

IAYT Accreditation: Why It's Needed, How It Was Created, and What It Means for You

By Aggie Stewart

Recognition and understanding of yoga therapy as a separate skill set and distinct profession continues to grow within the yoga community, the general public, and conventional healthcare. Just as the number of yoga teacher training programs grew rapidly over the past decade as yoga became a more mainstream practice, the number of yoga therapy training programs is growing rapidly as yoga therapy is increasingly viewed as a valuable and desirable complement to conventional medicine, including therapies such as physical, respiratory, and occupational.

As yoga therapy emerges as a profession within Western healthcare, it's becoming increasingly important that the profession has a way of self-regulating—that is, ensuring that its practitioners have a foundation of knowledge, skills, and abilities that enables them to practice yoga therapy safely and effectively. Accreditation is one way of regulating a profession. It is a means of self-regulation—that is, the profession takes the initiative to regulate itself—as opposed to government regulation. Accreditation has a long and respected history in both education and healthcare.

This past summer, the IAYT implemented a voluntary, international accreditation process for yoga therapist training programs offered by its member schools. Accreditation is primarily a means of ensuring quality control and promoting continuous improvement. Typically a peer-review process, accreditation recognizes that someone or something has met or exceeded established standards of quality and safety for a service it offers. In this case, the service is a yoga therapy training program.

Because accreditation is a standards-based process, it provides a consistent benchmark against which yoga therapy

training programs can be evaluated. The IAYT developed an accreditation process to serve three groups:

- the public, by developing a set of educational standards intended to promote safe and effective yoga therapy practice;
- the yoga therapy practitioner and educator communities, by promoting a stronger and more well-defined profes-

ble for evaluating how well a program meets the accreditation standards and training requirements.

The process is overseen by the Accreditation Committee, a diverse body of yoga therapy practitioners and educators, and is administered by the IAYT staff.



- sional identity for the field; and
- yoga therapy students, by establishing standards and policies designed to ensure access to quality training programs.

The IAYT's accreditation process has four essential components:

- educational standards and training requirements, including definitions of key terms, such as *yoga therapy*;
- an online application that requests documentation of standards-based data and information about the training program;
- policies and procedures that guide the accreditation process; and
- review committees composed of yoga therapy professionals who are responsi-

The Educational Standards and Training Requirements

The centerpiece of the IAYT's accreditation process is a set of competency-based educational standards that focus on entry-level requirements for the training of yoga therapists. These standards were formed by consensus and include a definition of *yoga therapy*, other key definitions of terms used in the standards, and detailed training requirements. The goal was to define the foundation of knowledge, skills, and abilities required for the safe and effective practice of yoga therapy and the minimum amount of hours necessary to adequately train students to acquire that foundation.

The IAYT Standards Committee (see IAYT's website for committee members) led the standards development effort. For more than two years, this dedicated and diverse group of experienced yoga therapy educators and practitioners met to craft standards, definitions, and training requirements. The committee worked diligently to draw from the knowledge base of the yoga therapy tradition to identify the core knowledge, skills, and competencies of yoga therapists. The draft standards were twice presented to the IAYT member schools, IAYT practitioners, and the practitioner community at large in order to ensure that the final set of standards would be widely acceptable and allow for a diversity of yoga philosophies and training approaches. The educational standards were further shaped by the results of these reviews and address the following areas:

- the philosophical foundations of yoga therapy,
- the biomedical and psychological foundations of yoga therapy,
- teaching and therapeutic skills,
- yoga therapy tools and their application, and
- issues surrounding professional practice.

The Standards Committee not only considered the knowledge base it believed an entry-level yoga therapist needed, but also the training requirements, homing in on the knowledge base and teaching experience program faculty and mentors needed to have in order to competently educate trainees. It also considered the minimum length of time a program needed to sufficiently deliver the educational content to students and for students to learn, integrate, and demonstrate understanding of that content through case studies, a practicum, and other activities. Reviews of the draft standards by the IAYT member schools, IAYT practitioners, and the practitioner community also shaped the training requirements, which cover the following parameters:

- minimum program admission requirements,
- the program's length,
- its hours (both contact and non-contact),
- specialty training,
- distance learning, and
- the qualifications of programs directors, faculty members, and mentors.

The Online Accreditation Application

The online accreditation application was designed to capture the data and information required to make a fair, efficient, and consistent standards-based evaluation of a yoga therapy training program. It takes a detailed look at the structure and composition of a program, seeking to understand the way in which the program meets the defined competencies and training requirements, including the qualifications—that is, education, expertise, and teaching experience—of its faculty and mentors. The application also looks to see that a program has a credible and sound assessment process for evaluating student understanding and integration of the curriculum material; that the program is guided by policies and procedures that protect students as well as the school; and that it advertises its program and relationship to IAYT and IAYT accreditation fairly and accurately during before, during, and after the application process.

IAYT accredits yoga therapist training programs, not the individuals who graduate from those programs. In accrediting programs, the IAYT is not accrediting the schools that provide the programs nor giving formal, individual recognition to its graduates.

Accreditation Policies and Procedures

The accreditation policies and procedures establish the rules and processes the Accreditation Committee follows to process and review the data, information, and other supporting materials a member school submits as part of its application for IAYT accreditation and to make a decision based on that review. These policies and procedures provide a clear roadmap of the accreditation process, while ensuring that

the review process is conducted in a consistent, fair, and timely manner. Additionally, the policies and procedures also address yoga therapy training programs that achieve IAYT accreditation, such as substantive changes in the yoga therapy training program curriculum or senior faculty and required reporting during the period of accreditation.

The Accreditation Committee and Application Review Committees

Currently, accreditation application review committees are composed of members from the full Accreditation Committee (see IAYT's website for committee members). This committee is a diverse group of yoga therapy professionals and educators who bring a breadth and depth of yoga therapy education, experience, and expertise to the oversight of the accreditation process and to the review of and decisions on the accreditation applications. As mentioned earlier, the accreditation review process is a peer-review process, carried out in a collegial manner by peers and for peers.

Progress to Date

The IAYT accepted the first round of applications this past summer, and received ten applications by the August 1st deadline. The Accreditation Committee and members of IAYT staff (John Kepner and this author) met in mid-August for a three-day retreat to conduct an in-depth evaluation of these applications and the application and review processes. The committee had several objectives as it undertook this work, principally:

- to conduct a fair, objective, and consistent evaluation of each application;
- to further develop and refine the overall evaluation process; and
- to identify refinements and improvements in both the application and the application process, including the guidance and materials we developed to assist the field in the completion of applications.

The retreat time was highly productive and educational for both the committee and the IAYT staff present. The first applications that were fully reviewed provided test cases for the review process itself and enabled the committee to begin to transform a theoretical review process to a practical one. As the committee members made their way through these initial appli-

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cations, they identified a number of areas in which they saw that they needed to provide clearer guidance to applicants with respect to some required application elements. Many of these areas related to the development of essential supporting materials, such as curriculum syllabi, faculty CVs/résumés, and the code of conduct that programs are required to submit. In outlining the composition of the curriculum, the syllabi must clearly address how a program meets the required competencies. Faculty CVs/résumés must show with relevant detail how faculty education, training, and experience qualify them to teach the subjects they are assigned to teach. The code of conduct must address the behavior of faculty as well as students. The committee also identified areas within the application that needed clarification, such as how a program evaluates whether transfer hours meet com-

petencies. Clarifications in all these areas will help member schools to compile a more clear and complete application as well as help review committees within the Accreditation Committee make a more accurate determination of the extent to which a program meets the standards and training requirements, thus providing a reliable basis for an accreditation decision.



A few of the IAYT Accreditation Committee members.

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Developing clearer guidance required the committee and IAYT staff to create, among other things, model documents, guidelines, and other materials to better explain and illustrate what is required of programs to demonstrate compliance with the standards and training requirements. As a result of this work, the deadline for the second round of

Accreditation is for Programs, not Individuals

IAYT accreditation addresses yoga therapist training programs, not the individuals who graduate from those programs. In accrediting programs, the IAYT is not accrediting the schools that provide the programs nor giving formal, individual recognition to its graduates. These are crucial distinctions. By providing a consistent standard for training programs, including a definition of *yoga therapy*, accreditation is a first step toward helping to ensure that entry-level yoga therapists have the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary

to practice safely and effectively. A later step will involve some sort of process that provides formal recognition of individual yoga therapists. This process would also apply to yoga therapists who completed their education and training prior to the implementation of the standards and accreditation process. These individuals include recent graduates of yoga therapy training programs and current students, as well as seasoned yoga therapists who may not have graduated from a formal yoga therapy training program, but who have been pioneers in the field. Development of this process is still some time off in the future.

The Value of Accreditation

For the present, through its accreditation

process for yoga therapy training programs, the IAYT is providing the expertise and the leadership to elevate the emerging profession of yoga therapy such that it has the professional credibility to connect with Western healthcare systems. The goal of establishing standards that allow healthcare providers to integrate yoga into their systems without compromising the tenets of yoga is central to this effort. Throughout the development process, the IAYT has been guided, trained, and coached by Dan Seitz, an experienced facilitator who has extensive expertise in helping emerging complementary and alternative medicine professions achieve self-regulation through developing standards and implementing accreditation. The IAYT has and continues to strive for a process that is transparent, inclusive, and representative of the diversity that exists within our field. In this process of self-regulation, the IAYT has merged its expertise in yoga therapy with expertise in accreditation, and has thus laid the groundwork for a consensus-based, professional definition of yoga therapist backed by standards and its definition of yoga therapy. This will have increasing employment and economic value as yoga therapy continues to grow as a recognized and respected therapy.

Through these and other related actions, the IAYT is providing a benchmark for students, yoga therapy practitioners, healthcare providers, and the public against which to evaluate the quality of training programs and the practitioners who graduate from them. It is also, just as importantly, providing a benchmark for programs themselves to conduct self-assessment and evaluation of their offerings to ensure that they are providing the highest quality education and training for students to enable them to attain the foundation of knowledge and skills required for the safe and effective practice of yoga therapy. [YTT](#)



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