

2023 Post ACVD Exam Survey (15/18 responders; response rate: 83%)

- 1. Do you think the material covered on the examination was a fair selection of what you were told to expect? (e.g. via the Study Guide, your training program, meetings with the Exam committee, etc.?) If not, why? Please give examples, and be as specific as you can.**

Responses:

- I think it was a fair selection, I think the training program I had in residency adequately helped with going through the vast amount of material needed for the exam.
- Yes. The majority of the tested info aligned with the study guides, but I felt that the diversity was lacking. There were several questions on the same topics (i.e. multiple large animal lice questions, 2 of which used the same louse image; two questions about DTM culture media).
- I would have to slightly agree/slightly disagree. I did feel there was a significant portion of questions that did feel “random” or like they covered extremely rare or obscure diseases that I have never heard of and therefore had to guess. I did a tremendous amount of well structured studying, therefore I feel quite confident that I would at minimum recognize most conditions and have a fair shot of answering any practical material that would come up in practice. It’s hard to be specific, but I vaguely recall a question regarding the demodex species in hamsters. I studied enough to recognize that hamsters have two types of demodex, but asking that question did feel unfair as it is not something that most dermatologists will require practical daily knowledge of with such specificity. There was also something regarding a foal and mare and water leading to acute leg lesions on a condition that seemed exceedingly rare. In contrast, other uncommon conditions such as PNOE or even dermatophyte, are topics I was well prepared for and are conditions I may actually encounter in practice. Those questions felt more fair. I also felt the test was a bit unfair in that a good percentage of what I studied was not covered. I would guess 30%. Which would equate to over a month or longer of material that I studied daily that I didn’t get to show my knowledge on. I do understand that the test is limited (only 250 questions), but I wish that there were no questions spent on topics that I am exceedingly unlikely to see, to maximize testing the knowledge I know. There is a genuine chance I could not pass the exam because I missed several questions on blindingly obscure topics rather than testing what my true potential is.
- Overall, I felt the test was primarily an application of knowledge exam with a handful of clinical questions. And I felt that perhaps only 50% of the questions

were truly practical that a dermatologist should have walking knowledge of. To me, it felt like we were all studying for a very difficult test of primarily book knowledge that can be referenced when needed any time in my career. Many other dermatologists have echoed my comments from years past. I do acknowledge that the test is much improved from past years from what I've heard from colleagues who have passed and mentors. I am appreciative of that fact. However, there still seems like there is a large area for improvement in topics chosen and selection of conditions that are pertinent.

- The material on the exam was mostly fair and adhered to the topic guidelines. However, I felt that the species allocation was skewed more heavily towards exotics than I had expected. There were also some topics that were minimally covered eg infectious diseases while there were recurring questions regarding the same diseases, ie PNOE, zinc-responsive dermatosis and Chediak-Higashi Syndrome. There were also some diseases that I felt did not have a hard and fast answer due to conflicting papers and clinicians so the questions regarding "current theory" were a bit harder to answer. This was in reference to the hair cycle arrest question.
- I think the majority of the test was fair but I was surprised that they focused on such small details of a particular topic. There were also many topics that I felt were important that weren't on the exam i.e. collagen synthesis
- Yes, it was fair
- Yes, most of the material was well rounded and fair. However, there were a few pointed questions such as the Demodex species that affects pot-bellied pigs that seem very trivial. Also, there were questions regarding the exact species of Culicoides or Leishmania that were pattern or regional dependent that were more challenging than needed. There were also a few questions that appeared to have multiple answer options that even with an open book exam were confusing. For instance, there was a lesion on the medial thigh of a horse that was likely a sarcoid with multiple treatment options (field vs clinic surgery dependent). Finally, there was also a question regarding pruritic donkeys at a rescue facility which you could make a case for multiple etiologies, more information in the question would be helpful.
- For most questions, yes. There were however a few questions that seemed "out of left field", including one asking for the breeds that is predisposed to the 'human equivalent to palmar-plantar keratoderma'; unfortunately, both Dogues de Bordeaux and Kromfohrlanders were listed as possible answers; both breeds presenting with similar focal genetic footpad hyperkeratosis.
- I do feel that the material covered was fair and well represented by the materials available to us. Some questions were poorly written; please see my last response for details.

- I feel like the majority of questions were fair. There were a few questions that were difficult to determine the correct answer based off of the wording of the question or the answer options. Specific examples include:
- Asking about the least recommended treatment option for a cat with presumed allergic disease and asthma that is indoor/outdoor. Both Atopica and Apoquel were listed as options, which have both been determined to lead to fatal toxoplasmosis in outdoor cats. Also, Apoquel is not labelled for use in cats, so would that lead this answer to being the most appropriate? Or since Atopica has the most research, is this considered the best choice?
- Using human terminology to describe the placement of an anus in an ectoparasite with unjointed appendages/pedicels. Posterior/Anterior are terms used in human medicine, not veterinary medicine. Is a terminal anus found in sarcoptes the same as a posterior anus? Small animal dermatology text uses the terminology terminal, but the question on the exam was using different anatomic terminology.
- The histopathology images were blurry when zoomed in, which made it extremely difficult to see the microscopic changes to answer the appropriate questions.
- Reasonably fair. Some use of colloquial terms for disease could probably be reduced or eliminated.
- Overall yes. However, I felt that some of the topics came up multiple times while others which are seen more frequently in clinics did not show up at all e.g. zink-responsive dermatosis (~5 questions) vs. NME (none)
- Yes and no as the study guide is not very detailed and very broad. Most of the questions were fair but some were a little of the scope of dermatology.
- No, I feel there was a lot of immunology types of questions, more than I expected, with cytokines and chemokines. I feel there should be clearer distinction with specifics of what we should be learning/knowing for the various topics, especially if this is supposed to be more clinically applicable. Also, some of the photos were not very clear. It also would have helped if both clinical images and histopath images were included.
- Some questions are trivia stuff that is not clinically important, and I suspect most boarded dermatologists aren't able to answer them correctly. Some questions ask things that we don't need to memorize because such information can be quickly looked up by Googling or by pulling out our tables/charts/etc. For example, cross-reactivity between some grasses. I believe most boarded dermatologists (including my mentors) look at the cross-reactivity tables to check this information. It is not necessary to memorize this kind of information. Another

example is the question about the name of *Demodex* species in pigs. The name of the pig *Demodex* species can be found within 2 seconds by Googling, and memorizing it brings no benefits in treating our pig patients. One more example is the *Lutzomyia* sand fly species name. There were two options that have the genus name *Lutzomyia*, with different species names. I believe most boarded dermatologists can answer the sand fly in the New World is *Lutzomyia*, but I suspect less than 10% of them know the species name, which is *Lutzomyia shannoni*. This can be looked up by Googling within 2 seconds as well, so I think it brings no benefits in cramming this name into our memory. I personally consider these questions to have limited value in testing a clinician's knowledge and ability to treat animals. Even if these questions are experimental, I would still think they have no value to be put in and tested by candidates who are already under the stress of the exam, i.e., these questions are apparently poorly designed, so I don't think we need the candidates to test if the questions are good or not.

2. Did the time allotted for each part of the exam present a problem for you? If yes, please elaborate.

Responses:

No, I felt the time was adequate

No

No. I thought the timing was very fair

No, there was plenty of time allocated for each question.

There was plenty of time to complete the exam

No

The time was appropriate

No

No, I felt the time allotted was very fair

No, the time allotted did not present a problem.

No issue

No, time was plenty

No, I had plenty of time to answer questions and I was not stressed by time.

No

Not a problem. Time was more than sufficient.

3. If you are the candidate who requested accommodation, did the alternative examination schedule present a problem for you? If yes, please elaborate.

Responses:

Not applicable

N/A

NA

NA

No problems

I was very grateful to have accommodations as a new mother, everything worked out great.

The alternative exam schedule was fair and helpful

NA

NA

NA

NA

NA

NA

NA

NA

4. Did you feel that you devoted an adequate amount of study time to take this exam? How much time did you take to prepare? How much time off work were you given?

Responses

- Unfortunately not, my current job and remaining time available for me to take off was only around 2 weeks. I had previously summarized/made notes to study from so this did not need to be done, however another week at least would have

been nice to have. This is a repeated exam for me, so I did not get as much time as previous years.

- I studied for 8.5 weeks, I think I would have benefited from another 1-2 weeks.
- I began studying daily for an hour after NAVDF (approx. 5-6 months prior). Then I had approximately 7 weeks off from work between September and the test. I felt like this was sufficient to pass this type of exam. When I was completely off work, I studied 6-8 hrs per day during the week and 4 hrs on the weekend as a “break”. It is quite easy to burn out studying at that capacity.
- I devoted 8 weeks of full-time study in the lead up to the exam. I feel like I could have done with one more week to adequately go over everything once more. I had started preparing notes and going over all topics once since February 2023 (after the paper was submitted).
- I studied 10-12 hours/day for 8 weeks straight. I definitely devoted enough time to studying. I tend to not perform well under pressure so I don't think the exam will reflect the knowledge I have gained.
- I started studying 3-5 hours a day in July. I work part time right now so time off was not necessary. I think I dedicated enough time.
- Yes, I have taken a significant amount of time to study for this exam. It was my main priority over the past year and I continued to work part time for several months leading up to the exam.
- 7 weeks off work to study. I felt rushed and would have preferred 10 weeks
- I was given 8 weeks to prepare for the exam, which I felt was the perfect amount of time. Regardless of the outcome of my exam, I feel that any more time would have led to a decline in my mental state (which sounds funny but is true).
- I was allotted 6 weeks of paid time leave for board study. I took two months to prepare for this examination.
- Yes. Roughly 75-100hr over 7 mo. Although I had taken exam 2x before so already had materials compiled. 2 weeks reduced schedule and 2 weeks totally off from work.
- Yes. I spent 4 months (50 days for detailed exam preparation). I took a break between my previous job and my new job and was unpaid during this time.
- I took 12 weeks of study time which was plenty in my opinion. I planned to start working only after boards. I was lucky because I got a signing bonus which allowed me to take 3 months off. I feel that even if I got more time, I would not

have retained more stuff. With less time, I would have been more stressed probably.

- No. I had been occasionally studying throughout my entire residency but was given 4 weeks completely off and worked a few days the other weeks. I felt I needed more time to study, given issues experienced during the time off.
- The time I devoted was adequate. Eight weeks.

5. If you are repeating the exam, was this exam in the current multiple-choice format _____? (Please circle)

Easier?

Harder?

The Same?

Responses:

I have only taken the multiple-choice version of this exam, and while I initially didn't like the fact that we had to travel to take the exam again (as previous ones have been remote), I feel that it may have been beneficial from a standpoint of it calmed me down a bit to see other people taking the exam with me.

N/A

NA

NA

NA

The same

The same

NA

NA

The same

3rd time taking exam- actually very good consistency in difficulty year-to-year.

NA

NA

NA

NA

6. Do you have any comments regarding the Exam Soft program?

Responses:

- No, this worked well (this time and previous times)
- The program seemed to work well overall. The quality of the images was relatively poor, especially when zooming in on organisms/cells.
- The program itself caused my laptop significant issues and crashed in advance of the exam. Through technical support we learned that it is not compatible with antivirus software. So I had to remove that from my personal computer which felt very uncomfortable, but I didn't feel that I had another option. It would be better for us to not have to take such an important exam on our own laptops. I believe they should be done in a computer lab like how the NAVLE is run.
- I thought it was very easy to use and very user-friendly. I liked the reassurance that it was loaded onto the hard drive so even if my computer failed, that answers would still be accessible. One issue I did have was in relation to the histopathology photos – the zoom function was not particularly useful as it became pixelated. Unrelated to the software and I do understand some of the limitations to examining histopathology online but some of the colours on the photos (eg pigment) were not as clear as you would see it on other softwares such as VetDermAtlas.
- NO
- It seemed to work well
- The Exam soft program was easier to navigate in person with an IT person on site.
- Histopathology images were poor quality and often inverted/upside down.
- The software worked beautifully and it was wonderful to have an IT person there with us on exam day. He made the experience very smooth and I would 100% recommend having him available for future test takers.
- Straightforward, easy to use. I liked having the ability to highlight specific words in the questions, and flag questions I needed to go back to.
- I am not sure if it was an issue of image quality provided to the company or an issue with the software heavily compressing the images, but the higher magnification of slide images was poor (pixelated, etc.).
- The Exam Soft program was good, I liked the chance for typing notes, highlighting the questions, flagging and setting a timer. The pictures in the mock

exam in the program were clear, however the pictures during the exam were unfortunately blurry and zooming did not help at all.

- No, the format of the exam/the program were convenient. Everything was well organized.
- No. The program was fine.
- Some of the histopath pictures were blurry. I wonder if the picture resolution gets lower when it's uploaded to the Exam Soft program. I would suggest the exam committee carefully review this issue.

7. We are moving toward putting the entire examination at a centralized location not on the campus of a university or a testing center. Would you find this (please circle) _____ ?

Easier?

Harder?

Comments?

Responses:

- I think this would be fine, I initially thought taking this at a testing center would be better, but I think it actually benefitted from having multiple people in one room.
- It seemed fine taking the exam in a single location with onsite support staff. I can understand the financial stress that this may create for some individuals, which is certainly a disadvantage.
- We just took our test in a centralized location which overall I felt was fair. However, it does automatically add extra cost to the test takers as the ACVD (to my knowledge) does not cover travel costs. Based on the horror stories I've heard from at-home test takers, this was probably an easier experience. I did like the community feel of being with other test takers rather than the isolation of being at home. However, I am a very social oriented person. Ultimately, I think the test would be best done at a testing center similar to NAVLE. That would be the easiest and most fair to test takers.
- My main concern was the cost of the whole exam experience. The exam fee, international air fares, hotel expenses, travel costs cumulatively added up to \$10,000 AUD (~\$6300 USD) which is quite a lot for someone fresh out of residency. I wonder if it would be possible for any ACVD grants for the exam, or seeing as it is done on computer, if it would be possible to accommodate the international residents to have it centralized at one location within their home country?

- I would prefer to be able to take the examination at a local testing center because the exam is stressful enough, let alone traveling and costs associated. However, I did feel that all parties involved in organizing this did an amazing job of making sure we were comfortable and had everything we needed.
- A testing center that we could go to in our own town seems like it would be the easiest.
- Easier. I think it is much preferred to take an exam such as this at a hotel versus a testing facility. The stress induced at a testing facility seems worse. It would also be best to keep only the students participating in this exam together (and not mixed with other testing candidates).
- Going forward, I would much rather use multiple local prometric testing centers rather than continuing to use a centralized location. Prometric testing centers are used for both the NAVLE and all board-certifying exams for the ACVIM (neurology, oncology, internal medicine exams). For the multiple-choice format, Prometric is both appropriate and superior to using an “in-house” centralized exam location. Prometric eliminates the need for costly, time-consuming, and climate-unfriendly travel, especially for international candidates. It also eliminates the risk of personal laptop failure for a candidate.
- The cost of the exam was also very disappointing. The cost of Prometric certifying exams for those within the ACVIM this year were ~\$1000 (general 2nd year board) and \$1495 (specialty-specific 3rd year exam; i.e., neurology, oncology, internal medicine), as opposed to \$3200 for the Dermatology exam. Additionally, this \$3200 did not include the costs of airfare and the hotel (3+ nights for most). This is even more disappointing in light of the fact that residents had previously been told the exam’s price increase was solely because of the cost of the remote testing software. Despite no longer using the remote testing software, the price never was decreased.
- The exam committee had previously cited 2 reasons in their email to candidates (1/25/23) for why a centralized location was being used this year:
“The main reason for this decision is to ensure that our exam is as secure as possible.”
- A Prometric testing center is significantly more secure than an in-house exam done at a hotel. I appreciate the efforts made by the ACVD to host an “in-house” exam and am very thankful for all the exam committee members that were there in TX, but Prometric is simply much more qualified to host a board-certifying exam. Prometric is a nationally and internationally recognized testing center and it is trusted by both the ICVA and ACVIM. The security and measures to prevent cheating are much stricter at Prometric testing centers, speaking from personal

experience (NAVLE) and citing the experiences of colleagues that recently took ACVIM exams at Prometric centers.

- *"Consistent and helpful exam proctoring."*
- Prometric proctors are adequately trained to proctor for multiple choice exams and to troubleshoot any (rare) technical difficulties that might occur. Again, I sincerely appreciate the ACVD members who volunteered their time to be there in TX, but there is no need or feasible reason/argument for why specifically a member of the ACVD would be needed during the exam in lieu of a Prometric proctor.
- Easier. In my opinion, having the exam in a location specified for that purpose would be extremely helpful. A university or testing center would be preferred over a hotel, for reasons specified below (see +).
- I think candidates should be able to take the exam at a local testing center instead of having to fly to a central location to take the exam all together. Traveling to a different location and environment is a significant financial investment, and can lead to high stress if travel details change/are cancelled at the last minute.
- This was done this year. It was fine, a bit of an added headache and expense. I do not believe it impacted my performance
- Harder. Most of us spent 5-10.000 \$ to fly to Texas and stay in the hotel and pay the exam fee. I would still hope that the exam committee takes into consideration to offer the exam at least for oversea people at a local test center.
- I found it convenient but expensive
- I did not really like traveling to Texas for the exam. Travel is already exhausting and then people need to adjust to the time difference, etc.
- It would have been easier if we could take the exam at a local testing center. However, I also think gathering everyone at the same location removes the concerns of technical issues.

8. Do you have any comments on the venue of the examination?

➤ **Hotel Room**

Responses:

- Hotel room was fine, location of the hotel was good from the airport (short travel, major airport).

- Hotel room – nice and spacious
- Hotel room was a little small, but overall it was fine. This was not a vacation trip, so it's OK
- The room whilst comfortable, was very dark. The yellow lamps made it perfect for sleeping but more difficult for studying.
- Nice, modern, quiet, just not enough light in the room for studying.
- It was okay
- The hotel was like a cave. It was very dark and unfinished. However, it was quiet for the most part and not overcrowded. The service and location were very good as well.
- None
- Hotel room was lovely
- Nice, spacious, quiet.
- Adequate. Venue was a lot of bare concrete (all floors and walls) and gave some prison vibes. But a fancy prison. I really appreciated that the hotel block opened a few days before the exam.
- Hotel Room: It was great that there was a large table for studying, however the lights in the room were limited. Studying at night was difficult as there was no light source from the ceiling at the center of the room.
- It was fine
- Did not care for the hotel room. The concrete floors made it so I could hear the person above me walking around the room in heels. Perhaps being on the top floor would be better. Also, the heater was not working in the room and the warmest it got was 69 F. Had to get my own heater delivered, as that was more convenient than having someone check it or me packing up my things to go to a different room.
- Great

➤ **Examination Room**

Responses:

- Ideally this would have been further from the front desk, there were multiple people talking and yelling outside the exam room. There were also people

walking by and watching us as the curtains were not closed. The hotel is fine, but I feel that the conference room in which we took the exam could be further from the front of the hotel.

- Exam room - Very distracting. There was a lot of noise from the lobby and elevators. I appreciated the effort to put up signs to encourage people to be quiet, but it was ineffective.
- Exam room – there was some distracting noise outside of the room in the lobby of the hotel during the exam. The room itself was fine.
- Overall, it was a good layout and appreciated the power chargers, bright lights, but there were noises coming from people talking outside that did not read the quiet sign, or cars that kept their engine running in the car park so somewhere that has better sound-proofed walls and doors may be more ideal.
- No complaints
- It worked fine
- The exam room had a colder climate. The room was private and quiet for testing.
- The exam room had the main lobby directly to its left, and the parking lot directly to its right. Because of this, there were several times in which noises (talking, laughing) from the lobby and the parking lot (revving or idling engines) could be heard during the test.
- **+ Examination Room – Attention please:** The examination room was absolutely inappropriate for this test. The exam room was connected to the lobby, so every bit of activity happening in the lobby could be seen AND heard. I can recount several conversations people were having in the lobby while we were trying to focus on the biggest examination of our lives. Additionally, the dermatologist who was proctoring our exam refused to step into the lobby and ask anyone to keep their voices down. We paid ~\$3500 for this exam, and it couldn't even be in a quiet place. This was a huge failure by the ACVD exam committee and is extremely disappointing to a test-taker who paid 1/10 of her annual resident salary to take this examination. Please, please be more attentive when making these arrangements in the future. Please do better for the future residents taking this exam.
- Not appropriate for quiet exam taking. The room was in the main lobby of the hotel, by the main entrance, check in desk and across from the elevators. Conversations of all guests could be heard while trying to take the examination. Proctors of examination did not prevent distractions from occurring (people gathering outside the room, loud noise, etc).

- The all-glass conference room in a hotel lobby was not the best. I had ear plugs and occasionally, I could still hear noise from the lobby.
- Was fine, but sometimes noises outside were distracting.
- It was fine but I would advise not to rent a room in the lobby because of the noise
- Being located next to the concierge, it was very noisy and we could hear everyone talking outside of the exam room. I could still hear others talking outside even with ear plugs in – I felt bad for those who did not have ear plugs. Also, the curtains were open so it was distracting to be able to see people walking around. I would prefer a completely enclosed room on a different floor, away from foot traffic – like rooms where the resident lectures are held during NAVDF.
- Unfortunately, there was some noise occasionally.

9. Any additional comments to improve future candidates' experience when taking this exam?

Responses:

- It would be ideal to find a quieter environment to take the exam in.
- If possible, the exam room would be best moved away from a busy lobby. However, the breakroom set up and the room itself were perfect.
- I appreciated the session the night before the exam as it allowed us to become accustomed to the room and get an idea of how the exam was run. Rob was fantastic with his tutorials and his instructions on how to work the program were very clear.
- No
- None
- Overall, I had a much better experience taking this exam in person versus proctored at home. It was better having a group of individuals to address issues with on site. I think arriving to the hotel two nights early also allowed time to settle in and resume a study routine.
- NA
- **+ Attention please:** There is one comment I would like to respectfully extend to the exam committee members – please work harder to ensure that your examination questions and respective answers are fair. For example, it is

inappropriate to ask candidates to pick *between* cyclosporine and Apoquel as an inappropriate treatment option for an outdoor cat with feline atopic skin syndrome and allergic asthma. Both medications have been reportedly associated with fatal feline toxoplasmosis, so it is unfair to ask residents to just pick one. Another example is regarding the treatment of choice for an occult equine sarcoid – both cryotherapy and narrow surgical resection can yield recurrence of the sarcoid; the appropriate answer would be wide surgical resection, but this was not available for residents to select as an answer. We pay 1/10 of our annual salary and work so hard to take this exam, please do your part in being sure that the questions and answer choices are up to date with the literature and have a single correct answer. Please consider removing these questions from the current examination and do not use them in future examinations.

- The candidate should be able to take the examination at a local testing center, to prevent unwarranted traveling.
- The cost of the examination is a significant financial investment. If you want to continue to have the exam at a centralized location, the testing room needs to be at another hotel, away from the main entrance, crowds and distractions.
- I would still advocate for local testing center.
- The people who were involved onsite, especially Diana and Rob were extremely helpful, and everyone made sure we were doing okay. I appreciated that a lot.
- No...this exam is hard and the study period is mentally challenging....I don't think that this experience can become positive whatsoever! I did learn a lot of stuff though by studying so much. Everything came together and I understand key concepts that I did not get before, which is wonderful. I must say that the exam day was well organized and that I did not feel stressed about knowing where to go or what to eat. Thank you for that!
- NA
- I think some of the questions are trivia stuff that is not clinically important for most dermatologists. I suspect most boarded dermatologists are not able to answer those questions.