IAYT’s Member Schools Committee (MSC) hosted the annual Meeting of Schools ahead of SYTAR 2023. This year’s meeting began with the MSC presenting the results of a school survey revealing their current top priorities: the business of yoga therapy education and the sharing of ideas (or sangha and collaboration). Long-time MSC volunteer Ananda Deviika ‘Ma’, MSc, C-IAYT, shared the history of the MSC and Meeting of Schools, both of which started in some form more than 15 years ago and have evolved to include virtual town halls throughout the year. This year the MSC focused on facilitating conversations about the therapeutic continuum of yoga from a public health perspective.

The discussion-centered format began with establishing the context of the three distinct areas of a student’s journey through yoga therapy training: enrollment, clinical practicum, and postgraduation. After introducing each topic, “roomies” (people physically present at the meeting) and “Zoomies” (people attending the meeting via Zoom) engaged in conversation at roundtables and in breakout rooms, with a worksheet and Google Form available for note-taking.

During the discussion on enrollment, which was introduced by IAYT Director of Integrative Initiatives and Accreditation Manager Heidi Crocker, DC, EdD, C-IAYT, questions were posed to glean whether schools felt that the prerequisites for students entering yoga therapy programs are adequate preparation for the curriculum, and whether stronger standards should be adopted. While some schools felt that a 200-hour training was adequate, others responded that students were not prepared and especially lacked knowledge of anatomy and physiology. Some also felt that students should be required to experience yoga therapy sessions with a seasoned practitioner prior to enrollment.

Denyse Le Fever, MBA, C-IAYT, of Maryland University of Integrative Health, introduced the next discussion on clinical practicums, during which we learned of the diversity of operations among programs. While some offer a school-led practicum and supply students with clients, many schools expressed the need for students to be proactive in recruiting clients for their mentored practicum. Many schools shared that they have community partnerships and referrals to nonprofits in place to provide students with practicum experience, and another school illuminated the importance of community education and reaching out to various settings to familiarize the community with yoga therapy. Mentors provided supervision for client sessions in a variety of formats, including in person, live online, after recorded sessions, and via review of written reports and worksheets.

The final discussion, framed by Yoga Professional Academy’s Nicole DeAvilla, C-IAYT, centered around postgraduation tracking of job placement and the ongoing need for mentorship and professional development for newly minted yoga therapists. It was agreed that the future of yoga therapy depends on the accessibility of well-paid and impactful job opportunities. We also looked at ways IAYT can assist graduates by providing resources and templates to aid them in securing contracts and clinical partners.

Many schools reported that they perceive tracking their graduates to be difficult because of a lack of resources. Heidi Crocker shared that tracking employment is nevertheless a critical step for schools wishing to receive scholarship funds.

Overall, the meeting was productive and shed light on various aspects of yoga therapy education and support. It was exciting to witness the passion, dedication, and innovative thinking of all involved. As yoga therapy educators, we are working out the guidelines that future generations will follow as the field grows. As yoga therapists, we offer a unique medicine that amplifies an empowering approach to health.

Melissa Aguirre, E-RYT 500, C-IAYT, is an author; mindfulness mentor; developer of yoga, mind-body, and mindfulness programs for the U.S. military; and the founder of MelMarie Yoga.

Sarah Greco, MA, E-RYT 500, C-IAYT, is the dean of students for Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy and owns Your Kompass, LLC. She has served on the MSC for the past 6 years, the last 3 on the executive committee as secretary, vice chair, and chair.