



AOMA GRADUATE SCHOOL *of*  
INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

# Best of our Blog

made with  
*Beacon*

# Table of Contents

1. Chinese Medicine 101: 5 Reasons to go to Acupuncture School
2. 5 Books to Read Before Starting Acupuncture & Chinese Medicine School
3. What is Integrative Healthcare?
4. 5 Tips for Applying to Acupuncture School
5. 5 Things You Will Learn in TCM School
6. From Patient to Practitioner: Two Perspectives on Chinese Medicine

7. Nurses Expand Scope of Practice, Study Acupuncture

8. Medicine from the Bottom of the Heart: AOMA Student and Pediatric Stroke Awareness Advocate

9. Massage Therapists go to Acupuncture School, Study Chinese Medicine

10. Catching Up With Ashley Oved, Acupuncturist, Cancer Treatment Centers of America

11. Personal Transformation: My First Term in Acupuncture School

12. Chinese Medicine 101: 5 MORE Reasons to attend Acupuncture School

13. From Liberal Arts to Acupuncture

14. [Acupuncture Student's First Clinical Experience](#)

15. [Qigong: The Art of Staying Sane during Acupuncture School](#)

16. [Chinese Medicine School: What is Qi?](#)

17. [5 Tips for Self-care: TCM and Beyond](#)

18. [Want more information?](#)



# Chinese Medicine 101: 5 Reasons to go to Acupuncture School



It's no secret that the program at [AOMA](#) is rigorous and challenging. Acupuncture school will inspire you to discover your full potential as a student, as a healer, and ultimately as a professional practitioner. Though not easy, this truly **transformational journey** is meaningful and provides the foundation to building a successful career after school.

To **become an acupuncturist**, you must attend an accredited acupuncture school, take comprehensive national board exams and, upon passing them, apply for licensure in the state where you want to practice. It takes most people an average of four years to get through acupuncture school. A [master's degree in acupuncture](#) is the current **entry-level standard** for the profession. A few schools also offer [doctoral programs in Oriental medicine](#) (DAOM), which would add a couple more years.

## Efficacy

There is increasing scientific evidence proving the efficacy of acupuncture for the treatment of medical ailments, including chemotherapy-induced nausea, autoimmune disorders, chronic back pain, hypertension and allergic rhinitis.

Coverage of acupuncture by major health insurance plans is also on the rise, and compared to traditional Western medicine, acupuncture and Chinese medicine are less expensive.

Acupuncture can also decrease reliance on prescription drugs, making it a safe, affordable and accessible healing modality.

## A Growing Industry

The use of **acupuncture is on the rise** in the United States. Between 1997 and 2007 the number of visits among adults nearly tripled, rising from 27.2 to 79.2 per 1,000 adults.

According to the [National Health Interview Survey](#) (NHIS), approximately 3.1 million adults in the United States used acupuncture in 2006, a **47 percent increase** from the 2002 estimate.

## Job Opportunities

The **demand for acupuncture** could soon outweigh the number of practitioners that can currently fulfill that demand. There are many career possibilities for acupuncture and Chinese medicine practitioners. According to the [National Association of Advisors for the Health Care Professions](#), “The future of AOM is bright with **great opportunity for graduates in this field.**”

There are many possibilities for students who graduate from acupuncture school. Most chose to work in **private practice** or work with a group of practitioners, like a massage therapist or chiropractor, at a holistic health or rehabilitation center. As acupuncture is growing in demand, opportunities to work in **pain management clinics** and **hospitals** are becoming more available. The **military** is also becoming more open to employing acupuncturists to research post-traumatic stress which has shown positive

results for treating veterans.



There are also **opportunities to travel** with acupuncture by working for groups such as [Acupuncturists without Borders](#) or island hopping on cruise ships. Many students have done this right after graduating from acupuncture school as a sort of working vacation.

## Credentials and Recognition

After graduating from acupuncture school you have to take board exams and apply for licensure. Most US states require **national board certification** for licensure. The [NCCAOM](#) administers the national board examinations for the profession. Each state has unique licensure and scope of practice regulations. In many states, candidates for licensure must demonstrate their diagnostic and technical clinical skill that they learned in acupuncture school. There currently is no standardization of licensure, for example, in Texas the license is called "Licensed Acupuncturist", whereas in Florida it is called "Acupuncture Physician" and in New Mexico it is called "Doctor of Oriental Medicine" (DOM).

# Fulfilling and Lucrative Career

According to the U.S. Department of Labor [National Center for O\\*NET Development](#), median

wages for an acupuncturist are \$33.98 hourly, \$70,690 annual. Recent graduates should keep in mind that statistics show that it takes **2-5 years for a new practice to get established**. Factors like location, style of practice, and clinical specialties can all impact expected earnings.

--	--



# 5 Books to Read Before Starting Acupuncture & Chinese Medicine School

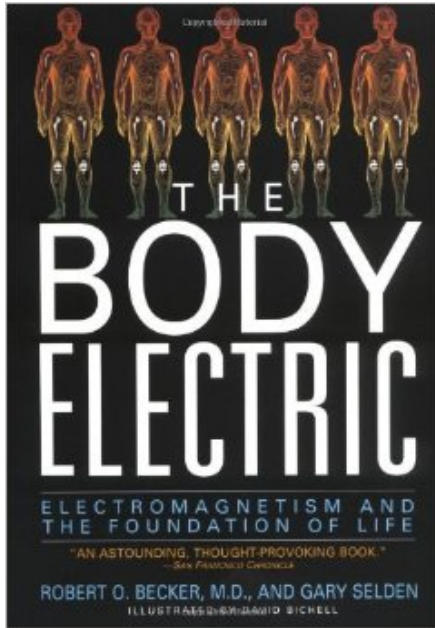
If you are considering a life dedicated to Chinese medical practice, we recommend the following resources to help build your understanding of this medicine.



Stepping into the world of traditional Chinese medicine as a student or a patient calls for an openness in acknowledging how tradition and science overlap. Some aspects of traditional Chinese medicine can't be easily

reconciled to a specimen under a microscope, yet the scientific community is increasingly expanding its understanding of how acupuncture and herbal medicine affect the body.

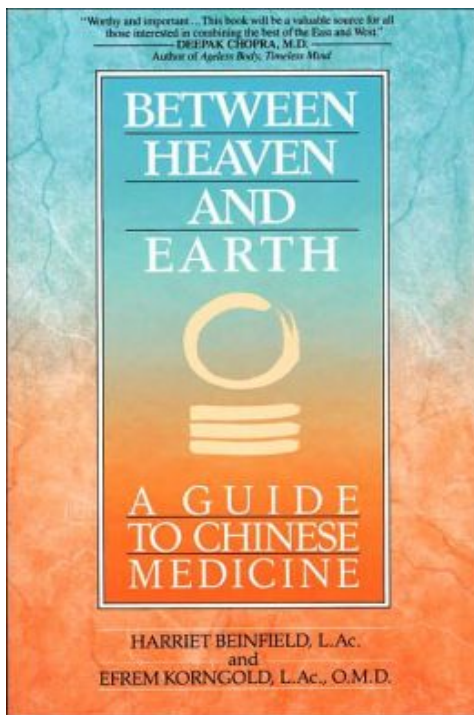
As an intern in the student clinic at AOMA, patients routinely ask why I'm immersed in this field, what the needles are doing, and about this word "qi" that keeps coming up. If you find yourself asking these questions, or are considering a life dedicated to Chinese medical practice, I recommend the following resources to help build your understanding of this medicine.



## 1. The Body Electric: Electromagnetism and the Foundation of Life

Authors: Robert O Becker, MD, and Gary Seldon

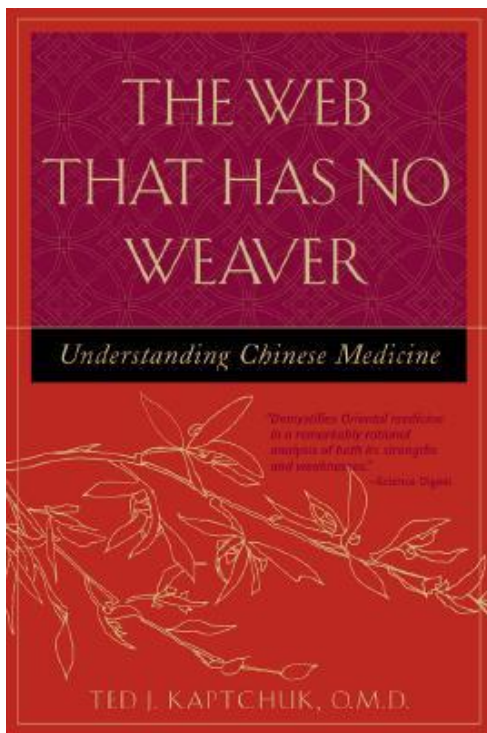
Dr. Robert Becker's writing offers a somewhat rare voice from the modern medical community that connects compassionate medical care to scientific theory—a connection resonating with many of those curious about Chinese medicine. An orthopedist, Becker, opens his book with a description of his medical school experiences in crowded wards before the discovery and application of penicillin. Exposed as a student to this widespread suffering, he explores what it means to define pain as an objective and subjective experience. So compels his subsequent lifework researching electromagnetism as it shapes and heals our bodies.



## 2. Between Heaven and Earth: A Guide to Chinese Medicine

Authors: Harriet Beinfeld, LAc and Efrem Korngold, LAc

This text reads almost like an introductory course in Chinese medicine, completely accessible to the Western lay reader. Beinfeld and Korngold describe their watershed introduction to Chinese medicine in the 1970s when it was first being introduced in the US. They quickly go through a stepwise comparison of Eastern and Western approaches providing a readable, informative explanation of Yin-Yang theory, the Taoist Five Phases, and tongue and pulse diagnosis—Chinese medicine concepts fundamental to every beginning student. Rounding out the last chapter is a collection of therapeutic recipes resting on the ubiquitous concept that longevity and vitality require keen understanding of “kitchen alchemy.” Anyone who wants to dive into the world of Chinese medicine through the personal voices of American authors should check out this book.

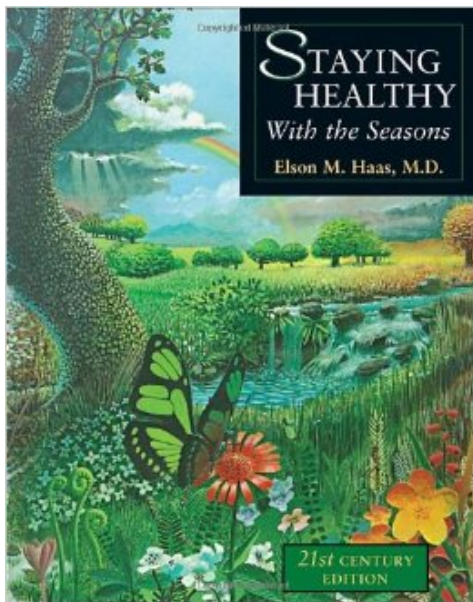


### 3. The Web that Has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine

Author: Ted Kaptchuk, OMD

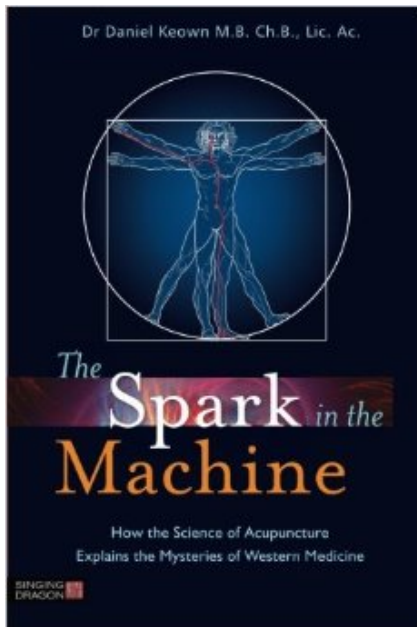
Like the previous selection, this book holds a place as a foundational staple for new students and curious patients of Chinese Medicine. *The Web*, however, dives into detail rapidly, quoting readily from classics in the canon of ancient Chinese medical text. It reads less like a personal narrative and more like a compelling cultural textbook. It moves beyond a basic overview of Taoist theory and digs into richer detail of TCM diagnosis, the zang fu (organ) patterns, and meridian system. This book is best appreciated as a cover-to-cover read, appropriate for someone wants to spend time delving into and ruminating on the broader implications of a life in Chinese medical practice.





#### 4. Staying Healthy with the Seasons Author: Elson M. Haas, M.D.

Many of us who enter the field of Chinese medicine--or merely seek care from an acupuncture and Chinese medical practitioner—appreciate to varying degrees that ancient healing is a life practice and not just a 1-hr session of needles with a bag of medicinal herbs. *Staying Healthy with the Seasons* fastens a Western life to manageable ancient Eastern practice. It takes the Taoist Five Elements and expands them heartily into a guide for diet, exercise, meditation, and disease prevention. Not only does this book provide great introductory information but also is a bookshelf staple in the homes of wellness-seeking families.



## 5. The Spark in the Machine: How the Science of Acupuncture Explains the Mysteries of Western Medicine

Author: Daniel Keown, MD (England)

Dr. Keown commences his book by hitching together a functional definition of qi (“chee”) to the sheet-like bands of tissue under our skin called fascia. He continues in an explanation of how human anatomy develops prenatally, where acupuncture points emerge in this development, and how fully developed meridians course in the mature human body to connect these points. The book uses anatomical references to define more esoteric acupuncture landmarks. Any layperson can pick up this book for a concrete understanding of where and why major points in the body exist. If you have found yourself as an acupuncture patient asking about the where and why of the needling points, definitely check out this text!

# What is Integrative Healthcare?



Some people think of acupuncture and Oriental medicine as alternative healthcare, shying away from Western medicine. While it is true that in the modern world of traditional Chinese Medicine a holistic approach to care is at the heart of our practice, we like to think of our approach at [AOMA](#) as integrative healthcare. When we feel the radial pulse we are differentiating between choppy, slippery and dai mai, to name a few, but we are also looking for red flags like tachycardia and hypertension so we also take blood pressure.

Integrative healthcare as defined by the [National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health](#), "combines mainstream medical therapies and CAM therapies for which there is some high-quality scientific evidence of safety and effectiveness." So we get the best of both worlds while providing the best possible care for our patients. We take into account the whole person's mind, body and spirit.

Providing care that's within our scope and utilizing the other medical fields as would best serve the patient needs: pretty straightforward. In using an integrative approach, we are not limited by one therapy because we access both alternative approaches as well as conventional ones. A good example is using acupuncture to help with post surgical pain and inflammation. Acupuncture alone wouldn't be sufficient treatment for a structural issue, like a broken bone or severely torn muscle. But after the x-rays have been taken, the bone set back into place, the use of acupuncture can be instrumental not only to reduce physical pain but also the care for the emotional component of the injury.

[The Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco](#) states that "integrative medicine seeks to incorporate treatment options from conventional and alternative approaches, taking into account not only physical symptoms, but also psychological, social and spiritual aspects of health and illness."

As acupuncturists, we might ask why it matters to be integrative. Well, it may mean jobs for one. According to the [American Hospital Association](#), the percentage of U.S. hospitals that offer complementary therapies has increased dramatically in less than a decade, from 8.6% in 1998 to almost 42% in 2011. That's good news for practitioners but it's great news for patients.

Part of being a good integrative healthcare practitioner is understanding the health landscape for that patient and being able to speak intelligently about it with other practitioners that may have a background different from our own. Qi, yin and yang are incredibly important to us but if we're working on a case and the patient's primary wants to understand what you are treating and what herbs you intend to prescribe, we need to be able to have that conversation. Not to say you can't use terms like zang fu and xue xu, just explain what is meant by those.



[AOMA](#) hosts its own integrative healthcare symposium with the Southwest Symposium, yearly in Austin, TX. One of the best ways to understand TCM and how to speak about it with patients and other healthcare providers is to get many different points of view. Be sure to check out this year's line-up!

[aoma.edu/sws](http://aoma.edu/sws)

# 5 Tips for Applying to Acupuncture School



Pursuing a master's degree in Chinese medicine is a choice that will lead you to a rewarding professional career, one that enables you to have a real impact on the health of people in your community.

Now that you have made the decision to attend acupuncture school, what's the next step? Your journey will most certainly start with the admissions department!

Check out these handy tips for students applying to the graduate program:

## 1. **Connect with admissions before applying.**

Before you apply, it's a good idea to [contact the admissions staff](#). Not only can they address any questions you have about the admissions requirements, the required application materials, they can even help you decide what term to apply for. It's important to keep in mind that the admissions staff is here provide guidance during the application process – they're ready and available to help you!

## 2. **Apply Early.**

AOMA conducts admissions on a rolling basis, meaning applications are processed individually as they are received. Applying well in advance of the [application deadlines](#) ensures that you have sufficient time to gather all of the required application materials. Similarly, by completing the application process as early as possible, you are giving yourself plenty of time to prepare for classes and make your post-acceptance plans.

## 3. **Order your transcripts first.**

Official transcripts from your undergraduate education are required as part of the application process. Unfortunately, obtaining official transcripts can take several weeks, potentially extending the length of the application process. To prevent delays, the first step after completing the [application form](#), should be to request official transcripts from your previous school(s) be sent to the AOMA Admissions Office.

## 4. **Address concerns in your personal statement.**

If you are concerned about factors such as your previous undergraduate GPA, limited experience with health sciences, or anything else that you feel may be relevant to the strength of your application, it's best to address these issues in a straightforward manner. The personal statement is a wonderful place to do this!

## 5. **Choose your references wisely.**

As part of the application process, each candidate is required to submit two letters of recommendation. The individuals you select to write these

letters on your behalf should be able to address your skills and abilities that are relevant to graduate-level study. Choosing references who can speak to your academic or professional background such as former professors, professional supervisors or colleagues lends strength to overall quality of your application.

With that stated, if you have a referee in mind and you're not sure whether they're an appropriate reference, you can always contact the admissions team for guidance.

For more information about applying to acupuncture school, visit AOMA's website at [aoma.edu/admissions](https://aoma.edu/admissions) or contact the admissions office today!



# 5 Things You Will Learn in TCM School



In traditional Chinese Medicine School, you will learn much more than you would expect. Because Chinese medicine and acupuncture have been in existence for many centuries and have manifested in a number of cultures, the styles and theories are endless. This, among other reasons, is why I chose to go to TCM school. I wanted to be able to tailor treatments to my patient's needs, in addition to consulting them as a holistic healthcare practitioner. With my education, license and degree, Not only can I give patients varying forms of treatments such as acupuncture and herbs, I can also advise them regarding lifestyle and nutritional modifications. At [AOMA](#) especially, you

will be exposed to a myriad of theories and protocols. You will graduate with so many tools under your belt to choose and hone. As such, it is quite difficult to narrow it down to 5 things you will learn in TCM School. After much thought and consulting my constituents, here is what we have to say:

### **1) Acupuncture is an Art Form**

There is no such thing as a perfect point prescription. Of course, there are certain points and combinations that are clinically effective. But whether you decide to use a certain point or not, guasha versus cupping, e-stim, or moxibustion, depends not only upon how you view your patients' syndrome pattern (to what you attribute their symptoms) but also which modalities that you resonate with the most and have had the most therapeutic success with. You see, there is no "right" treatment. The only common factor that should exist from practitioner to practitioner is the patients' differentiation (and this is sometimes up for debate, too). In TCM school, you will learn various modalities from various practitioners and parts of the world. In the end, it is up to you to choose your focus and ultimately create a unique set of tools that fit your practice and your patients. The art form is a reminder that each patient you see, even if the complaints are identical, will need to be treated as his/her own unique piece of artwork. No two people are the same!

### **2) How to Confront Ego**

Along with the varying forms of acupuncture and TCM modalities, inevitably comes ego. Because there is room for a variation of methods when treating a syndrome, and varying forms of success between patients, it is common to feel confused, defensive, or disgruntled when comparing treatment strategies with other practitioners. It is fortunate that as TCM practitioners we do not slap a pill on top of a symptom, but rather view the patient holistically and treat the root cause through various methods. However, it is simultaneously unfortunate how the ego can sometimes lead one to find oneself in an uncomfortable conversation or even argument. In the end, it's about the acupuncture. It's about the patient, not the practitioner. TCM School teaches you how to be confident with your own mind and toolbox, while simultaneously respecting that of others.

### **3) The Importance of Emotions**

A lot of us know that stress can make you sick. But it is one factor that is often overlooked when considering the etiology of diseases, such as

environmental factors, diet, lifestyle, and genetic risk. In TCM school, you will learn that individual emotions correspond with their respective organs. For example, grief correlates with the lung organ and stress or anger correlates with the liver organ. In TCM theory, when one organ becomes overactive with its respective emotion, it can become more vulnerable to external pathogens, decline in function, and even affect other organs. This also relates to Western perspectives. The more stressed we are, the greater the amount of cortisol we release, and this in turn affects other hormone levels (and the brain and immune system), resulting in higher risk of developing diseases like diabetes, hypertension, allergies, and depression.

#### **4) Western Medicine is Useful but Can Fail Your Patients**

Clinically, biomedicine can often supplement TCM theories wonderfully. More importantly, it allows you to gain an even larger perspective of your patient's health. In our [graduate program at AOMA](#), about one-third of the courses are in biomedicine. You will learn to take vitals, perform physical assessments, read lab reports, and become familiar with prescription drugs. All of these tools become critical when assessing your patient's healthcare needs. This is what is incredibly useful about western/biomedicine. However, what you will inevitably encounter in clinic are patients who have been neglected by their primary care physician. In many settings, the conventional and current medical system has evolved into a quantity rather than quality-based model. Therefore, because we have considerably more time with our patients and the aforementioned biomedical education, we can educate our patients about their diagnosis, labs, and prescriptions so they can discuss any questions or modifications with their primary care. It is our role, as holistic healthcare providers, to educate and give patients autonomy so they can take control of their health. We are also trained to spot red-flags that need immediate referral.

#### **5) Inevitable Personal Transformation**

When you first start as a student at AOMA, it is very exciting. You are making new friends and establishing connections, as well as learning the foundations of Chinese medicine. I only started school about two years ago and have already made large personal transformations, and so have all of my peers. This program immerses you in an environment that challenges and rewards you socially, mentally, and emotionally. Just wait until you start internship in clinic! That is when the real transformations begin. As a student at AOMA, be prepared to dig deep into yourself and find an even deeper

understanding of what it means to be you, both as a person and TCM practitioner.



# From Patient to Practitioner: Two Perspectives on Chinese Medicine



Many acupuncture students begin their journey as patients before becoming fully invested in the academics and practice of Oriental medicine. For one reason or another, this functional medicine resonates with the healing process better than others you have tried before, and the interest is sparked. At some point the fascination exceeds the mystery and develops into a

desire to understand how it works. Like many others before me, I was incredibly curious about this profound method of manipulating qi.

When I was having complications with my own health, going to doctors became a fearful chore. In the waiting room I would work myself into a clammy sweat anticipating whichever test they would need to run next, but unfortunately, leave feeling the same as the day before and without conclusive results. There were so many follow-ups and referrals to get to a place of homeostasis it seemed the horizon would never come.

The experience with my acupuncturist was completely different – the closer I was to the office the better I felt. As soon as it was my turn to be seen I could feel my muscles unlock from the base of my skull to the tips of my toes. I could release my tension onto the floor and finally take a breath. The building my acupuncturist worked in, including the treatment rooms, was nothing special, but there was something about the energy of the space my practitioner created for me that was more therapeutic than any other place I had known at the time. Walking into that space with her made me feel confident I would leave feeling better than when I came, which I always did.

I admired her. She portrayed freedom with her personal style underneath her lab coat and by the way she was accompanied by her small child at work. I felt her mind was completely focused on me and my healing while I was in her presence. The passion and independence she had as a businesswoman was something I had only fantasized about. Seeing it right in front of me was promising for my dreams. It was about more than the incredible healing I achieved while I was under her care that convinced me I had found my divine decree – the harmonious lifestyle she portrayed is what held a mirror to my future.

Now as a young practitioner and student of the medicine at [AOMA](#), I aspire to create the same atmosphere my acupuncturist did for me. When I see patients I always try to meet them from wherever they are coming from. For several of them this is their last resort, a shot in the dark, because they have been in pain for so long. For others, it's an intricate part of a well thought out therapeutic plan. The essence of transitioning from patient to practitioner is that I am now the one who creates the space.

Whatever was happening before they stepped into my treatment room has lost all of its power. I open the space to allow my patients to leave whatever misfortunes they have on the floor, jump up on the table, and heal. At the

end of each session I watch my patients walk away with a lighter heart as I wash their pain from my hands and, we both leave the day behind us on that floor and go home.



# Nurses Expand Scope of Practice, Study Acupuncture



AOMA is well known in its field for attracting a highly diverse student body consisting of gifted practitioners with a wide variety of backgrounds under their belts. Many students come into their studies having already obtained a background in a particular healing modality or healthcare field.

Many students at AOMA studied Western medicine in nursing school and obtained a strong background in nursing before they decided to advance their careers with Chinese medicine studies. We interviewed them to share their knowledge and stories around returning to school after receiving a nursing education, as well as their thoughts around combining the two very complementary modalities.





## **Nurse/Acupuncturist in Training: Natalie Ledbetter**

### **What prompted you to return to school?**

I have been very interested in alternative medicine for years and have been wanting to gain education and training in other modalities of healing. My children are older now, and I thought it was a good time to go back to school now that they are more self-sufficient.

### **Why did you choose AOMA?**

AOMA is a highly ranked and highly respected school for TCM. They are accredited, and I was impressed with the herbal program as well as the other classes offered.

### **What is your nursing background?**

I taught nursing school at Galveston College, worked in ICU, obtained a master's degree in administration, and then a master's in nursing anesthesia. I currently work as a certified registered nurse anesthetist at the office of a local plastic surgeon, providing anesthesia for her patients undergoing surgery.

### **How has your background in nursing impacted your experience as a student/practitioner of Chinese medicine?**

In some ways I think it has made things a little more challenging, but it has made it easier in other ways. I had a difficult time at first with the concept of "organs" in TCM and how different it is from Western medicine. I often

thought I was memorizing "facts" that were not really facts at all, but odd theories. I decided to suspend judgment and just learn all that the instructors had to offer and sort it all out in the end. This has been working well for me so far.

The fact that I am familiar with anatomy, physiology, physical assessment, and other biomedical subjects has allowed me to skip the biomedical courses, which gives me time to continue working. This is a huge plus, because I refuse to take out loans to pay for school.

**What has your experience been like as a student of Chinese medicine?**

I love most of the instructors and others who work at AOMA. I am learning so much. It can be hard to balance school, work, and family, but I believe it will be worth it. If AOMA would offer some of the courses online, it would make things so much easier to juggle.

**What advice do you have for other nurses returning to school?**

Be ready to learn things that are very different from what you have been taught in the past. Be ready to be challenged in the area of time management if you are going to work while in school. Give yourself permission to be less than perfect as you juggle job, studies, home, family, etc.



**Nurse/Acupuncturist in Training: Jason Spees**

### **What prompted you to return to school?**

I returned to school to shift my life practice of helping others into a more holistic direction.

### **Why did you choose AOMA?**

There were many factors, some of them more logistical, like family, a great job market, and that AOMA is in a counter-culture-strong city. The main thing that drew me to Austin was how strong AOMA is into integrative medicine, how they are research-driven, with several experienced teachers, and aligned with other healthcare disciplines. I believe every facet in healthcare needs to engage with the others in a harmonious and collaborative way to bring about the best results for the patient.

### **What is your nursing background?**

Emergency medicine, chronic pain/rehab, and hospice/palliative care.

### **How has your background in nursing impacted your experience as a student/practitioner of Chinese medicine?**

It helped to already have strong assessment skills and be informed on pathology and pharmacology. That is something that people who are just entering patient care struggle with in the beginning. It has been a challenge to start seeing medicine from the Chinese theory angle, but now I am a lot more empowered, being able to view disease in two or three different ways according to theory. It is like looking at different surfaces of a gem. I find that people are also uncomfortable speaking with acupuncturists if they don't have Western medical experience. For me, that is something to worry less about.

### **What has your experience been like as a student of Chinese medicine?**

I have had a great experience. There are great teachers here, and AOMA is very supportive and full of a lot of good people.

### **What advice do you have for other nurses returning to school?**

Jump on board! Keep up your nursing skills, and see how you can keep helping people, but in an expanded way.



## **Nurse & Licensed Acupuncturist: Katie Burke**

### **What prompted you to return to school?**

I have always enjoyed helping others and have been particularly drawn to assisting in the healing process and gaining optimal health. While nursing has been a wonderfully rewarding career in many ways, working within the confines of the hospital setting and having only medical interventions and pharmaceuticals as my ways of treatment were not completely fulfilling for me. I knew there was a more natural way to heal (and prevent illness). The feeling that something was missing prompted my path to delving into natural medicine.

### **Why did you choose AOMA?**

Since I was already living in Austin and wanting to continue my work part-time as a nurse while going to school, I knew I wanted to choose a school in Austin, if possible. After doing some research I was delighted to find out that there were two acupuncture schools here. I have an acquaintance who was going to an acupuncture school, so once I had set my sights on a career change I talked with her about her experience. She told me she was going to AOMA, and she had nothing but positive things to say about the school. After that, I set up a tour of the campus with the director of admissions. After learning more about the program, I knew that AOMA was where I



needed to be. I immediately felt like I was in the right place. Call it a hunch. And of course the school's outstanding reputation in the field didn't hurt, either.

### **What is your nursing background?**

I graduated with my bachelor's in nursing from the University of Texas at Austin in December 2006. I started out working full time in Labor and Delivery prior to going back to school at AOMA. Once I started classes, I continued to work, but on a part-time level. Today I am still working at the hospital (but less frequently), in addition to my work as an acupuncturist.

### **How has your background in nursing impacted your experience as a student/practitioner of Chinese medicine?**

Having a nursing background had been extremely helpful when going through the program. You start off with a base knowledge of anatomy and physiology, disease processes/medical conditions, and pharmaceuticals before you even begin classes. Some of my biomedicine classes also transferred, and I was able to get credit for them, which helped in lightening the course load and the financial burden of grad school. Aside from that, nursing helps you develop your interpersonal and diagnostic skills and gives you a leg up once you start treating patients in the student clinic. Now that I'm practicing, my clients are always interested in my work as a nurse and how I integrate both medical models. Being a nurse makes you a "familiar" person in the eyes of people who are new to Chinese medicine. I have personally witnessed it reduce anxiety and increase receptiveness in clients once they realize that I also have a Western medicine background.

### **What has your experience been like as a student and alumna?**

As a student I was probably a bit frazzled while going through the program (as were many of my classmates, I'm sure). Working part-time while taking a full load of classes was hard, but I'm glad I continued my work in nursing while going back to school. The program at AOMA is rigorous but rewarding. As an alumna I have been fortunate in many ways. Continuing my work in the hospital allowed me to have a "career cushion" during the transition phase after graduation. I was able to have an income while determining what my next step would be (which was truly a blessing). I am now happily practicing acupuncture at a clinic in Austin that specializes in fertility. I'm working with a wonderful team of skilled practitioners. I am

also continuing my work in labor and delivery a few days a week.

**What advice do you have for other nurses returning to school?**

If natural medicine is something that interests you, then AOMA is a great place to find what you've been missing. Western medicine and Chinese medicine go hand in hand. It's wonderful being able to practice and have a solid knowledge base in both fields.

# Medicine from the Bottom of the Heart: AOMA Student and Pediatric Stroke Awareness Advocate



In Mandarin, there is a character pronounced “de” 得. It's a neutral tone, and it's typically translated as "virtue". There's nothing particularly wrong with this translation, but something that people don't know is that it's part of a grammatical structure that indicates how you do something. While adverbs are optional in English, in Mandarin Chinese, you never miss a verb

complement or this "de"-structure to indicate how you do what you do. This is an important aspect of our medicine we often miss. Deeply rooted in the culture behind our medicine is the emphasis on how we approach the things we do in our lives.

I became a mother in June of 2015, and leading to that point, I would rub my bump everyday, especially when I could feel where Logan was and say, "I love you, but you should know, I have no idea what I'm doing. Please, be sturdy." Everyday, "Dear baby, I love you. I have no idea what I'm doing. Please, please, please, be sturdy." Logan was born, after 25 hours of labor, in the 99th percentile for height, weight, and head size. He also had an infection, shoulder dystocia, a ring of hematomas around his crown, and required a cpap machine and pharmaceutical intervention to help his lungs absorb oxygen due to the prolonged compression of his chest.

On our fourth day in the NICU, my husband and I left to get dinner and received a call. Logan was having focal seizures localized to his right arm and leg, and they would need to do an immediate CT scan to look for the cause. We arrived as they received the results, and our neonatologist told us that our son suffered a stroke. His CT scan looked like his left sensory motor cortex hadn't develop at all. However, an MRA and MRI showed that his brain developed perfectly and, most likely, the injury occurred during the delivery. The neonatologist and the neurologist also told us that we could expect Logan to start showing symptoms as early as eight or nine months. I thought, "Thank God, I have time to research."

At four and a half months, I noticed that Logan always had his right arm forward at tummy time. I always just thought it was cute until I realized it was because he wasn't putting weight on his right arm. I thought I had time, but he already quit using his right arm, which never left a fist. I immediately took him to see Dr. Song Luo at [AOMA acupuncture clinic](#). After one treatment, Logan slept with his hand open for the first time ever. After a few days and a follow up treatment, I was holding Logan and felt this slimy sensation on my cheeks. After the initial thought of how much drool was covering Logan's hands, I realized he was grabbing my face with both hands!

Regular, local treatments have kept Logan's development on track. Even when he started to show weakness in his right leg, just two points on the stomach channel followed by massage led to him crawling forward for the first time. I talk to parents around the country caring for children who have suffered from strokes and hemiplegia, and without acupuncture, many of




these children grow up not being able to use their arm and often unable to walk unassisted. Dr. Luo tells me that Logan's experience is not uncommon. To see these children who aren't recovering and to know that acupuncture is so effective even with just three points and without needle retention is unacceptable to me.



Dr. Luo once shared a story about his great grandfather who taught him TCM. He was in his nineties and without hesitation, got up and got dressed in the middle of the night to help a patient in need. Dr. Luo said he taught him to practice medicine from the bottom of his heart, and it is this complete and utter compassion with which he approaches medicine that I feel makes him Logan's favorite doctor. His compassion and dedication combined with Logan's recovery have inspired me to dedicate myself even more in my studies in hopes of becoming a better acupuncturist when I graduate. These days, I don't generally ask the universe to keep Logan sturdy anymore. I know acupuncture has him covered. I just try to approach medicine and motherhood from the bottom of my heart.

Schedule an appointment at the AOMA acupuncture clinics in Austin:  
[www.aomaclinics.com](http://www.aomaclinics.com)



# Massage Therapists go to Acupuncture School, Study Chinese Medicine

[AOMA](#) has an incredibly diverse student body that consists of gifted practitioners with a wide variety of different histories, ethnicities, and hometowns. Many students come into their studies already having obtained a background in a particular healing modality or healthcare field. Specifically, a great deal of talented massage therapists have chosen to further their education by studying [Chinese Medicine and herbal medicine](#) at AOMA. We decided to interview them and share their knowledge and stories around returning to school after receiving massage training and combining the two complementary modalities.



## Massage Therapist/Acupuncturist in Training: Ammathyst Rose

### What prompted you to return to school?

Returning to school was always part of the master plan. My decision to get my massage license was to assist me in being able to pay the bills while returning to school, but the Universe must have felt I wasn't ready to do that for another five years because I wasn't generating enough cash to make it easy to drop down to a part time worker and a full-time student. Also, I still had a young child at home which required more home responsibility.

### Why did you choose AOMA?

It has the reputation for being a good school and it's regionally accredited which is an important factor for licensure. I had looked at another school in Hawaii because a friend had recommended it, and I thought with the amount of projects, friends and adventures I had going on, living here in Austin would make it very difficult to study and do well. Plus, it was Hawaii, need I say more? But my child did not want to move to Hawaii. So, when I let go of the idea of moving there, staying in Austin and attending AOMA just clicked. I had an "Ah-ha" moment and after that, the process unfolded quite easily.

## What is your background in massage therapy?

I have worked in the clinic setting at Collette Zygmonts Chiropractics and 27 Bones podiatry clinic. Polished my spa skills at the [Woodhouse Day Spa](#) and The Austin Omni Downtown. I have done volunteer work for Power to the Peaceful in San Francisco. I have offered massage at yoga conferences such as [Bhakti Fest](#) in Joshua Tree, and Tadasana Fest in Santa Monica, California. I have also had my own practice for the past 8 years.

## How has your massage therapy background impacted your experience as a student/practitioner of Chinese medicine?

As a bodyworker, I felt like I had worked through the initial awkwardness of working rather intimately with other people's bodies – sometimes total strangers – so I was able to hop into the role of being a practitioner fairly smoothly. I had also developed a relationship with the anatomy of the body through massage and so this particular aspect of learning at AOMA, whether it be locating the acupuncture points by way of feeling them with my hands or understanding verbal description of body landscape. Also physical assessment and anatomy and physiology classes were a bit easier because I had already studied those as part of the massage school curriculum.

## What has your experience been like as an acupuncture student?

I have had a great experience. There are great teachers here and AOMA is very supportive and full of a lot of good people.

## What advice do you have for other massage therapists returning to school?

Jump on board! Keep up your massage therapy skills, and see how you can keep helping people, but in an expanded way.

## Massage therapist/Acupuncturist in Training: Vanessa Huffman



## What prompted you to return to school?

also a licensed massage therapist) really opened up my interest in TCM and showed me that what I really wanted was to continue my path in the healing arts. After reading *The Web That Has No Weaver* and *Between Heaven and Earth* at his suggestion, I was fascinated. The rest is history!

## Why did you choose AOMA?

I transferred to AOMA after realizing that I wanted my TCM education to be strong in both herbs and acupuncture as well as containing biomedical integration.

## What is your background in massage therapy?

I received my training from The New York Institute of Massage. It's a very



medically grounded, and oddly enough, Shiatsu heavy curriculum. After graduating, I followed my passion for medical massage but quickly found that I was experiencing very powerful energetic experiences with many clients. This led me to discover Reiki and I am now a Certified Level 1 practitioner. Over the course of my career, I also absolutely fell in love with Ashiatsu. I took an advanced Ashiatsu training in 2011 and have been working almost exclusively in this modality ever since. It's a technique where you hold onto bars suspended from the ceiling and massage clients with your feet! AWESOME!

## How has your massage therapy background impacted your experience as a student/practitioner of Chinese medicine?

I was a small business owner as a massage therapist, but I also networked with a lot of other therapists and healthcare professionals. I think this has prepared me well for the realities and logistics of setting up a successful acupuncture practice.

In terms of clinical context and patient care, I've had the honor of building very profound therapeutic relationships with my massage clients. These relationships have taught me a lot about working with different personality types, energy profiles and dynamics in order to achieve therapeutic results. Each patient teaches me how to be his/her healer and in return, this process makes me both a more skilled practitioner and a more compassionate human being. All of the interactions and lessons learned (both successes and failures) doing massage inform my current interaction with TCM patients.

## What has your experience been like as an acupuncture student?

Studying TCM has been both a challenging and gratifying experience academically, personally, professionally and spiritually. It has fundamentally changed the way I see and interact with myself, others and the world around me for the better.

## What advice do you have for other massage therapists returning to school?

Studying TCM will be challenging but it will be worth it! Everything you already know tactilely and intuitively from being a bodyworker will apply

and be an advantage to you (and your patients), especially when working in clinic. An education in TCM will help you master powerful healing tools that will be able to impact state change in patients on a level that massage therapy alone has difficulty achieving. Studying TCM will deepen your ability to help others as a healer.

## Massage therapist/Acupuncturist in Training: Gene Kuntz II



What prompted you to return to school?

When I was a kid I watched kung fu movies all the time. In one of my favorites, "Hard to Kill" with Steven Segal, not only did he use acupuncture on himself with smoke coming off the ends (what I now know is moxa) he said, "anyone can hurt someone, it takes a true master to heal." That was the first time I really became inspired to learn about Oriental medicine. Years later, while studying martial arts, my master was able to not only kick through baseball bats but also help heal his students with tui na, acupuncture and massage. That was it! I figured I had learned how to fight long enough and would learn to heal people and myself. The next step for me was obvious: to get a feel for the energy and mechanics of the body with massage therapy before furthering my education with Oriental medicine. Step one: check.

## Why did you choose AOMA?

First, I should say that I chose Austin. It is an amazing city and only five hours from my home, and what can I say? I love my family. Of the two schools in Austin, I chose AOMA initially because of what I had read of Master Li and the qigong program. When I found out I didn't have enough hours to attend AOMA I started my Oriental medicine education at THSU, the other acupuncture school here in Austin just a stones throw away. Whenever I had enough credits to attend AOMA, I had to make a choice of whether to stay at THSU or transfer to AOMA. Both schools have amazing teachers and have acupuncturists graduate several times a year. I chose AOMA for three reasons:

1. The credits I receive from AOMA can be transferred to an accredited university.
2. The number of clinic opportunities and community outreach they provide.
3. The professionalism with which I was received the first time I walked in the door.

## What is your background as a massage therapist?

I have been a massage therapist for six years. I received my license in Lake Charles, Louisiana, at the [Louisiana Institute of Massage Therapy](#). The owner of the school was Susan Salvo, who literally wrote the book on massage therapy. (Seriously, most schools in the U.S. use her book. ) After I graduated,

I got a list of every massage therapy place in town and began calling them asking for a job. After a few days, I started at Massage Clinique and apprenticed under a talented sports and deep tissue therapist. Next, I got a job at Lake Charles's claim to fame, Lau Berge du lac, the local casino. I worked there for four years before moving to Austin. While in Austin, I have worked at Woodhouse Day Spa, Hess Chiropractic, Massage Harmony and am currently employed at what has become literally one of my favorite places ever to work: milk + honey day spa. In that time, I have had training in: repetitive use injury therapy, medical massage, supreme science qi gong, reiki, along with a myriad of spa treatments.

## How has your massage therapy background impacted your experience as a student/practitioner of Chinese medicine?

Massage therapy has helped me in so many ways as a student of Oriental medicine. I am comfortable doing intakes with clients/patients. I am aware of my energy and the energy of others, and how they can affect one another. I have become familiar with insurance billing and other administrative aspects of the business. From intake to treatment plan, the process is similar whether giving massage or performing acupuncture. The most important impact massage has had on my Oriental medicine skills is my sensitivity to touch, feel and palpate. It will be my hands and my ability to feel that guide the needle.

## What has your experience been like as an acupuncture student?

My experience at AOMA has been awesome. I came in as a transfer knowing about three people, and my first semester landed me in about 4 different cohorts. Lots of people to meet. In every class I felt welcome and am grateful to have had the opportunity to meet so many people in such a short time. With just a few terms in, it already feels like home. As far as academia, the school is legitimate. A serious endeavor with four years and a big chunk of change.

## **What advice do you have for other massage therapists returning to school?**

Massage therapy has been great to me while in school. It has given me a source of income and allowed me to feel more bodies as I learn a new art. If

you are coming into Oriental medicine school, be aware that it is much more intense than massage therapy school; a longer time and financial commitment. When I first looked into Oriental medicine school I had no idea of the intensity that would ensue. Think of getting a master's degree in any other subject: it is like that. So, if you're thinking of studying Oriental medicine, get ready for some intense awesomeness. This schooling has brought my knowledge to a level that I thought I could only find being trained by a sage on a mountain in China, and I still have a year left. My advice... if you're interested in studying healing arts for a good portion of your life, sign up.

Massage therapist/Acupuncturist in Training:  
Jessica Healy





## What prompted you to return to school?

I decided to return to school because I felt that during massage sessions the body was communicating more information to me than I had skills to interpret. I felt like there was more I could be doing for my clients if I could only learn how to understand better the feedback that the body was giving me. So, I decided to try and expand my knowledge through acupuncture, which has proven to be very useful. I also returned to school because after five years of practicing massage it was beginning to take a toll on my body. So, I wanted something I could do that would be a nice addition to my massage practice but would also give my hands and body a bit of a break.

## Why did you choose AOMA?

I chose AOMA because they have a strong herbal program, they have a great national reputation, and because my acupuncturist at the time recommended it to me, despite graduating from another school. Once, I visited AOMA I was sold on the good energy, friendly people and nice learning environment found on campus.

## What is your background as a massage therapist?

I graduated from The Costa Rica School of Massage Therapy in 2007. From there I went on to work in several different environments, from spas to wellness centers as well as having a small private practice on the side. The type of massage I enjoy the most is integrative deep tissue and craniosacral work.

## How has your massage therapy background impacted your experience as a student/practitioner of Chinese medicine?

My massage background has helped me greatly in the clinical setting, and has enhanced my learning process. Already being comfortable touching and talking with people has helped me to be able to dive right in and focus on the Chinese medicine theories, without worrying about developing those basic skills.

## What has your experience been like as an acupuncture student?

Being a student at AOMA has been life changing. It has been a challenging, but also very rewarding experience.

## What advice do you have for other massage therapists returning to school?

Returning to school is a big commitment and it is easy to lose yourself amongst all the books, so be sure to set aside time for yourself to do something you love. :)

# Catching Up With Ashley Oved, Acupuncturist, Cancer Treatment Centers of America



On Thursday, October 15, [AOMA Alumna](#) Ashley Oved presented “Acupuncture in the Integrative Hospital”, a Brown Bag Lecture about her experience with an increasingly common practice of providing acupuncture treatments in integrative settings.



We caught up with Ashley to ask her a few questions about her life at the [Cancer Treatment Centers of America](#) and how she felt her education at [AOMA](#) helped prepare her for the challenges she faces each day.

## **What does a typical work day look like for you at the hospital?**

There are two acupuncturists at this location and we each treat between 9-14 patients a day. It's a fast-paced environment but quite manageable. We treat most of our patients in the Outpatient Clinic but we also treat patients in the Intensive Care Unit or will visit them when they are receiving chemotherapy in the Infusion Center. Just recently, we've started Group Acupuncture twice a week which has been a huge success. Our patients really love acupuncture, so there is rarely a dull moment around here.

## **Do you feel like your training at AOMA adequately prepared you for work in an integrated environment?**

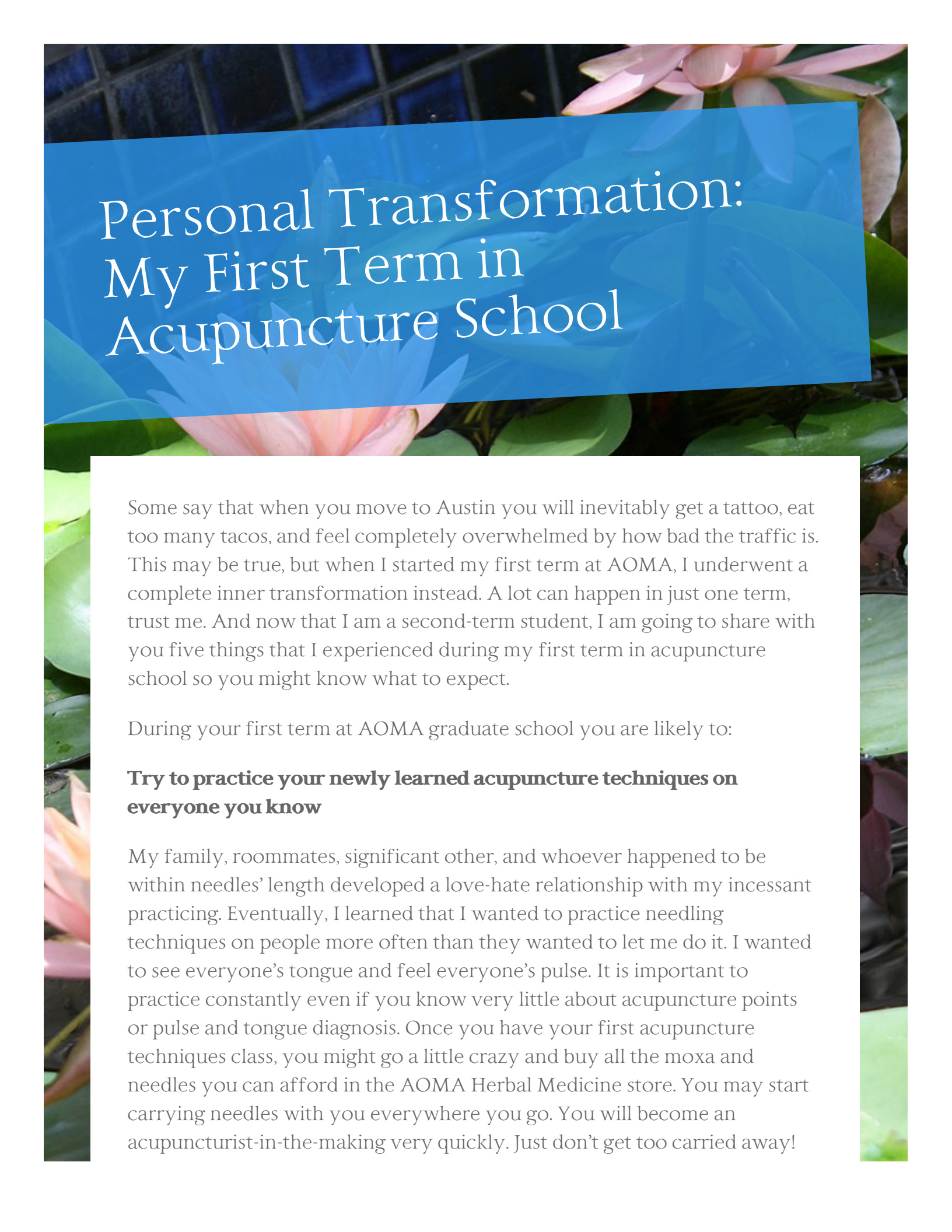
I really do! Working at [Seton Topfer](#) and [Austin Recovery](#) gave me a ton of experience. Austin Recovery intimidated me so much the first couple of weeks (shout out to Claudia Voyles for being my pillar of strength) but it was probably the best clinic I ever had at AOMA. It exposed me to a different patient population and prepared me for leading Group Acupuncture here at CTCA. The information I learned in the Physical Assessment classes has also come in handy. The first time I saw "No Babinski, Negative Romberg" on a patient's chart I thought, "I know what that means!"

## **Any advice for current students or alumni who are interested in working in an environment like CTCA?**

It's a good idea to focus in on a specialty. Whether it's pediatrics, oncology, or fertility it really is up to you. Get some books on what interests you, or take some online CEU's. Having that leg up gives you an advantage when applying for jobs. But truly my best advice is to just go out and apply. The clinical experience you gain in the student clinic has prepared you more than you know. You don't have to be the greatest acupuncturist that has ever lived. You just have to be confident in yourself and your abilities. If you continue to learn new techniques and keep up to date on the latest studies, you will be well on your way. There are many hospitals that already

incorporate acupuncture into their model of care, and many more on the verge of it. So don't get discouraged! There are definitely jobs out there.





# Personal Transformation: My First Term in Acupuncture School

Some say that when you move to Austin you will inevitably get a tattoo, eat too many tacos, and feel completely overwhelmed by how bad the traffic is. This may be true, but when I started my first term at AOMA, I underwent a complete inner transformation instead. A lot can happen in just one term, trust me. And now that I am a second-term student, I am going to share with you five things that I experienced during my first term in acupuncture school so you might know what to expect.

During your first term at AOMA graduate school you are likely to:

**Try to practice your newly learned acupuncture techniques on everyone you know**

My family, roommates, significant other, and whoever happened to be within needles' length developed a love-hate relationship with my incessant practicing. Eventually, I learned that I wanted to practice needling techniques on people more often than they wanted to let me do it. I wanted to see everyone's tongue and feel everyone's pulse. It is important to practice constantly even if you know very little about acupuncture points or pulse and tongue diagnosis. Once you have your first acupuncture techniques class, you might go a little crazy and buy all the moxa and needles you can afford in the AOMA Herbal Medicine store. You may start carrying needles with you everywhere you go. You will become an acupuncturist-in-the-making very quickly. Just don't get too carried away!

## **Attempt to diagnose every aspect of your health in terms of Chinese medicine**

Yes, you could have spleen *qi* deficiency. But chances are you don't have every disease you learn about from Dr. Qianzhi Wu in Foundations of Chinese Medicine. You will, however, become very conscious of every aspect of your health, which I would say is a good thing. And while there are probably some of you out there who have your health completely together, I sadly did not. I stopped eating both gluten and dairy in my second month of acupuncture school. And while that has made enjoying pizza almost completely impossible, I am so happy to have done it because I feel so much better! Through several acupuncture appointments, listening to my teachers' advice, taking plenty of herbs, and using my willpower I was able to wean myself off of all of my medications. You will learn many ways to take your health into your own hands, and you will find a community at AOMA that is very supportive of self-care.

## **Think your brain has reached maximum occupancy**

I remember studying for a particularly difficult Point Location test, and no matter how hard I tried I just could not retain all of that information at once. I thought that my career as an acupuncturist would be over in my first term. And although I did not make an A on that test, I did just fine, anyway. When preparing for an exam I have a tendency to blow things out of proportion and think my world is going to end if I don't earn an A. Do not be like me! Those who remain calm during test time always seem to make the best grades. There will be times that you just cannot possibly remember everything, especially during exam time. Just always do your best, and don't stress too much about it. And as one of my favorite teachers taught me — write your questions down! I would like to add that you should also write down everything you would like to remember in general. When it is crunch time, you will want some good notes to work with. Just remember, no matter how intense it gets, it is totally worth it!

## **Start believing that acupuncture must be magic and that it heals all ailments**

At first I was pretty skeptical. I wondered just how exactly a needle in your finger could help the cough you've had for a week. But I kept an open mind. You will learn, as I did, that acupuncture can help almost any ailment. If you need some convincing, get a treatment at the clinic. My treatments at the

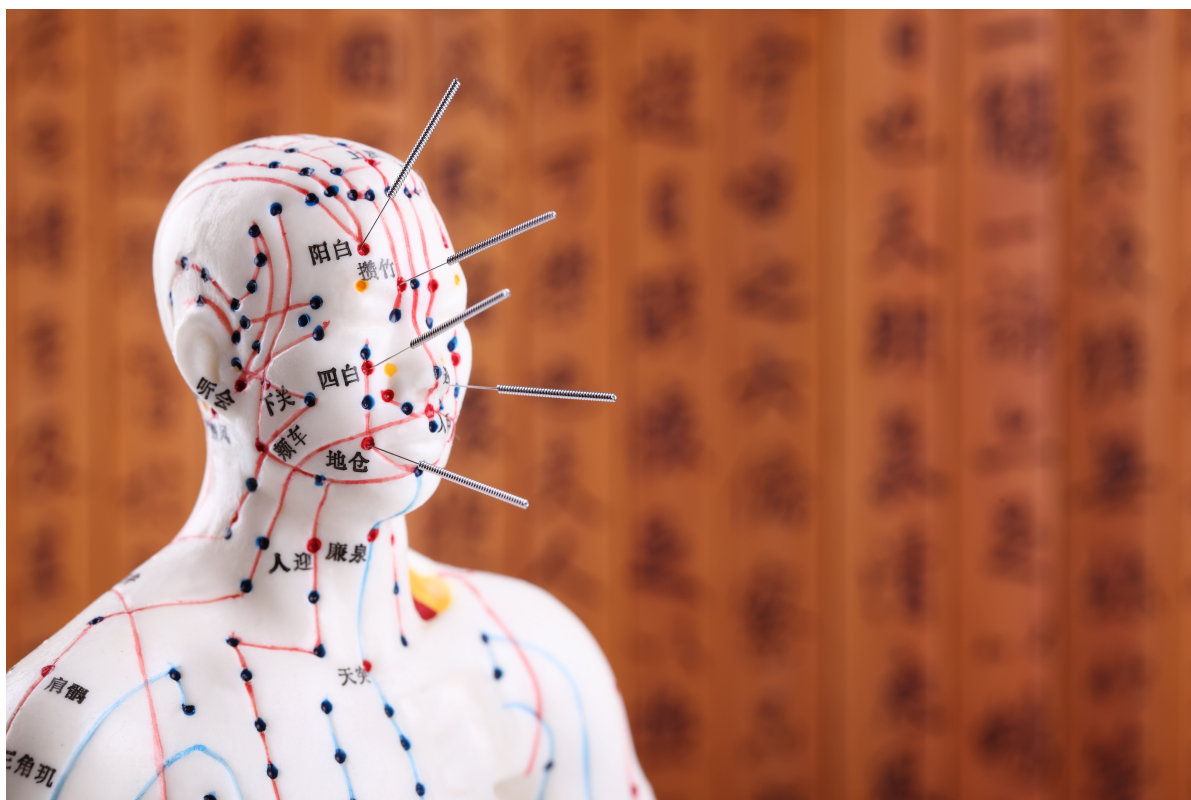
student clinic completely resolved my health problems that I thought I would be stuck with for life. On top of that, it feels like every class includes an introduction to a really cool acupuncture-style party trick. For instance, if you or someone you know is having a nosebleed, you can rub a spot on their foot to make it stop. No, I am not kidding; it really works. And this is just one example. So many things you learn when studying Chinese medicine will change your life. By the time I finished my first term I felt like a completely different and healthier person.

**Want to know everything all at once, because being patient is hard (for me)**

Patience is not my strong suit. I want to know everything so well that studying becomes trivial and I make A's on all my tests effortlessly. But it does not work that way. Most of the content you will learn in your courses is so foreign that at first you won't understand what exactly it is that you are memorizing. While you will have to remember that LU6 is the "Xi-Cleft" point of that channel, it might take you a whole other term to find out what it is exactly that Xi-Cleft points do. But that is okay because patience is a virtue. Just keep swimming!

One of the biggest hurdles of becoming an acupuncturist is having the patience to learn everything and learn it right. It will happen all in due time. Do not be in a huge hurry. I have to remind myself to take it one day at a time and that soon enough I will master the fundamentals of acupuncture and Chinese medicine.

# Chinese Medicine 101: 5 MORE Reasons to attend Acupuncture School



Choosing to attend acupuncture school may seem like an unconventional choice, but for the students who choose this path, that's okay. Completing a master's degree in acupuncture and Chinese medicine can lead to a rewarding career – one where your personal values are aligned with your professional ambitions.

## A Career That Matches Your Values



Many of the students who attend AOMA cite a desire to change the way healthcare is practiced in the U.S. as a motivating factor behind their decision to study Chinese medicine. For some, it's Chinese medicine's inherently integrative approach – viewing the impacts of physiological, mental, emotional, and environmental factors as equally important elements in human health – that makes it so different from other systems of care. With this in mind, it's no wonder that many acupuncturists seek out opportunities for professional integration and collaboration with other medical practitioners. For others, the practice of Chinese medicine provides an opportunity to address the healthcare needs of underserved patient communities and to expand access to genuinely patient-centered care.

## Transforming Your Life

One of the key themes expressed by students graduating from AOMA is just how truly transformational their experience in the graduate program was. Put quite simply, by the time you graduate from acupuncture school, you won't be the person you were when you started. You'll be someone different – a healer.

The decision to become a healthcare provider isn't one that is made lightly. It's often the result of much soul-searching, of listening to that persistent voice whispering of your desire to help others, of a vocation. No matter where you start from – whether it's a corporate boardroom or undergraduate classroom – when you finish your studies at AOMA, you'll be a competent, skilled healthcare professional ready to step out in the world and make a real difference in peoples' lives. Getting there takes a lot of hard work and personal dedication, but it is this very work and the overcoming of challenges that fosters personal growth.

## You're an Explorer at Heart

Despite its history spanning over two millennia, the prevalence of acupuncture and Chinese medicine in contemporary healthcare is often considered a relatively “new” phenomenon within Western medical communities. While organizations like the [World Health Organization](#) recognize the efficacy of acupuncture for the treatment of dozens of conditions, research into the mechanisms behind why and how acupuncture works is still relatively new within the scientific community. For curious students who always find themselves asking “why”, the field of acupuncture



and Chinese medicine provides many avenues to explore uncharted territory and to enhance our understanding of human health and the human body.

## You Want to Pay it Forward

Spend even a few minutes in AOMA's student lounge on the first day of classes, and you'll most likely overhear a new student talking about the impact acupuncture or Chinese medicine had on his/her own life. Graduate students often start out as patients – maybe acupuncture was the only form of treatment that provided relief from chronic pain; or maybe qigong helped restore balance to an unsustainable lifestyle; or perhaps acupuncture and herbal medicine even aided in the conception of a first child. Whatever the experience, many students often start out by experiencing the power of this medicine first hand before deciding they want to play a role in ensuring that others can find the same relief and benefit.

## Your Social Network will get Bigger

One of the most interesting things about describing a “typical acupuncture student” is how hard it is to do. Students of Chinese medicine come from *all* walks of life – they're former nurses, massage therapists, computer programmers, teachers, military veterans, biologists, social workers, yogis, writers, doctors, lawyers, corporate executives, and so much more. Despite these differences, there is a common theme – the desire to help others. Studying Chinese medicine introduces you not only to a new system of medicine – but also a new network of people you can connect with and relate to. After a few terms studying acupuncture and Chinese medicine, you might discover yourself feeling at ease amongst a whole new set of peers.

Can you think of another reason you'd like to study Chinese medicine? If so, feel free to leave a comment. To learn more about studying at AOMA, visit: <https://aoma.edu/admissions>.

# From Liberal Arts to Acupuncture



I had just graduated from [Austin College](#) in May 2012 when I felt a sense of impending doom. I had completed my bachelor's degree without deciding what I wanted to do for my career, what I wanted to be now that I was all “grown up”. This was a big deal at the time because I have always been the girl with a plan. I am always thinking about my future goals and what I need to do to accomplish them. Once I walked off the stage of my graduation, I felt that I had a big decision to make, and I wanted to make it quickly.

For a while, I was at a loss for what career I should pursue. I have always

wanted to do something that helps people, that makes people's lives better, but I did not know which career would suit me best. I had gotten my degree in Spanish because I really enjoyed the language and I wanted to travel during school, but I did not really want to be a Spanish teacher or a translator. I could use my Spanish language skills in almost any work environment, but I did not want it to be the focus of what I did or what I could offer people. I knew in my heart that I wanted something more.

I thought about my options for a little over a year. I spent some time figuring out who I was and who I wanted to be. At some point, I got tired of being sick all the time. And even though I went to a liberal arts school and learned a lot, I had never heard of integrative medicine or acupuncture. My undergraduate education taught me to be open-minded and that there were things in the world which I did not understand, but that did not make them any less valid. So I went to an acupuncture clinic on a whim. And as strange and unfathomable as acupuncture was at the time, I am so glad that I chose to try it.

***"If I had not taken that leap of faith, I would not be here telling you my story or even getting my master's degree in Oriental medicine."***

Growing up, I was constantly developing new illnesses that needed prescriptions from the doctor. Unfortunately, I had not felt much relief of my symptoms through modern Western medicine, so I thought it was time to try something different. By the time I met Dr. Chapa at [Valley Ranch Acupuncture](#) in Irving, Texas, I was on five different medications. Now, a little over a year later, with the help of acupuncture, herbs, and some hard work of my own, I am symptom free, 40 pounds lighter, off all of my medications, and happier than ever. Being open-minded and willing to try new things, like acupuncture, has deeply influenced my life in a very positive way.

If I had never tried acupuncture, I do not know where I would be now. If I had not taken that leap of faith, I would not be here telling you my story or even getting my master's degree in Oriental medicine. And acupuncture has not only improved my life, it has improved the lives of my patients. There is no greater feeling in the world than knowing that you have made a real impact on someone's health and life. My patients give me that utmost sense

of accomplishment- the handshakes and hugs I get in thanks for listening to them and treating them are the most rewarding part of this life I have chosen. It turns out that the gift of serving others is more rewarding than any work I have done for myself.

Finally, if I have learned anything from going to school, both at the undergraduate level and now in graduate school here at [AOMA](#), it is that my degree is a stepping stone that I can use to accomplish anything I desire. When I first sought out acupuncture it was because I wanted to feel healthy. However, in turn, my own quest for health inspired me to show others that they could feel good too. Never be afraid to try something new. Do not worry if people will think you are crazy. Nothing stands in your way in dictating your own life. Do that which you truly desire and what really speaks to your soul; get there as quickly as possible. Trust me, it is worth it.



# Acupuncture Student's First Clinical Experience



When I first came to [AOMA](#) in Austin to attend acupuncture school, I was thrilled. Yet, I have always been anxious about this day – I am about to go into my first clinic as a treating acupuncture intern. I am writing this only a few hours before I go into clinic. I am nervous, excited, and slightly nauseous. I've finally arrived at the day that I will meet a complete stranger and put acupuncture needles in him/her! This is what all Oriental medicine students have been waiting for!

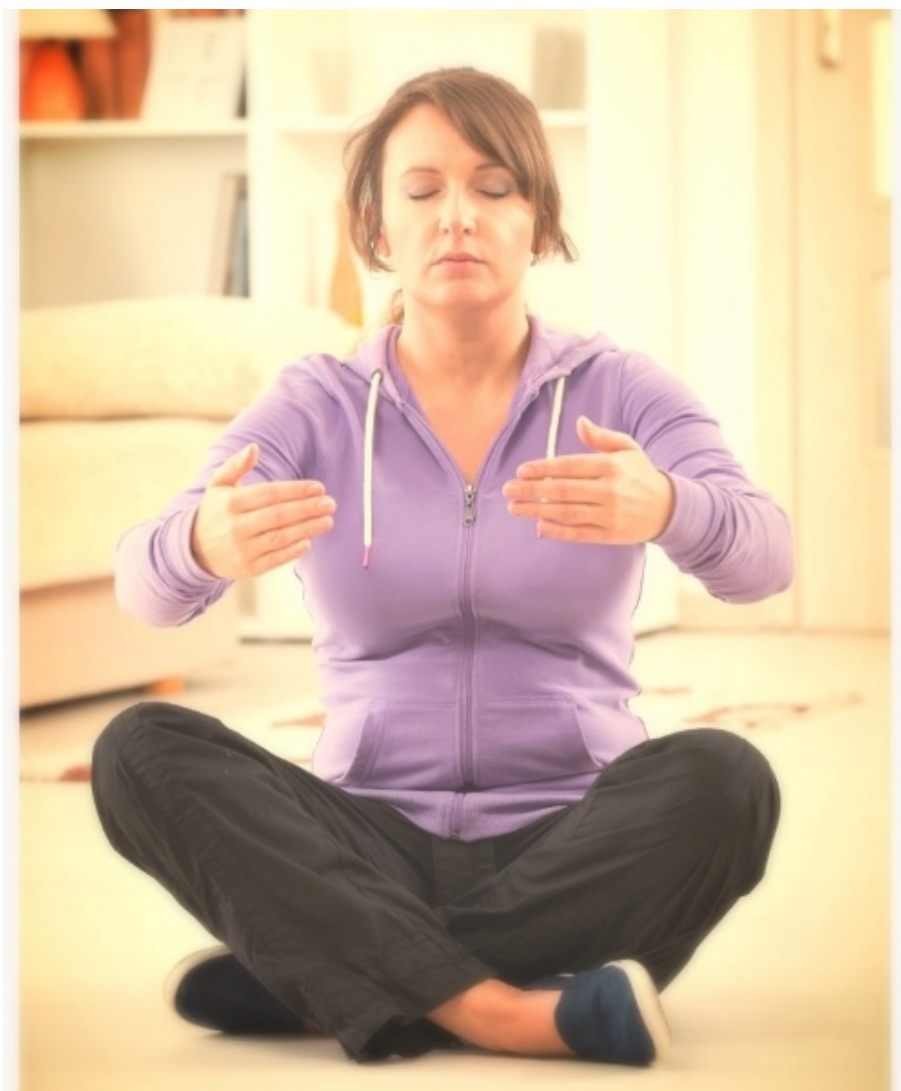
My only hope is that I can help someone. It is all a little nerve-wracking to



have patients' care in my hands for the first time. Everyone in my cohort has been praying this week to only get patients with local qi and blood stagnation because it is supposed to be the easiest to treat. Please, please don't let me get a chief complaint of cataracts or really anything to do with someone's eyes. I don't know if I am ready treat such a sensitive area, although, I guess when the time comes I will have to be ready. It's a good thing there are supervisors and residents there to assist me.

For those of you who are observing in clinic right now you might notice that some of your interns are doing their best but are very anxious. And you know what? That is perfectly alright. It is okay if you have to double check your school materials. I am going to have to do that plenty myself. Chinese medicine is complicated after all. Let's not forget that acupuncture is an art form; there is no one right way. If you don't happen to remember where a point is located or what energetics it has, don't fret too much. As acupuncture students, we are supposed to be learning right now. Mistakes will happen, but don't think it's the end of the world. The great part is, even if you don't do everything right, you are still making a huge difference in the lives of your patients. At least that's what I am telling myself right now. Wish me luck!

# Qigong: The Art of Staying Sane during Acupuncture School



When I first started acupuncture school at [AOMA](#), qigong was just another

required class on the academic docket. It was a mysterious movement therapy and meditative spiritual practice that I had heard about but had never tried myself and wasn't particularly excited to learn, to be honest. Sure, I was open-minded and amped up about anything that was a part of my beloved, brand spanking new venture into a healing arts education. I can't, however, say that I came to AOMA knowing enough about qigong to be thrilled about beginning a regular practice of it. Sure, it was reputed to be incredibly stress-relieving and relaxing...but it was also more credits to be earned in an excruciatingly long four year long program. Little did I then realize how crucial qigong would eventually become to support- my well-being in grad school, and more notably, my sanity.

As aspiring professionals in the field of the healing arts, we as students sometimes forget how the medicine we are engaging with requires us to become caretakers, to consistently be placing our time, energy and resources into helping others feel stronger, healthier, better, more joyful and balanced. This makes it extra important for us to be on top of our own self-care and ensure we are, ourselves, exceptionally healthy, strong, balanced and joyful. Because if we don't embody these qualities, how can we model them to others?

Unfortunately, massively busy schedules and expected graduate school stressors, including hours and hours of memorizing foreign material such as tedious locations of tiny, specific acupuncture points and long lists of unpronounceable herb names certainly are not conducive to keeping us calm, stress-free and balanced. In fact, I can say in full disclosure that I have seen many a student panic under pressure and nearly run in the opposite direction from the stressors of this graduate program (myself included, ahem).

However, all breakdowns aside, the end rewards of completing the program are without a doubt, worth every ounce of personal challenge. Despite the multi-dimensional benefits of the profound personal growth that seems to be a necessary side-dish of enrollment at AOMA, it's true that we as students need to continually be seeking outlets that ground us, help us nourish ourselves, release stress and calm our minds enough that we can continually revisit the magic of studying this medicine thoroughly despite the chaotic challenges that may surface along the journey.

One of these outlets that I accidentally stumbled upon was qigong -- and to this day it has become one of my primary anchors through this program.

Initially I experienced resistance to it, I'll admit...mostly because at the beginning of the program, I was so exhausted from the intense mental workouts that left me feeling like I would rather skip this "mandatory" class and just sleep more. The self-sabotaging aspects of laziness and burnout crept up on me more than once, but then something happened one day in my qigong class: I relaxed into what I was doing, pushed past the resistance and allowed for moving of the energy in my body in ways which felt incredibly healing and not the least bit tiring. I left the class feeling massively energized and WAY loosened up. Liver qi stagnation, be gone! I had renewed vigor and excitement for being in my academic classes and learning (aka, memorizing away until my brain exploded), my body felt stronger and healthier, and I felt noticeably more FULL: full of vibrant life force energy and more capable of caring for my clients from that place instead of from the droopy place of total burnout.

So that's what truly sold me -- it wasn't the proclaimed or advertised benefits of the practice, it was the undeniable personal experience with this ancient art that led to me being able to maximize and master my own energy in a myriad of ways, subsequently allowing me to be a better, more grounded, embodied (and mentally stable!) practitioner for my patients (and, simply put, a better person in general). Qigong helps me calm my nerves and emotions, it helps break apart any stagnation that accumulates from hours of sitting in cold classrooms, it allows me to tap into the qi from nature and the Universe in powerful ways which feed me and refill the places that get drained consistently from being a student and a busy, active woman with many a ball to juggle. It helps me come back into and connect to MYSELF: and this is a crucial task for anyone that is holding space for others on a daily basis, or learning to step into that role in their lives.

Not convinced or feeling the magic yet? Maybe you just need to find the right qigong form that is a good match for YOUR body and your needs, and there are so many of them that you won't find a shortage of options to choose from. We learn a limited selection here at AOMA, but I have gone on to find some incredibly potent forms outside of what we are taught in the dojo that have become absolute necessities in my daily self-care regimens. And sure -- there are still some days where I am too tired to do much of anything, and that's okay too. However, when I push past the hesitation and the excuses my mind feeds me and spend even 10 to 15 minutes in moving meditation, I absolutely never regret doing so.

One helpful resource to check out is the Qigong Institute:

- <http://www.qigonginstitute.org/html/GettingStarted.php>

Here is the list of AOMA's qigong community classes in Austin, TX, for students interested in juicing up their practices outside of class requirements:

<https://aoma.edu/continuing-education/community-classes/qigong-classes/>



# Chinese Medicine School: What is Qi?

## *What exactly is “Qi?”*



AOMA student interns and practitioners are posed this question often in clinic, so we decided to explain the fundamental concept of Qi so patients can have a better understanding of this term so frequently used during their treatments.

Qi, pronounced "chee," essentially means vital energy. It refers to the circulating life force, the existence and properties of which are the basis of much Chinese philosophy and medicine. You may see it spelled "Chi" or even "Ki" in Japanese, or called "prana" in India, but all of these terms carry

the same meaning.

Qi is the energy of the body, of the meridians, of food, of the universe. It is the basic vibratory nature of all phenomena – the flow and movement that is happening continuously at molecular, atomic, and sub-atomic levels.

All of Chinese medicine (CM) starts with this concept of Qi, because it is energy being described in its broadest sense or meaning.

### **Here are some basic tenets of Qi within the philosophy of Chinese medicine:**

- Qi is universal.
- The term Qi embraces all manifestations of energy, from the most material and tangible aspects of energy (such as your cell phone, your physical body and the earth beneath your feet) to the most immaterial, intangible aspects (light, movement, heat, thought/emotion).
- Qi is in a state of endless, dynamic flux, constantly transforming from one aspect of Qi into another. It is never created and it is never destroyed, but instead simply changes in its form and manifestation.
- There are many different kinds of Qi.
- Qi is the leading force behind blood circulation.
- Qi circulates in the human body mainly along 12 major meridians, corresponding to all of the major organs in CM theory.
- The network formed by the meridians which Qi runs through connects organs, tissues, veins, nerves, cells, atoms, and consciousness itself.
- When Qi is balanced and free-flowing in the human body, a state of vibrant health is naturally cultivated in that individual.

### **Qi as it Pertains to your Health**

One fundamental concept of Chinese medicine is that balanced and free-flowing Qi results in health while stagnant or imbalanced Qi eventually leads to disease. This is true not only at the level of the human body, but also in terms of natural landscapes – mountains, rivers, forests – and man-made structures such as houses, parks and office-buildings.

In the same way CM practitioners diagnose energetic imbalances in the bodies of their patients and work to re-establish balance through freely moving Qi, so do feng shui practitioners perceive energetic imbalances in varying landscapes and settings, and then apply various specialized techniques to remedy those imbalances. In both cases, the goal is to establish

a more open flow of energy in the particular environment, whether it is external or internal. When CM practitioners are able to establish a balanced state of free-flowing Qi in the body, it allows the human body to optimize the innate healing abilities we are all naturally born with.

While all patients are constitutionally different and may be working with unique blueprints for health and vitality, naturally flowing Qi is considered by Chinese medicine to be the root of wellness for all individuals.

## **Different Kinds of Qi**

Practitioners of Chinese Medicine and qigong have identified many different kinds of Qi. According to Chinese Medicine's basic philosophy and Taoist cosmology, the two most fundamental forms of Qi are Yin Qi and Yang Qi – the primordial feminine and masculine energies.

Within the human body, we contain the basic Qi that we are each born with, called Yuan Qi, or ancestral Qi. The Qi that we absorb during the course of our lives from food, water, oxygen and qigong practices is called post-natal Qi. The Qi that flows at the surface of the body, as a protective sheath that also helps cultivate immunity, is called Wei Qi or protective Qi. Each internal organ also has its own Qi, such as Lung Qi, Spleen Qi, Kidney Qi, and so on. Many qigong practices also utilize what is referred to as Heaven Qi and Earth Qi, as well as the natural environmental Qi that emanates specifically from trees, mountains, the ocean, and other natural elements.

It is said in the Chinese medical classics that all of life is a gathering of Qi. A healthy and happy human being is a dynamic yet harmoniously balanced mixture of all the aspects of Qi that make up who we are. In order to talk about the relationships between the various aspects and manifestations of Qi within a given context, Chinese philosophy employs the concept of “Yin” and “Yang.”

*You can read about the CM concept of Yin and Yang in our blog post <http://blog.aoma.edu/blog/bid/286300/Chinese-Medicine-School-Basic-Yin-Yang-Theory> and watch a video of Dr. Jamie Wu talking about Yin/Yang Theory here <http://blog.aoma.edu/blog/bid/223412/Dr-Wu-speaks-on-Yin-Yang-Theory-Video>.*



# 5 Tips for Self-care: TCM and Beyond



Self-care is a buzzword that's mentioned a lot these days, but I feel like the meaning can get lost when tossed around so frequently. What does self-care really mean? Care of oneself, sure, that's easy. We eat, we drink, we sleep – our needs are met, we are cared for. Right?

“Self-care” can be defined as intentional actions that you take in order to care for your own physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. While eating, drinking, and sleeping would all technically be considered self-care, I'd like to explore the idea a bit further than the basics to stay alive. Our bodies are

generally pretty good at making sure our physical needs are met, so what often falls by the wayside is our mental and emotional wellbeing. Here are some approachable and affordable suggestions for incorporating more self-care activities into your daily routine:

## 1. Get Acupuncture

Being poked by needles may not be the first item on your “self-care and relaxation” to-do list, but it should be. Hear me out! Symptoms of stress can manifest physically (fatigue, muscle tightness, insomnia, illness, etc.) or emotionally (depression, anxiety, mood swings, poor concentration, etc.) and vary greatly from person to person.

Acupuncture acts on areas of the brain known to reduce sensitivity to pain and stress, also promoting relaxation and deactivating the “analytical” brain, which handles anxiety and worry ([www.acupuncture.org](http://www.acupuncture.org)). Research done on a specific acupuncture point (*yintang*) has shown that, when used during acupuncture or acupressure, this particular point lowered the reported stress levels of volunteers (Fassoulaki). Other research done on the success rates of in vitro fertilization, or IVF, found that women undergoing acupuncture combined with IVF had higher successful implantation rates compared with those who did not receive acupuncture (Balk). The [World Health Organization](#) lists physical stress symptoms such as fatigue, sleep disturbances, depression, and pain among the problems that acupuncture has proven effective in treating. You can receive acupuncture when these symptoms arise or go in for regular “preventative” visits to stay ahead of any imbalances.

## 2. Meditate

For many people, meditation might be the most intimidating item on this list. I used to think of meditation as something completely unapproachable, something that only *tai chi* masters and yoga gurus have the discipline to do. I thought meditation wasn't for me. Not true! I've since found that simple, approachable meditation practices such as “alternate nostril breathing” (below) can be effective at reducing stress and bringing my awareness back to the present. Also, apps like Buddhify and Headspace offer a variety of guided meditations for all moods and situations, and you can always check out a class at AOMA! Every Sunday evening from 5-6pm there is a [free meditation class](#) at the AOMA South campus – no registration or materials



are required.

### **Alternate Nostril Breathing:**

- In this exercise, the breath should be relaxed, deep and full.
- Use the thumb of the right hand to close the right nostril, and the index finger or ring finger of the right hand to close the left nostril.
- Close the right nostril and inhale through the left nostril.
- Then close the left nostril and exhale through the right nostril.
- Then inhale through the right nostril.
- Close the right nostril and exhale through the left nostril.
- Continue repeating, alternating nostrils after each inhalation.
- Inhale left, exhale right: helps to make you calm and integrates unwanted negative emotions and stress, excellent by itself before bed.
- Inhale right, exhale left: Gives clarity and positive mood, helps us to focus on what is important. ([www.3ho.org](http://www.3ho.org))

## 3. Exercise

Aerobic exercise causes your brain to produce more endorphins, which are the body's natural painkillers and "feel-good" neurotransmitters. Exercise also maintains both physical and mental fitness, reduces fatigue, improves alertness and concentration, and enhances cognitive function. It doesn't have to be high-intensity or long-duration; even just 5 minutes of aerobic exercise can stimulate anti-stress effects ([www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)). My personal recommendations include yoga, *qigong*, *tai chi*, walking, running, or swimming, but any activity that inspires you to get up and get moving is perfect! Studies have shown that both brisk walking and *tai chi* can reduce levels of the stress hormone cortisol and improve mood (Putai).

## 4. Hydrate

This is the easiest item on the whole list yet the one that I struggle with the most! All our organs need water to function, and studies have shown that being just a half-liter dehydrated can increase your body's cortisol levels (Shireffs). Stress also causes your body to release more water by elevating your heart rate and increasing both ventilation and perspiration (Maresh). Drinking a glass of water won't make your problems disappear, but dehydration will make you feel worse! Keeping your body fully hydrated will enable you to perform better under pressure and may help you feel less stressed. I use an app called Plant Nanny that reminds me to hydrate

throughout the day and helps me track my daily water intake in a cute, fun way.

## 5. Think Happy Thoughts

An important aspect of self-care is thinking about and focusing on things that inspire you to feel more positive and hopeful. Research has shown that negative thinking can both produce and sustain depression, which can then affect memory and cognitive brain function (Teasdale). There’s a quick and easy “positive words” exercise that I like to do in the mornings, sometimes while the coffee is brewing or even before I get out of bed. I stand or lay quietly for a minute or two and brainstorm a list of random positive words – no order, no logic, no pressure – just a free-flow of any positive words that come to mind. It can be challenging some days but it’s always fun, and most of the time I’m smiling before I even realize it. Typically I don’t write anything down, but this morning I did so that I could share my list with you:

Laugh	Smile	Abundance	Love	Share
Joy	Mercy	Compassion	Inspired	Blessing
Happy	Fulfilled	Embrace	Brave	Enjoy
Thankful	Goal	Accomplish	Success	Friend
Brilliant	Positive	Giving	Awesome	Connected
Sunshine	Ready	Cherish	Healthy	Fun

Making this list took me just 3 minutes; I smiled while I was writing it and I’m smiling again as I re-type it now. Try it for yourself! It’s amazing how powerful a few words of affirmation can be when they brighten your day and remind you of the positivity that already exists inside your own head.

## 6. Bonus Tip: Ask for Help

If you try all the items on this list and don't feel any positive improvements in your sense of wellbeing, it may be time to look outside yourself for help. Reaching out to a trusted friend or another member of your support system might help, or you may need to seek the advice of a qualified medical professional like a therapist or counselor. Your body might also be trying to tell you something, and a visit to your primary care physician could reveal an underlying medical cause for your symptoms. Please feel free to contact the [AOMA Clinics](#) for recommendations on local acupuncture-friendly

physicians and specialists.

Resources:

Balk, Judith, et al. "The relationship between stress, acupuncture, and IVF patients: a pilot study." *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*. Volume 16, Issue 3, August 2010, Pages 154–157

Fassoulaki, Argyro, et al. "Pressure Applied on the Extra 1 Acupuncture Point Reduces Bispectral Index Values and Stress in Volunteers." *Anesthesia & Analgesia*: March 2003 - Volume 96 - Issue 3 - pp 885-890

Maresh, C.M. et al. "Effect of Hydration State on Testosterone and Cortisol Responses to Training-Intensity Exercise in Collegiate Runners." *Int J Sports Med* 2006; 27(10): 765-770

Pomeranz, Bruce. "Scientific Research into Acupuncture for the Relief of Pain." *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*. August 2007, 2(1): 53-60.

Putai, Jin. "Efficacy of Tai Chi, brisk walking, meditation, and reading in reducing mental and emotional stress." *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, Volume 36, Issue 4, May 1992, Pages 361–370

Shirreffs, S M. "Markers of Hydration Status" *Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness* 40.1 (Mar 2000): 80-4.

Teasdale, John D. "Negative Thinking in Depression: Cause, effect, or reciprocal relationship?" *Advances in Behaviour Research and Therapy*. Volume 5, Issue 1, 1983, Pages 3–25

[www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety](http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety)

<https://www.3ho.org/files/pdfs/alternate-nostril-breathing.pdf>

<http://www.acupuncture.org.uk/a-to-z-of-conditions/a-to-z-of-conditions/stress.html>

<http://johnsoncook.com/positive-words-exercise-nob...>

AOMA GRADUATE SCHOOL *of*  
INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

Want more information?



Thank you for reading our ebook. To learn more about our campus, programs and community, please click the link below

LEARN MORE

made with  
*Beacon*