifies the knowledge and competencies Candidates are expected to demonstrate approximately midway through an ACVIM-approved residency training program.

The Certification Council acknowledges concerns about the balance of species-specific and broadly applicable physiology content. This feedback will be documented for consideration during the next General Examination JTA, scheduled for 2029.

Q: Will the LAIM publication requirement remain unchanged following the recent SAIM policy revision?

A: Yes. The recent change to the SAIM publication requirement applies only to SAIM and does not affect LAIM. The Certification Council acknowledges the feedback received during the Town Hall supporting the current LAIM publication requirement, including the value of the journal peer-review and manuscript revision process.

Q: Should well-written case reports be considered an acceptable option for fulfilling the LAIM publication requirement?

A: During the Town Hall, members suggested reconsidering case reports as an acceptable option for fulfilling the LAIM publication requirement, particularly following the elimination of the CWA requirement. The Certification Council appreciates this feedback and will share it with the appropriate committee for consideration. No changes to the current publication requirement have been approved or are planned at this time.

Q: What are the primary barriers LAIM Candidates encounter in fulfilling the publication requirement?

A: The Certification Council recognizes that Candidates may encounter a variety of challenges in meeting the publication requirement, including research support, manuscript acceptance, and publication timelines. The Council may consider gathering additional Candidate feedback, potentially through surveys, to better understand these challenges and determine whether further evaluation is warranted.

Q: How representative are the views expressed during the Town Hall regarding the LAIM publication requirement?

The Certification Council recognizes that Town Hall participants represent only a portion of the LAIM specialty and that the perspectives shared may not reflect those of the broader membership. Before considering potential changes to the publication requirement, the Council may seek additional feedback to better understand the views of LAIM Diplomates across different practice settings.

Q: What are the most significant barriers preventing LAIM Candidates from completing Board-certification requirements?

The Certification Council recognizes the value of better understanding the challenges Candidates encounter in completing Board-certification requirements, including examinations, publication requirements, and other certification components. ACVIM plans to

review available Candidate outcome data and share additional information as it becomes available to help identify potential barriers and inform future discussions.

III. Neurology

Q: How is ACVIM approaching the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in relation to residency requirements and credentialing?

A: ACVIM recognizes both the opportunities and challenges associated with artificial intelligence (AI) and supports its thoughtful, responsible use. Our approach emphasizes keeping the “human at the helm,” ensuring that professional judgment, accountability, accuracy, and transparency remain central to how technology is used.

While AI may assist with completing work, it does not replace the responsibility of individuals to ensure that submitted materials accurately represent their work and meet established requirements. As AI continues to evolve, ACVIM will evaluate whether additional guidance is needed to clarify expectations for its use in residency training and credentialing processes.

Q: Do the current instructions for documenting resident research projects adequately accommodate different types of research?

A: ACVIM recognizes that research projects may involve different methodologies, including prospective clinical studies, retrospective studies, and laboratory-based research. Documentation instructions should be clear and applicable to these different approaches.

ACVIM will review the current research documentation instructions to identify opportunities for clarification, particularly where the guidance may appear more applicable to prospective clinical research.

Residents and mentors with questions about documenting research activities for credentials review are encouraged to contact the Certification team at Certification@ACVIM.org for guidance.

Q: Are other forms of scholarly activity being considered for the future?

A: The Education and Research Committee (ERC) is currently reviewing and updating the list of Research and Scholarly Activities (R&SA) options, which has not been updated in more than a decade. Once that work is complete, the revised list will be shared with the Residency Training Committees (RTCs) for consideration of specialty-specific R&SA requirements.

This work, along with the broader research competency framework development led by Dr. Jane Sykes, may help inform future Certification Council discussions and decisions regarding Board-certification requirements.

IV. Nutrition

Q: What is changing with the Nutrition Specialty Examination, and why?

A: Beginning with the 2027 administration, the Nutrition Specialty Examination will transition from a conjunctive (multiple-section) design, requiring Candidates to pass each section independently, to a compensatory (single-section) design, allowing performance across all examination content to contribute to one overall passing decision.

The revised examination will consist of 200 machine-scorable questions, replacing the previous combination of machine-scored and hand-graded items. Importantly, machine-scorable does not mean multiple-choice only. Questions may include formats such as multiple-choice, multiple-response, drag-and-drop, hot spot, fill in the blank, select from a list, and potentially other interactive item types.

Q: Why is the Nutrition Specialty Examination moving away from open-response essay questions, and how will the revised examination maintain quality and rigor?

A: The decision to transition to a fully machine-scorable examination reflects several considerations, including scoring consistency, examination quality, and the long-term sustainability of the examination program. Complex case-based essay questions require substantial time and expertise to develop and grade, and maintaining a sufficient supply of high-quality questions has presented ongoing challenges.

The revised examination will continue to assess the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) identified through the Job Task Analysis (JTA) as necessary for a practice-ready Nutrition specialist. Machine-scorable questions can assess higher-level thinking, including clinical reasoning and the application of knowledge, through appropriately designed clinical scenarios and a variety of question formats.

All examination questions undergo established development and review processes involving subject matter experts, and the passing standard is established through a formal standard-setting process to support a valid, reliable, and defensible examination.

Q: How will the new examination design affect current Candidates, particularly those who have already passed one section of the previous examination?

A: Beginning with the 2027 administration, all Candidates taking the Nutrition Specialty Examination, including those retaking the examination, will be required to pass the new single-section examination. Because the revised examination uses a compensatory scoring model, previously passed sections from the former examination design cannot be carried forward. Candidates who have not yet completed all requirements under the previous examination design will need to pass the new examination to achieve Board-certification.

Q: How is species-specific content addressed in the Nutrition Specialty Examination blueprint?

A: The Nutrition Specialty Examination blueprint is intentionally broad, reflecting the knowledge and skills relevant to Nutrition specialists across species. However, this does not

mean Candidates are expected to demonstrate knowledge of every topic as it applies to every species.

Examination content primarily emphasizes broadly applicable nutrition concepts and small animal nutrition, while incorporating large animal content when appropriate. Subject matter experts use their professional judgment, guided by the JTA and examination blueprint, to determine which species-specific knowledge is relevant for inclusion. All questions undergo review to ensure alignment with the knowledge and skills expected of Board-certified Nutrition specialists.

Q: How are differences in large animal and small animal training experiences considered when determining examination content and expectations?

A: The Nutrition Specialty Examination is designed to assess the knowledge and skills expected of all practice-ready Nutrition specialists following completion of an ACVIM-approved residency training program. The examination blueprint, developed through the Job Task Analysis (JTA), establishes a common framework for determining examination content across the specialty.

While residency training experiences may vary, examination content is selected based on the knowledge and skills expected of Nutrition specialists as a whole, rather than the specific curriculum or clinical experiences of individual training programs.

Q: How can residency programs and mentors best prepare Candidates for the revised Nutrition Specialty Examination?

A: The updated Nutrition Job Task Analysis (JTA) and examination blueprint are the primary resources for understanding the knowledge and skills assessed on the Specialty Examination. Residency programs, mentors, and Candidates are encouraged to use these documents to guide examination preparation and identify areas for additional study.

While the blueprint does not require Candidates to demonstrate knowledge of every topic across all species, preparation should reflect the breadth of knowledge expected of all practice-ready Nutrition specialists, including relevant species-specific concepts.

Q: How does ACVIM ensure Candidates meet the requirements for Board-certification following changes to requirements?

A: While residency training requirements and oversight fall under Accreditation, Certification maintains established processes to verify that Candidates meet the requirements for Board-certification. These include eligibility requirements for the General and Specialty Examinations, Resident Advisor attestations, and formal credentials review, including referee letters.

Together, these checkpoints provide independent review at key stages of the certification process and help ensure that Candidates are evaluated consistently and objectively against established certification standards.

Q: Does the recent change to the SAIM publication requirement affect Nutrition Candidates?

A: No. The recent change to the SAIM publication requirement applies only to SAIM and does not affect Nutrition. The Certification Council acknowledges the feedback received during the Town Hall regarding the importance of scholarly activity in residency training and professional development.

Q: Where can members find the most current Nutrition JTA, examination blueprint, and preparation resources?

A: The current Nutrition Job Task Analysis (JTA) can be found on the ACVIM website: [2026 Nutrition JTA](#). The Examination Blueprint, located within the JTA, provides information about the knowledge and skills assessed on the Specialty Examination and can help Candidates and mentors prepare.

ACVIM will communicate updates to additional preparation resources directly to Candidates as they become available.

Q: How many approved Nutrition residency training programs are currently available?

A: There are currently 11 ACVIM-approved Nutrition Residency Training Programs.

Q: How many Board-certified Nutrition Diplomates are there?

A. There are currently 112 Board-certified ACVIM Nutrition Diplomates.

V. Oncology

Q: How does ACVIM ensure the Oncology Specialty Examination maintains consistent standards of quality and rigor over time?

A: ACVIM uses established examination development, review, and standard-setting processes to support fair, reliable, and defensible certification examinations. Examination questions undergo multiple levels of review by subject matter experts, and item-level performance and Candidate feedback are evaluated following each administration before examination results are finalized.

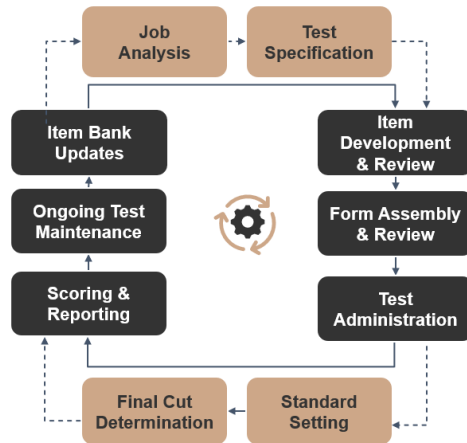
Passing standards are established through a formal standard-setting process designed to reflect the knowledge and skills expected of a Board-certified specialist. While examination pass rates may fluctuate from year to year, these changes do not necessarily indicate differences in examination difficulty or rigor. Pass rates should be considered in the context of Candidate populations, examination performance, and trends over time.

Q: How can ACVIM provide greater transparency about the examination development process while maintaining examination security?

A: ACVIM regularly shares information about its examination development processes, including during the annual Certification Council Town Hall. These presentations outline the full examination development cycle, from Job Task Analysis (JTA) and blueprint

development through item writing, item review, form review standard setting, administration, and post-examination analysis.

Evolution of Examination Development



- **Job analysis and examination blueprints:** Define the knowledge and tasks the examination should assess.
- **Structured examination development:** Item writing, item review and form review follow consistent processes each year.
- **Psychometric review:** Item-level and examination-level performance provide evidence about how the examination functioned.
- **Defensible passing standards:** Standard setting and statistical equating, when appropriate, support reliable and consistent cut-score decisions.

Together, these methods support examinations that are valid, reliable, fair and legally defensible.

Volunteer subject matter experts play an essential role throughout this process, helping ensure examinations reflect the knowledge and skills expected of Board-certified specialists.

While ACVIM is committed to transparency about its examination development methods, actual examination questions and other secure examination materials cannot be shared outside authorized development activities. Protecting this content is essential to maintaining examination integrity, fairness, and security.

VI. SAIM

Q: What changed with the SAIM publication requirement, and why?

A: Certification Council recently amended the SAIM publication requirement to allow Candidates to fulfill the requirement by submitting a manuscript to an appropriate journal, rather than requiring journal acceptance or publication. This change reflects the Council's consideration of the purpose of the requirement, the role of scholarly activity in certification, and the challenges associated with making Board-certification dependent on external journal decisions and timelines.

The publication requirement remains in place, and submitted manuscripts must meet established requirements and undergo review by the SAIM Credentials Committee.

Q: What are the intended learning outcomes of the SAIM publication requirement, and how are they maintained under the revised policy?

A: The SAIM publication requirement is intended to develop Candidates' skills in scientific medical communication, including organizing and interpreting scientific information, communicating findings clearly in writing, and contributing to the dissemination of knowledge.

The revised policy maintains these objectives by continuing to require Candidates to prepare and submit a scholarly manuscript. While journal acceptance is no longer required, Candidates must still demonstrate the ability to produce scientific work suitable for submission to an appropriate journal, with supporting documentation reviewed by the SAIM Credentials Committee.

Q. What documentation is needed to demonstrate compliance with the publication requirement?

A: Candidates may satisfy the publication requirement by providing evidence of a published manuscript, journal acceptance, or manuscript submission.

For manuscripts that have been submitted but not yet accepted, Candidates must provide a copy of the manuscript, proof of journal submission, and a letter of attestation from a SAIM Diplomate (such as a Residency Advisor, Program Director, or research mentor) confirming that the manuscript represents legitimate scholarly work and was submitted in good faith.

The SAIM Credentials Committee reviews the submitted documentation to determine whether the publication requirement has been satisfied. Journal submission alone does not guarantee approval.

Q: How does the publication requirement ensure Candidates have meaningfully participated in scholarly work?

A: For manuscripts that have been submitted but not yet accepted, a SAIM Diplomate must attest that the manuscript represents legitimate scholarly work and was submitted to the journal in good faith.

Diplomate attestations are an established part of ACVIM's certification processes and reflect the professional integrity and accountability expected of ACVIM Diplomates. Together with the SAIM Credentials Committee's review, these safeguards provide a reasonable approach to verifying compliance without creating unnecessary barriers for Candidates.

While no policy can anticipate every possible circumstance, the Council believes it is important to balance appropriate oversight with a process that is fair, practical, and supportive of Candidates.

Q: Are other forms of scholarly activity being considered for the future?

A: The Education and Research Committee (ERC) is currently reviewing and updating the list of Research and Scholarly Activities (R&SA) options, which has not been updated in more than a decade. Once that work is complete, the revised list will be shared with the Residency Training Committees (RTCs) for consideration of specialty-specific R&SA requirements.

This work, along with the broader research competency framework development led by Dr. Jane Sykes, may help inform future Certification Council discussions and decisions regarding Board-certification requirements.

The current SAIM publication requirement remains in effect, and no additional alternatives have been approved at this time.

Q: How has the examination development/review process changed, and how is question quality maintained?

A: ACVIM's examination development process has evolved to incorporate more structured item development, review, and psychometric analysis to support examination quality, consistency, and fairness. Examination questions undergo multiple levels of review by subject matter experts, with item performance and Candidate feedback evaluated following each administration to identify opportunities for improvement.

ACVIM recognizes the value of in-person collaboration during examination development activities and shares volunteers' interest in bringing committee members together whenever feasible. We continue to evaluate opportunities for in-person engagement while balancing scheduling, resources, and the needs of our volunteer committees.

ACVIM is also implementing improvements to communication and coordination throughout the examination development cycle. These changes are designed to encourage greater collaboration among committee members, strengthen continuity from year to year, and support ongoing improvements to examination development and question quality.

Q: How does ACVIM ensure a broad range of expertise and perspectives among examination development volunteers?

A: ACVIM strives to maintain examination development committees with a broad range of subject matter expertise, professional backgrounds, and perspectives. Volunteer recruitment and selection consider the overall composition of each committee, with the goal of bringing together individuals whose collective experience reflects the breadth of the specialty.

Committee term limits provide regular opportunities for new volunteers to participate and contribute fresh perspectives while maintaining continuity through experienced members. ACVIM continually evaluates committee composition and recruitment needs to support a well-rounded group of subject matter experts.

Committee composition is also influenced by the pool of Diplomates who volunteer. ACVIM encourages Diplomates from all practice settings to consider volunteering and contributing their expertise.

Q: How should SAIM examination pass rates be interpreted, including first-time versus repeat Candidates?

A: Examination pass rates should be considered in the context of Candidate populations and performance trends over time. Overall pass rates include both first-time and repeat Candidates, whose performance may differ. Changes in the proportion of repeat Candidates from year to year can influence the overall pass rate, even when first-time candidate performance remains relatively consistent.

ACVIM reviews examination results following each administration, including item-level performance and Candidate feedback, to support examination quality and scoring decisions. Historical pass rates, along with the number of first-time and repeat Candidates, can provide additional context when evaluating trends over time.

YEAR	OVERALL PASS RATE	FIRST-TIME PASS RATE	RETAKE PASS RATE
2026	91%	98% (83/85)	30% (3/10)
2025	90%	96% (76/79)	61% (11/18)
2024	82%	89% (65/73)	65% (20/31)
2023	66%	69% (48/70)	58% (14/24)
2022	81%	85% (63/74)	72% (26/36)
2021	70%	75% (92/123)	42% (10/24)

Q: How do SAIM examination pass rates compare with those of other ACVIM specialties?

A: Historical examination pass rates for SAIM and all other ACVIM specialties are publicly available on the ACVIM website. These results allow members to review and compare examination performance across specialties and over time.

<https://www.acvim.org/board-certification/prepare-exams/examinations-pass-rate-history>

When making comparisons, it's important to recognize that each specialty examination assesses different content and Candidate populations, and passing standards are established independently. As a result, differences in pass rates do not necessarily indicate differences in examination difficulty or quality.

Q: When will the increased interval between the General and Specialty Examinations take effect?

A: Beginning in 2028, ACVIM plans to allow approximately six weeks between the General and summer Specialty Examinations, providing Candidates with additional time between administrations.

The 2027 examination dates were established before the Certification Council approved this adjustment, so the increased interval will not take effect until 2028.

Q: Where can members find the most current Job Task Analysis (JTA) and examination-related resources?

A: The current SAIM Job Task Analysis (JTA) can be found on the ACVIM website: [2023 SAIM JTA](#). The Examination Blueprint, located within the JTA, provides information about the knowledge and skills assessed on the Specialty Examination and can help Candidates and mentors prepare.

ACVIM will communicate updates to additional preparation resources directly to Candidates as they become available.

Q: What impact has the revised SAIM publication requirement had on Candidates completing Board-certification?

A: The revised publication requirement was intended to provide Candidates with a broader pathway to fulfill the requirement while maintaining appropriate review and oversight.

Since July 20, 2026, when the publication requirement change was announced, 73 additional SAIM Candidates have achieved Board-certification, including 25 who fulfilled the publication requirement through manuscript submission under the revised policy.

ACVIM will continue to evaluate the implementation of the revised requirement and its impact on Candidates.