

## SYTAR 2014 Meeting of Schools

By Susi Hatley

The Meeting of Schools at SYTAR 2014 was an enlightening, thought-provoking, and inspiring two-day session. Having been part of the Standards Committee—that early process of creating the backbone of our educational standards for our profession—it has been intriguing for me to watch how the Accreditation Committee (AC) has built upon that process and led us into the implementation phase. We are now well into the process of becoming a profession with a common

nal and this issue of YTT (see Hatley, Page 40). Accreditation is also part of differentiating between yoga therapy and other health and medical professions. It enables our industry to place a stake in the ground and state quite clearly, “This is who we are, this is what we offer, and this is how and what we do to help you.” It opens up the realm of health, healing, and wellbeing not only to the general public but also to any industry with which we can collaborate. It means a greater reach and an opportunity to really make a difference in the health and wellbeing of our communities and, I believe, in society at large.

As a bit of history, back in August 2013 when the first ten programs applied for accreditation, there were some glaring omissions in almost every program's application, which, truthfully, weren't the fault of either the program directors or the AC. These omissions revealed what we didn't know we didn't know. From this came greater awareness, and in January 2014 when the next 26 schools applied to have their yoga therapist training programs accredited, the process had become much clearer. And yet, even with that new clarity, there was still work to do.



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language. Definitions have been outlined, skills have been identified and categorized, parameters for training entry-level yoga therapists have been set, and the policies governing the accreditation of yoga therapist training programs have been created. Accreditation is a process that will continue to help us move forward, defining the line between what is a yoga teacher and what is a yoga therapist—a topic of much discussion at this meeting as well as in the current issue of our jour-

It is a rich time for yoga therapy. It is also a time that is not without its growing pains, groan zones, and hiccups. The procedure of implementing the accreditation process has been like many other first-time endeavors. As comprehensive as a new framework may be, there is always something that gets revealed as missing. It's a living process, and much of the Meeting of Schools was devoted to discussion—and clarification—of this important topic.

With that new clarity and evolution of the application process, what can you now expect? The following is a brief summary, but please be aware that because the process is being continually refined, you should be sure to inquire directly to those managing your application.

Beginning in October 2014, all applications will be accepted on a rolling basis, starting with the submission of a letter of intent to apply for accreditation and a

completed readiness assessment. Once IAYT becomes aware of your intent to apply, the accreditation manager will schedule a conference call with you and a member of the AC to discuss the results of your readiness assessment and to provide an orientation to the accreditation process. This will include directing you to educational and other supporting materials such as sample documents required for the application and YouTube videos that will guide you through certain parts of the application process. This is a new step, and it is very helpful for you to get clear on what your submission may be missing so you can fill it out effectively.

If necessary, you will be assigned to an AC guide who will help you through the process by answering questions related to completing the application and interpreting

**It is important to understand that while there is a different skill set required to be a yoga therapist, to be a really good yoga therapist, one needs to be an effective yoga teacher first.**

the standards, application requirements, and accreditation policies. This guidance service is a new support for program directors, providing a helping hand through one of the trickiest phases—the application process. By tricky, I mean creating all the documentation that the application requires. Because this is a paper-based application process, the only way for the AC to determine whether a program meets the Educational Standards is through a complete set of documents. Some aspects of a program are often not yet formally spelled out and, as a result, program directors may inadvertently omit some key pieces and components. The AC guide can help program directors understand what is needed to demonstrate compliance with the standards by helping them better understand those standards. IAYT hopes that, as a result, schools will put forth stronger applications that have less of a chance of being sent back for revision or requests for more details. In the end, this will save both sides a significant amount of time, reduce the backlog for the AC, speed up the evaluation and decision-making processes, and give program directors a



Meeting of Schools participants in a circle of introductions

welcome helping hand. The requirement to supply a formal curriculum may also serve as a benefit to those schools that haven't yet completed this step.

Also discussed at the meeting was the question of schools that offer “specialty programs”—those programs whose directors do not intend or need to develop a comprehensive yoga therapist training program, yet which offer programs that are useful and applicable to the industry of yoga therapy. These programs often provide competencies that are missing from some other programs and may work in collaboration with them. These might include programs such as Richard Miller's iRest or Amy Weintraub's LifeForce Yoga. The short answer is that specialty program accreditation will be addressed, but it is still quite a bit down the road, so you will need to hang tight for a while. In the meantime, program directors can still include these specialty programs within their own program so that it includes all competency areas. The key is this: to qualify as part of the application, the material being taught must address competencies, the syllabus for the program must be submitted along with the other syllabi documents for the program, and faculty teaching the curriculum must each submit a CV or resume that demonstrates that they

meet the faculty requirements outlined in the educational standards.

All in all, this process is providing a structure that will bring a foundational level of consistency and clarity to an industry that has many different ways of training teachers, not only in how the information is delivered, but also in where the focus of each program is directed. It brings the teaching of yoga therapy to a whole new level of professionalism.

The Meeting of Schools was a landmark event. In addition to IAYT having its 25th anniversary, all of us in that particular meeting and all who attended the full conference bore witness to the important steps that have already been taken and that continue to be taken to formalize yoga therapy as a profession, distinct from (and not better than) yoga teaching. It represented the role that we as yoga therapists and yoga therapists-to-be play in health, healing, and wellbeing—honoring the various traditions, lineages, and inclinations.

Thank you, John Kepner, Aggie Stewart, and the full Accreditation Committee for continuing to move the process forward. I look forward to what transpires over the course of this next year. **YTT**



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