Meeting of Schools 2022

By Jules Payne, with Sarah Greco

The 2022 Meeting of Schools was a milestone event—the first hybrid meeting, with schools and presenters attending both in-person and online. This was an opportunity for the IAYT Member Schools Committee (MSC) to “walk the talk,” as one of the main topics of discussion over the 2 days was online and hybrid learning.

MSC Co-Chair Ginger (Kamalesh) Hooven, MA, E-RYT 500, C-IAYT, began the meeting by acknowledging the resilience and flexibility of member schools as they continue to adapt to constant change. Attendees immersed themselves in sangha (yogic community), as small groups provided space for connection and discussion. School representatives reflected on and shared their experiences and takeaways from the pandemic.

These small-group discussions revealed a focus on remote learning:

• Although schools and faculty were able to quickly transition to online learning, challenges with technology were a constant theme.
• More students from a greater number of locations were able to enroll because they were not limited by geography.

Telehealth and online sessions enabled students to extend their reach to more clients living all over the world for their clinical practicum experiences. Member schools and program directors noted the benefit of accessibility while offering online and hybrid training and hope that these developments will support more inclusive and diverse yoga therapy training opportunities for students in future cohorts. Many yoga therapy schools are on board to move forward with online and hybrid learning while honoring and prioritizing in-person and residential training.

In-person participants were treated to an excellent vegetarian meal sponsored by the Trinity Healing Foundation, while online attendees shared a virtual mealtime hosted by MSC volunteers.

IAYT Updates

Following dinner, the IAYT leadership team offered updates and announcements for the coming year. Presenters included Executive Director Alyssa Wostrel, MBA; Membership Coordinator Kelly Froio, C-IAYT; Accreditation Manager Heidi Crocker, DC, EdD, C-IAYT; Certification Manager Nancy Sinton, MBA, E-RYT 500, C-IAYT; Technology Manager Janelle Aberle, RYT-500, C-IAYT; Editorial Director Laurie Hyland Robertson, MS, E-RYT 500, C-IAYT; and newly hired Marketing and Communications Manager Marita Greenidge, MBA, RYT-200.

Here are highlights from the presentations:

• There are now 66 accredited programs, with a 100% reaccreditation rate in the most recent round of eligibility.
• There are currently 5,273 individual IAYT members representing 66 countries.
• There are approximately 2,700 C-IAYTs, with 580 C-IAYTs certified in the past 2 years.
• IAYT is in phase 2 of beta testing for the new certification exam. The team will be working closely with accredited program directors beginning in fall 2022 to jointly determine exam implementation dates.
• Approved Professional Development (APD) providers were highlighted in a course catalogue (see the Spring 2022 YTT), with 337 APD courses offered from 508 APD providers.
• IAYT extended the waiver for online teaching. If a program starts before January 1, 2024, students can start online and finish online.
• IAYT is starting a professional development webinar series to support schools to increase their skill sets as educators.
• To inform future accreditation standards, IAYT is surveying member schools about how COVID-19 impacted curriculum and teaching methodology. Those who were unable to attend a focus group during the conference will be contacted to complete the survey.
• In partnership with Cochrane Complementary Medicine, IAYT will be publishing summaries of Cochrane Reviews that include clinical relevance to yoga therapy.* These review summaries will be authored by students in accredited yoga therapy programs.
Day 2 began with presentations from three member schools on their experiences delivering online and hybrid training. Nishita Shah, E-RYT 500, C-IAYT, spoke about her experience teaching a hybrid program at the Ayurveda Institute and how they are balancing the attention and needs from their “Zoomies” and “roomies.” To mimic the in-person experience, Zoomies in their program only do livestream, rather than recorded, classes. Shah used an extensive technology setup with monitors, sound mixers, and various microphones, and answered specific questions from attendees about their learning management systems (LMS).

Jess Demshar from the Yoga Well Institute spoke about their early adaptation to online learning and an extensive library of recorded classes. They taught their most recent cohort entirely online. The Yoga Well Institute is about to launch a podcast to connect students with their primary teacher, who has not been able to travel throughout the pandemic.

Jane Musgrave, MS, E-RYT 500, C-IAYT, from Marigold Yoga has a smaller program that moved to online training at the start of the pandemic. They began with a simple setup of a couple of phones, a laptop, and a projector. They’ve recently been considering how they can facilitate in-person connections for students living in the same geographical locations by renting spaces where the students and mentors can meet.

After these presentations, participants discussed the question, “How is online training making things more and/or less accessible for students, and what have we learned to have in place?” Highlights from the small-group discussions included

- internet accessibility in rural areas;
- videos and other tools to orient students to online learning, including LMSs;
- the role of scholarships and bursaries to increase accessibility and diversity; and
- the importance of offering additional mentorship support to students online.

The Meeting of Schools concluded with a thank you to all who attended in person and online and with recognition for the MSC members.

The committee is actively recruiting for new members. Representatives from member schools are encouraged to apply by emailing Kelly Froio at kellyf@iayt.org.