American Academy of Health Physics
American Board of Health Physics

CHP Corner

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New ABHP Policy on Candidate Examination Appeals

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The American Board of Health Physics (ABHP) policy and the American Academy of Health Physics (AAHP) bylaws regarding candidate appeals on the ABHP Part II Certification Exam have recently changed. Effective with the 1997 examination, candidate examination appeals are limited to a determination as to whether the ABHP's policies and procedures have been properly followed. This change eliminates the past policies of allowing unsuccessful candidates to review their ungraded examinations and to request a regrading of the disputed exam questions.

There are multiple reasons for these changes in the examination appeal policy, including the following:

Fairness:
Unfortunately, attempts at fairness for the individual candidate create unfairness among the candidates at large. The Board was concerned that the past appeal policy gave unfair advantage to those few individuals who had the time and resources to travel to a place where the examination can be reviewed. The Board felt it was inherently unfair for a Panel Chair's regrading of the exam to override the score posted by three individual graders who had graded all other candidates' responses to the challenged question part(s). The Board believed that this aspect, in particular, tended to undermine the integrity of a very fair, consistent, and impartial grading process.

Use of Pooled Standard Deviation:
The Board is confident that the use of the pooled standard deviation statistic in the pass/fail score objectively compensates for variations between the three graders for each question.

In developing this statistic, the standard deviation for each exam question is calculated from the scores assigned by the three graders. The standard deviations for all questions attempted are pooled or combined to provide the standard deviation of the total exam score. The candidate's grade of record is the upper 95 percent confidence limit of the exam score constructed using the pooled standard deviation (one-tailed test). If this value equals or exceeds the passing point (469), the candidate passes.

Note that if the regrading resulted in a changed score, the pooled standard deviation for that question became zero (one grader), which often resulted in a net decrease in the candidate's overall score. Since introduction of the pooled standard deviation in 1993, no regrading appeal has been successful in changing the candidate's pass/fail outcome.

Precedent:
The current policy has little or no precedent in other professional certification programs. The Board believes the grading process is best served by ensuring grader consistency and fairness of procedure and policy. The Board's new appeals policy is consistent with this philosophy and with the precedent established by other similar professional organizations, e.g., the American Board of Radiology.

Formal appeals will still be considered by the AAHP Appeals Committee when a candidate presents a persuasive argument that the ABHP may have failed to follow its own policies and procedures in administering the examination process.

The ABHP is committed to improving the certification examination process and solicits comments from all concerned. The new policy described above attempts to align the ABHP examination appeals process with that of other certifying organizations and to make the certification process fairer for all.

CONGRATULATIONS,

James (Jamie) Mallon, CHP,
new *CHP News* Editor!

More about Jamie next month.