

1. How is the exam curved? This question is actually more broadly broken up based on the following questions.

- The exam score sheet states that the exams are curved to a mean of 70 with a standard deviation of 8, but when the percentiles are given they don't match up. For example, a score of 78, or one standard deviation above the mean, should be an 84th percentile with a normal distribution but has wound up being scored in the 60s for many test takers. Students at various schools have been confused on how scores are generated as what is told to us doesn't seem to match up with the scores received.

- The mean of 70 was set in 2001-04. Each year they set the percentile based on the previous test administration. This usually happens around Nov. The mean has been climbing each year. The scaled score is comparable between test administrations. Schools receive both the scaled score and the percentile and can report either to students.

- How is the curve generated? Are students graded according to how students around the country did on that same test at the same time of year? Are they graded on how students have done on those same questions in years past? Is it some other mechanism?

- There is no curve. For the scaled score, a 70 on an easy exam should equal a 70 on a hard exam. They adjust the scaled score based on difficulty level. For example, if an exam is harder, you would need to get fewer answers correct to get a 70.

- Students taking exams at different times of year have advantages as they have covered more ground. The best example is medicine, where taking it first in 3rd year would be more difficult than taking it at the end of the 3rd year as the material from the other clerkships is applicable to the medicine exam as well. Does the curve correct for students who take the exam at different times of year?

- The exam is criterion based, which means there is not a limit to the number of students who can pass or get a certain score. The NBME releases quarterly norms to school. These are percentile based. They ask the school when the 3rd year begins. The school can then choose whether or not they want to use the quarterly norm information. The NBME recommends that schools choose 1 set of score norms and keep in mind that students who take the test earlier in the year may have lower scores than those who take it toward the end.

2. Where do the questions for the shelf exams come from? Students have been told everything ranging from the questions being retired Step 2 questions to questions written by faculty from around the country specifically for the tests.

- For some of the exams, they retire 1 form of Step 2 CK each year and those questions are used. For newer tests, they have committees who come in to write the questions. These are faculty from around the country. The NBME is not sure whether they will continue to use retired Step 2 CK questions in the future.

3. At the end of the shelf exams they ask how much time students were given for the exams. In our meeting some students reported getting 2 hours and 15 minutes, some 2 hours and 30 minutes, and some students mentioned hearing that there were some schools who did not have a time limit, or had more than 3 hours, though that could not be confirmed. What are the ranges of times that students are allowed on the exam? Does getting more or less time on the exam change the curve for that school?

- This used to be true for paper administrations. On web administrations, there is a set time now. The NBME recommends a certain amount of time for schools to use. For schools that choose to use a different time allotment, these test administrations are not used to scale the score.

4. For schools that get the official score report from the NBME, is there a way that students can access it without the school? Some students don't ever get to see the score report if their school doesn't send it to them. Is there any discussion about having an online login for students to access their scores?

- This is a question the NBME is very interested in. There is currently no login system that allows students to access their score or score report. The NBME thinks that there is a need for this. It would be helpful to have a system that schools can turn on or off, so that they can determine the pass/fail/honors criteria before students are able to access their score report. Schools feel like right now it's hard to get the score reports to students. This question was discussed at the recent NBME advisory meeting, and the NBME is currently working on such an option.