

One School's Model

Initially Provided For The White Pine Forum On Big Ideas

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Spring, 2026

The profession has a training problem, and it's not clinical.

Our graduates leave school with palpable skills and a great deal of clinical knowledge. They have the ability to help alleviate suffering and bring people back into connection with themselves, each other, and the seasons. What they often lack is the foundation to turn their hard-won skills into a practice that sustains them. At the [Seattle Insitute of East Asian Medicine](#), we're treating the gap in business education as seriously as we treat any deficiency in clinical training.

Students at SIEAM enter the clinic in their first week. That's been true for years. What we're folding in now is sustainable business training from the beginning: a scaffolded approach to professional development that grows across all three to four years, rather than appearing as a single required course students complete and forget.

Financial literacy starts in the first year, and is woven into clinical observation. SIEAM faculty have identified elements of successful practice, and students begin recognizing these elements in real encounters from the start. In the second year, students shadow established practices and analyze them to understand what makes them work. The third year brings formal coursework in business concepts, discussions with practitioners and health care business professionals, and culminates in a draft business plan. After that, in the fourth year, they take a trimester-long entrepreneurship course we developed in partnership with E4E, [an organization which has been teaching small business education for many years](#). The course is tailored specifically for acupuncturists. It will be open to practicing acupuncturists in the broader community as well, because we want everyone in the profession to thrive.

Mentorship also begins in year one, with first-year students mentored by those in later years. After graduation, alumni can participate in a revived mentorship program pairing them with volunteer mentors from the community, in addition to staying in touch with faculty. This creates a continuous support structure that extends well beyond graduation.

Alongside business education and mentorship, SIEAM is working with faculty on a plan to consolidate its siloed biomedical and East Asian medicine content into an interdisciplinary whole beginning in fall of 2026. This will only affect incoming students. We're tightening the curriculum and offering integrated classes. ACAHM's requirements are below our, and most other program lengths.

The curriculum consolidation will eliminate redundancy and, importantly, create time for students to hold a job while they're in school. This means they have to take out fewer loans, and can graduate with significantly less debt.

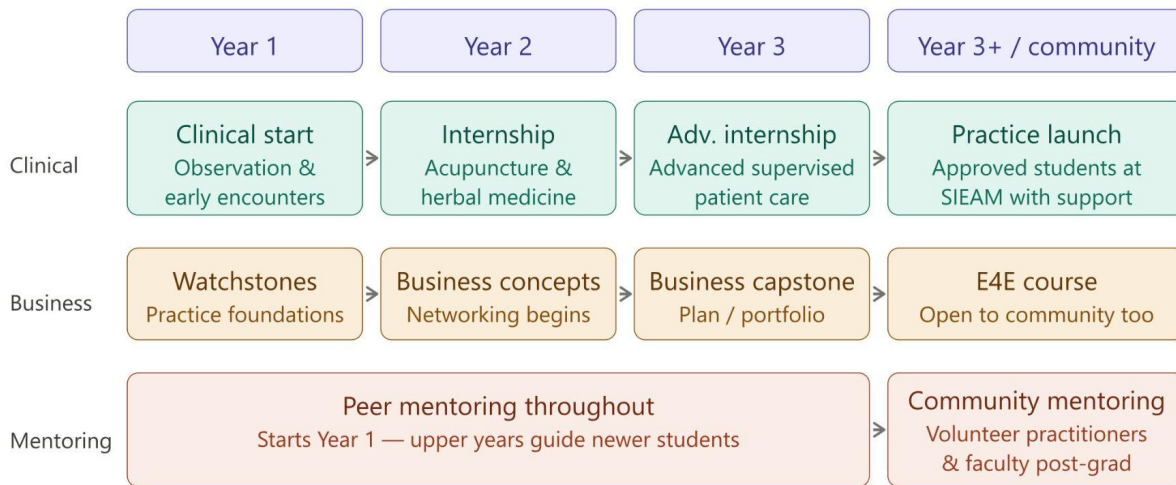
The third piece is the one that's hardest to summarize quickly. SIEAM has launched the [first bodywork certification program](#) of its kind in the country, approved by ACAHM, the Washington Massage Board, and WorkForce agencies. [The Certificate In Asian Medical Bodywork](#) started in May, 2026, and runs on evenings and one weekend a month. It's designed for working people. Graduates are eligible to become licensed massage therapists. If they go on to the acupuncture program, they can begin setting up their practices and be well-compensated while they continue their studies.

What connects all of this is a conviction that financial sustainability is part of clinical training, not separate from it. A practitioner who can't pay rent can't practice the medicine, and their communities can't benefit from their ever-evolving skill and knowledge. We have a plan for training practitioners to be successful, as well as compassionate and effective.

Below is a schematic that shows our plan, which is still in process:

Training Compassionate, Effective, and Successful Practitioners

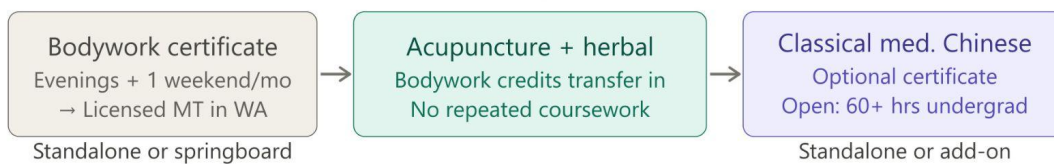
SIEAM curriculum design



Curriculum structure



Stackable pathways



■ Clinical
 ■ Business
 ■ Mentoring
 ■ Curriculum
 ■ Pathway entry

Taken together, these changes reflect our thinking in a holistic way about the full arc of a practitioner’s training and career. SIEAM is addressing everything from foundational clinical learning, to business readiness, to ongoing mentorship, while simultaneously broadening access to the medicine through a flexible, stackable pathway that may begin with bodywork. The result is a curriculum that is more integrated, more practically oriented, and more connected to the real-world needs of both graduates and the communities they serve.