

February 23, 2021

Dear National Board of Examiners in Optometry Board of Directors,

It is frustrating to realize that, despite open discussions between the National Board of Examiners (NBEO) and the American Optometric Student Association (AOSA) leadership over the past year, NBEO has made minimal effort to effect changes. During our dialogue, we reinforced three critical areas for improvement, including a more proactive approach to schedule changes, enhanced communication, and financial transparency for any changes. Several students this past week have contacted the AOSA with concerns that NBEO is not taking any steps to progress relations and, in effect, continues to undermine doctor education and patient care.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, NBEO was forced to cancel Part I exams at the last minute for the 2020 spring candidates. It was an unprecedented situation and handled in the best manner possible for the time. In response, the AOSA requested that future communication be provided further in advance. Now just recently, the registration date for Part III was changed from February 15, 2021 to February 12, 2021 with only a few hours' notice and after students had already been informed of the original day. Students plan their time and resources around key milestones and by changing the registration date with limited notice, they were ill-prepared to sign up for the first come, first-served enrollment and may not have had their funding prepared. It is unfortunate to learn that the NBEO failed to provide students adequate time to prepare for the change.

Next, to help disseminate important NBEO-related information, the AOSA offered to serve as an additional conduit to the students. Announcements made in coordination with the schools and colleges of optometry and using AOSA platforms ensure the greatest number of students receive the message. However, NBEO sent the communication simultaneously to AOSA and students, giving no opportunity to voice concerns on their behalf. It is unfortunate that the NBEO failed to utilize our relationship for the mutual benefit of those we serve.

Financial transparency had been discussed at length due to the 30% increase in cost per exam over the last three years. The NBEO established it was to maintain fiscal responsibility while balancing organizational expenses. Other organizations, including the American Optometric Association and affiliates, did not increase dues during the pandemic, even though they faced increasing operational costs. Optometry students face increasing debt, with 81% of optometry graduates accumulating a mean debt of \$178,922. However, instead of identifying ways to support students, NBEO has added yet another \$35 fee increase to the exam. Again, students were told in a January press release this would be effective February 15th and were understandably unprepared for it to be spontaneously shifted to February 12th. It is unfortunate that the NBEO failed to consider the financial impact of their decisions for students.

Although these points had been previously mentioned, it is important to again reinforce the crucial communication changes needed while addressing the necessity of the sudden schedule change and new fee increase. The increasing resentment by students for the NBEO is directly linked to the issues outlined here. We look forward to your response and to continue working together to best serve optometric students as they transition from students to doctors.

Thank you,



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