

## The Third Meeting of Schools *A Walk Along the Path of Self-Regulation*

**P**atience . . . balance . . . humor . . . these were just a few of the notable qualities individuals offered to the group during the opening ceremony of the third Meeting of the Schools, which assembled in the days before this year's SYTAR in beautiful Pacific Grove, California. The Educational Standards Committee recently released their draft of proposed standards for the entry-level training of yoga therapists. The meeting provided an opportunity for program directors and other representatives from yoga therapy training programs to voice feedback.

As a newcomer to this group, representing Professional Yoga Therapy during Ginger Garner's maternity leave, I was not sure what to expect. How can yoga therapy training be standardized while respecting yoga's rich tradition? Would each school not be biased in favor of their own training program and lineage? I cannot be sure whether it was the fresh Pacific coast air or the collection of well-medicated yogis in attendance, but the level of respectful discussion employed over those two days was impressive.

Our stalwart facilitator, Dan Seitz, started off the meeting with a description of the self-regulation process as he has witnessed it through his work in the field of naturopathic medicine and acupuncture. Although the process may be challenging, we were reminded of our intention to create genuinely qualified practitioners of yoga therapy for years to come. By establishing greater structure and organization of our blossoming field, we can promote safe and effective practice while creating a professional interface with the outside world. Each program is encouraged to retain its individuality rather than being required to share a blanket curriculum. Schools may consider partnering with each other, adding advanced modules, or accepting transfer hours from specialty programs in order to meet the new standards. As one committee member suggested, many different trails can lead to the top of the mountain. Indeed, once an attitude of abundance was accepted, cooperation ensued.

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We formed small groups to delve into the details of the three sections of the proposed standards—a definition of yoga therapy, an outline of required competencies, and guidelines for establishing a minimum number of training hours. The definition<sup>1</sup> was well received, with only a few suggestions for improvement. Many participants felt the word “spirit” should be explicit in the definition, while others found the word too charged for some populations and preferred the term “unchanging awareness.” Some asked for clarification of the term “a disciplined lifestyle,” as well as a shortened, “elevator,” definition of yoga therapy.

The discussions over competencies were vast. Everyone appreciated the obvious time and effort put forth by the committee, and the breadth of topics covered received general approval. Some requested a greater use of Sanskrit, while others wanted further translation of the traditional language of yoga to allow broad comprehension by the public. Scope of practice was a frequent discussion point—what are our boundaries as yoga therapists? What is the required depth of knowledge in biomedical and psychological sciences? How much



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**Member-school representatives in group discussion. Dan Seitz, standing, facilitates.**

training in Ayurveda should be included? Opinions varied on these topics, and a frequent suggestion was the development of sub-specialties within the general field of yoga therapy.

After expressing our opinions regarding the basic knowledge required to be a yoga therapist, we broached the topic of training hours. The majority supported a minimum of 800 training hours. While some attendees felt they could transmit the knowledge in fewer hours, others suggested a higher requirement, particularly with regard to practicum hours. Differing thoughts were shared over prerequisites. How many hours of experience teaching yoga should be required before entry into a yoga therapy training program—200 hours, 500 hours, 5 years? Or is it better to begin therapeutic training while the practitioner is still green? How much time needs to pass between initial teacher training and therapist training? At what point does a student of yoga integrate the teachings into daily life and experience changes on a cellular level? Overall, most attendees were in support of both strong prerequisites and a high level of training to ensure the development of well-qualified yoga therapists.

As our meeting came to a close, we turned our attention back to the Standards Committee, which is charged with translating the feedback into a finalized proposal. Their proposal will be sent out to the schools and membership for a second round of comments before presenting their recommendations to the IAYT board early next year. This fruitful Meeting of the Schools brought us a few steps further along our path of self-regulation. I left the meeting with a profound sense of gratitude that I am a witness to the unfolding of our profession. **YTI**



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1. Editor's note: The definition of yoga therapy described in this article can be found on IAYT's website (see the home page at [www.iayt.org](http://www.iayt.org) for the link).