

## NBEO RELEASES PART I SCORES

As previously announced, the Part I examination was administered to optometry candidates at 18 different sites across the U.S. and Canada on March 16-17, 2010. In late March, the NBEO became aware of allegations that candidates taking the examination engaged in an organized attempt to memorize confidential, copyrighted exam content in order to reproduce it for use by other students taking future administrations of the exam. This is commonly referred to as the “piracy” of exam items.

The NBEO immediately commenced an investigation, which has confirmed that a significant number of students at an optometry school organized such a piracy scheme at the request and encouragement of a faculty member. The memorized exam items were compiled in a thorough and systematic fashion for the purpose of sharing them with future exam candidates.

Part 1 scores were withheld to allow time for the piracy investigation to take place and for the processing of its findings. Today, the National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBEO) has released scores for the March, 2010 Part I examination, though on a tentative basis. Although the investigation has revealed numerous violations of National Board exam conduct policy and is still ongoing, NBEO’s Board of Directors has determined that the overall validity of the examination on a nation-wide basis has not been compromised, and therefore, exam scores may be released for candidates not specifically implicated in the investigation to date.

The NBEO wishes to emphasize that the numerical scores themselves, and the resulting pass-fail status, are not subject to change. However, because the investigation has not concluded, the score release should be considered tentative in that a candidate’s score could be withdrawn if such candidate is implicated at a later date by evidence uncovered during further investigation. The NBEO is pursuing appropriate disciplinary action against candidates involved in the piracy scheme.

Successful completion of NBEO exams is a requirement for licensure in the practice of optometry in all 50 states. Licensure of optometrists is established for the protection of the public health and safety. In furtherance of that purpose, the NBEO has the responsibility to state regulatory boards to provide valid exam results. The validity and integrity of exam results are dependent upon maintaining the highest security involving exam content.

In multiple choice exams such as NBEO Parts I and II, it is necessary for various statistical and equating purposes to re-use a certain number of exam items from prior years. Therefore, NBEO exam items are copyrighted, and the NBEO strictly guards the confidentiality of its exam items. As part of the application process for taking exams, all exam candidates expressly agree not to engage in any reproduction or distribution of exam items or to accept, receive, or obtain any exam items, in whole or in part, or to engage in any form of cheating or collaborative, disruptive or other improper conduct. The candidate agreement expressly acknowledges the

confidentiality of the exam content and the NBEO's copyright and proprietary rights in the exam content.

Under the terms of NBEO policies incorporated into the candidate agreements, the NBEO is authorized to impose a wide range of disciplinary penalties for item piracy, cheating and other violations, including cancellation of the candidate's exam score with or without barring the candidate from taking National Board exams for any period of time the NBEO determines is appropriate, including a permanent exclusionary bar.

During the course of the investigation into piracy of the March 2010 exam items, NBEO investigators discovered that a substantial number of items from prior years' Part I exams also had been pirated and that those pirated items were available and exposed to exam candidates at that same institution on a widespread basis via intranet posting and email circulation. Some of the pirated items came from students at other institutions, and the NBEO has extended its investigation to those institutions. This additional investigation is still in progress. A significant number of the items pirated from prior exams appeared on the March 2010 Part I exam. Candidates who had access to such pirated material gained an unfair advantage over other candidates for that exam.

NBEO's Board of Directors has determined that the widespread exposure of pirated items at the institution initially involved in the investigation compromised the validity of the examination as a whole at that institution. Accordingly, the NBEO is cancelling the March 2010 Part I scores of all Class of 2011 candidates at that institution. Some candidates at this institution will be offered the opportunity to re-take the exam at a subsequent administration, at no charge. The new ABS exam will contain no compromised exam items. However, any candidate who is found to have participated in item piracy or other improper conduct will be barred from taking NBEO exams for an as yet undefined period of time as a penalty for the violation and will not be eligible to re-take the Part I exam until such bar expires. This group of candidates will be required to submit the customary registration fee prior to re-taking their Part I exams.

In addition to candidate disciplinary proceedings, the NBEO exam content is protected under copyright laws; and copyright enforcement action remains under consideration by NBEO.

The NBEO Board of Directors understands and regrets the undeserved anxiety suffered by those candidates who took their Part I exams in honest, ethical fashion and who have endured the postponement of score release due to the requisite investigation. The Board further regrets the additional uncertainty created by the tentative nature of the scores. However, the NBEO wishes to assure the candidates and the public that this thorough and extensive investigation is fully warranted in order to ensure the validity of the exam scores and to protect the future security of the exam. The NBEO will continue to pursue the investigation to completion as expeditiously as possible. Periodic announcements concerning the investigation will be made on the NBEO website.