



WORKING GROUP PAPER

Scope of Practice

APRIL 2019

#YAstandards

In 1999, in its role as a voluntary, member-based organization serving yoga schools and teachers, **Yoga Alliance (YA)** sought to ensure and preserve the quality of yoga education and practice by establishing and disseminating standards for the education of yoga teachers and by maintaining a registry of teachers who met these standards. In 2018, **YA** launched a review of its standards, calling it the **Standards Review Project (SRP)**.

One result of the **SRP** is this collection of eight collaborative, condensed, and edited working group papers to which key yoga stakeholders for **YA** and for the yoga community at large contributed. These papers represent the recommendations by each working group of the best practices for the standard, or key inquiry area, in question. There is one working paper for each; what follows is the working group paper on the notion of a Scope of Practice in yoga.

SCOPE OF PRACTICE UPFRONT

From its inception, in an effort to clarify the role of yoga teachers in society, Yoga Alliance (YA) has invested in the complex inquiry of what the Scope of Practice (SoP) of yoga is for schools and teachers. The goal of this inquiry is to educate and protect the portion of the public who interacts with the practice of yoga.

YA's yoga community of schools and teachers is essentially empowered to self-govern; the act of becoming a yoga teacher does not require licensure as do fields like naturopathic medicine or massage therapy. The yoga community exposes itself to vulnerabilities in the dissemination of the quality and safety of yoga education when certain ethical commitments, such as an agreed-upon SoP and Code of Conduct, are not adopted.

Please see the SRP [Code of Conduct](#) Working Group Paper here for more information on this area of inquiry.

Yoga continues to grow globally, which creates reputational and real-life risks when those calling themselves yoga teachers practice and teach in areas in which they are unqualified. Yoga as a practice, and as an industry, furthermore faces challenges as it increasingly intersects with modern secular sciences, international law, and other global institutions.

Yoga continues to grow globally, which creates reputational and real-life risks when yoga teachers practice and teach in areas in which they are unqualified.

YA asked the SoP Working Group (SPWG) two wide-reaching questions:

- ➔ ***What are yoga teachers, and what defines their practice?***
- ➔ ***How do yoga teachers' practices differ, or do they differ, within the many environments in which they work?***

PROBLEM STATEMENT

To answer the first questions posed to them, the SPWG felt compelled to offer a definition of yoga. The **SPWG defined yoga as both a unitive state of consciousness and the techniques, philosophies, practices, and lifestyles that bring one towards this state of consciousness as well as to many associated mental and physical benefits.** The group also considered that through a published SoP, YA could set a precedent to provide a definition for yoga's cultural history, which originated from the Indian subcontinent, and protect it in doing so. (Please see the [Core Curriculum](#) and [Inclusion](#) Working Group Papers for more inquiry into yoga's definition.)

The **SPWG recommended components of a YA-approved SoP in yoga** and explored areas for further inquiry. The **group pressed for more conversation within the YA community in order to arrive at a fully accessible and inclusive YA-approved SoP standard.** The group addressed these issues for conversation:

- The lack of preparedness by some Registered Yoga Teachers (RYTs) to hold the mantle of any proposed SoP
- Whether RYT 200 (or “foundational”) teachers would have different scopes of practice than RYT 300 (or “professional”) or specialty teachers
- The additions of practices that would allow for varying levels of YA-registered teachers and what role YA has in educating the public on these practices
- The issues of adjustments, consent, touch, and other safety concerns
- The resolution and approval of the other seven key areas of SRP inquiry and how those standards would influence a YA-approved SoP

Beyond acknowledging that a YA-approved SoP is necessary, the SPWG was unable to arrive at solutions that all or most in the group could embrace and endorse.

BACKGROUND AND REFLECTION

The SPWG identified many issues inherent in defining a SoP in yoga. The most important of these was the group's perception that some RYTs are currently practicing in areas in which they are unqualified. The group felt that this is a major problem for the general public, for individual teachers, and for the yoga teaching profession as a whole.

The SPWG did generally agree on a definition of yoga (please see the Problem Statement above) and acknowledged that these practices, techniques, and philosophies were generally brought from the Indian subcontinent. The intersection of these practices, techniques, and

philosophies with contemporary times elicited a group discussion and debate of an evolved, accessible, and inclusive definition of yoga.¹

The SPWG identified potential problems with YA defining an SoP as applying to any RYT, regardless of level or designation:

- Many RYT 200 graduates may not be able to hold the mantle of a new proposed SoP
- An RYT 500 or Trainer² (Lead or Speciality) should potentially have a different SoP
- Emerging yoga specialties might mandate different SoPs

Recognizing the rapid changes in the yoga community and overall industry, the SPWG asked how YA would address emerging yoga specialties and the different potential scopes that would result.

The SPWG pointed out that YA's current SoP states that an RYT is not qualified to "conduct any individual sessions, classes, or groups that involve mental health, emotional, behavioral, relational, or trauma-related issues or that make use of psychological techniques or practices."³ The group pointed out that "thousands" of yoga teachers, RYTs and non-RYTs alike, are currently pursuing trauma-informed yoga continuing education training and/or are marketing their offerings, such as classes and workshops, as "trauma-informed" or "trauma-conscious."⁴ The SPWG believed that YA current RYS standards do not adequately allow for trauma-informed teaching to be part of an RYT's scope.

The SPWG also pointed to areas of specific biomechanical issues or common injuries, such as yoga for back pain, yoga for texting-neck, yoga for depression, or yoga for cancer. Here, too, the SPWG claimed, many yoga teachers are leading classes, workshops, and private sessions with these points of differentiation. The SPWG pointed out that these RYTs state that they can address those pathophysiologies through their yoga offerings, but technically and legally, they cannot say that what they are offering is, for example, "treating" low back pain as a doctor or other medical professional would. The SPWG found reality of the market problematic from both an ethical and legal perspective.

The SPWG observed yoga's emphasis as shifting from an original focus on spiritual salvation to more modern-day needs of health and wellbeing. The SPWG agreed that the definitions and goals of yoga practice have historically included

Gentle touch in yoga... could be a part of an RYT's Scope of Practice while tissue manipulation should not be.

¹ The SPWG discussed the definition of yoga and how it has evolved throughout history; in addition, it questioned whether defining yoga was within YA's scope as a member association. Though viewed as a departure from accepted norms of a definition of yoga, a unifying thread that did keep coming up among the SPWG members was that yoga is a form of body-mind-and-self inquiry, from the therapeutic to the transcendent. There was also conversation around a polythetic definition of yoga and a concern over any inadvertent erasure of the heritage and history of India in shaping yoga via the creation of a YA-approved SoP.

² The notion of Lead Trainer(s) and Other Trainer(s) come from YA's section of its website on [Standards Guidelines \(all RYS\)](#).

³ Please see more info [here](#).

⁴ Quotes are SPWG members'.

health and wellbeing, and from this point of agreement, the group suggested that YA consider commissioning a polythetic definition of yoga to accompany the organization's definition of yoga (*please see footnote #2*).

The SPWG debated whether YA should require RYT's to pledge; while some viscerally reflected on whether such a pledge is even necessary, others found the pledge to be aspirational and poetic, while still others believed it is beyond the bounds of YA's reach.

Finally, the SPWG said that touch, and the safety of all students, were issues that an SoP, inclusive of all other standards, must squarely address.

YOGA AS AN UNREGULATED FIELD AND PURSUIT OF HUMANITIES

In addressing the "scope" of the SoP, the SPWG encouraged YA to consider linking the SoP to similar fields such as those in medicine while also considering how a SoP could be explicitly inclusive of the entire yoga community. The group said YA could potentially set a precedent in an attempt to protect yoga's cultural history, using the concept of "yoga humanities" to influence "how" a yoga teacher should relate to yoga philosophy, thereby avoiding "what" an RYT can and cannot do legally, which would be outside of a YA-approved SoP.⁵

The majority of the SPWG believed that yoga teaching as an unregulated field was irrelevant to its inquiry into best practice standards for yoga's SoP. However, the group did strongly comment with respect to the following two issues:

- The "Do's and Don'ts" in an SoP relegate RYT concerns exclusively to wellness/biomedical/psychological realms, which intersects with cultural appropriation. The SPWG believed that YA has an opportunity to address yoga's given definition to include an SoP that speaks to intellectual, cultural, accessibility, and inclusion competencies and limits.
- "Something" has to show the RYT that the skills of yoga teaching are important, subject to qualification, and dangerous to practice irresponsibly."⁶

SOLUTION

AUDIENCE FOR THE SCOPE OF PRACTICE

Some members of the SPWG recommended changing the name of the RYT at the 200-hour level, perhaps to an RYI (Registered Yoga Instructor), to limit their scope relative to other RYT designations. As in several other SRP Working Groups, the SPWG distinguished between RYS 200 as a "foundational" training and RYS 300 and above as "professional" trainings. The SPWG said the SoPs for these trainings would be foundational SoPs and professional SoPs, respectively.

The SPWG suggested that the new specialty practices emerging in yoga warrant

⁵ Quotes are SPWG members'.

⁶ Quotes are SPWG's members'.

the inquiry into a new credential, perhaps called RYS, or Registered Yoga Specialists⁷. The word “Specialist” could imply, or prove via other certification or credential, that someone has a license in a complementary field or additional training in a specified field. The fact that most yoga teachers end up “niching” as their career matures, the SPWG said, in effect requires that YA attempts to define and designate specific competencies and skills of an RYS.

HISTORY, INCLUSIVITY, FORM, AND PRESENTATION

The SPWG suggested mirroring the format of the [International Association of Yoga Therapists Scope of Practice, Health Sciences section](#).

ACCOUNTABILITY

The SPWG debated whether YA should create a clear grievance policy in relation to SoP violations and use its Accountability Office to investigate grievances filed against RYT's relating to the SoP, including: whether or not any standard was enforceable and, if so, by whom; issues of RYT's and RYS's; and other concerns as they arise. The SPWG suggested:

- That YA consider whether it should investigate SoP grievances. If not, YA would use the Scope as an educational tool for insurance companies and courts of law companies for handling liability cases. Note: the SPWG did not suggest that this would mean YA could not investigate Code of Conduct grievances, including sexual misconduct complaints.
- That YA set up a community system that certifies and/or trains local respected senior yoga teachers in conflict resolution and on YA's policies in order to handle Code of Conduct or SoP grievances in their communities.

ADJUSTMENTS, TOUCH, AND OTHER SAFETY ISSUES

Most of the SPWG agreed that consent, and specifically informed consent, is an important safety issue to be part of the SoP, Code of Conduct, and Core Curriculum Educational Standards. Some in the SPWG questioned whether yoga teachers should touch students at all. (Please see the [Code of Conduct](#) and [Core Curriculum](#) Working Group Papers for more conversation on the notion of consent.)

The SPWG acknowledged that implied consent, including physical tissue manipulation, can over time become used as a technique by unethical teachers to touch their students inappropriately. The group also described gentle touch in yoga, namely that for alignment, support, balance, proprioception, awareness of breath, and relaxation, as something that could be a part of an RYT's Scope of Practice while tissue manipulation should not be.

⁷ This RYS is not to be confused with the already existing RYS for Registered Yoga Schools. This is the SPWG's suggestion, not that of YA.

Finally, the SPWG questioned the need for CPR and AED training for RYT's; the need for emergency response plans for RYS's; and the inclusion of general safety competencies such as first aid. The group considered these questions on which they did not reach resolution:

- Should teachers be trained in CPR and AED?
- Should studios have emergency response plans?
- Does/should the SoP include minimal safety competencies such as basic first aid knowledge?
- Should yoga teachers and studios do an intake for every student and keep student health records?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: CODE OF CONDUCT

The SPWG discussed several issues that they believed did not have a place in the SoP discussion, such as:

- Commentary on “blended” practices, e.g., culturally hyped practices such as acro yoga, pub yoga, goat yoga, nude yoga, beer yoga, etc., and how the RYT “brand” might get muddled with this
- Consideration of the cultural differences between yoga in popular culture and yoga in an academic setting. In an academic setting, it is taboo not to cite sources, expertise in a given field typically requires years of intense study and research, and people do not teach their own interpretations of particular ideas without clearly calling out that it is a hypothesis based on personal experience, whereas in popular culture, yoga teachers, with little more than 200 or 500 hours of training, very often assume a mantle of authority when teaching yoga philosophy, playing the role of the guru when their training clearly doesn't provide that competency
- The responsibility of offering modifications or guidance to a student who voluntarily shares information about a health condition; from a legal liability standpoint, an RYT must offer this, so what does that mean for YA's SoP, Code of Conduct, and/or Core Curriculum? (Please see the [Code of Conduct](#) and [Core Curriculum](#) Working Group Papers for more discussion on this.)

ADVISORY GROUP

Our heartfelt thanks go to the following Advisors who spent much time and energy meeting, discussing, debating, and resolving issues on the Scope of Practice to the benefit of Yoga Alliance's membership. The Advisors were:



SUSANNA BARKATAKI



DR. GRACE BULLOCK



SARAH COURT



DR. JOHN DOYLE



DR. GINGER GARNER



LESLIE KAMINOFF



HALA KHOURI



JAMES MALLINSON



JULES MITCHELL



NEIL PEARSON



MATTHEW REMSKI



DAN SEITZ



ROOPA SINGH



DR. MATTHEW TAYLOR



THEODORA WILDCROFT



#YAstandards

YOGA ALLIANCE & THE YOGA ALLIANCE FOUNDATION

Founded in 1999, Yoga Alliance is a member-based, non-profit organization that serves yoga schools and teachers across the globe, providing a world-recognized, best-in-class credential and unifying its members around a shared ethical commitment. In addition, YA delivers a strong value proposition to its members through community-building initiatives, educational resources, advocacy efforts, and social impact programs. Its sister organization, the Yoga Alliance Foundation, supports leveraged impact and direct service programs that expand the reach of and participation in yoga.

iwanttohelpya@yogaalliance.org
1560 Wilson Blvd, Suite 700, Arlington, VA 22209
[@yogaalliance](https://www.yogaalliance.org) | 1-888-921-9642



WORKING GROUP PAPER

Code of Conduct

APRIL 2019

#YAstandards

In 1999, in its role as a voluntary, member-based organization serving yoga schools and teachers, **Yoga Alliance (YA)** sought to ensure and preserve the quality of yoga education and practice by establishing and disseminating standards for the education of yoga teachers and by maintaining a registry of teachers who met these standards. In 2018, **YA** launched a review of its standards, calling it the **Standards Review Project (SRP)**.

One result of the **SRP** is this collection of eight collaborative, condensed, and edited working group papers to which key yoga stakeholders for **YA** and for the yoga community at large contributed. These papers represent the recommendations by each working group of the best practices for the standard, or key inquiry area, in question. There is one working paper for each; what follows is the working group paper on the notion of a **Code of Conduct** in yoga.

CODE OF CONDUCT UPFRONT

Yoga Alliance (YA) chose Code of Conduct (CoC) as one of its eight areas of inquiry because a Code of Conduct lays the foundation for safe yoga education of the highest quality and integrity.¹ YA asked the Code of Conduct Working Group (CoCWG):

- ***How should ethics be applied to yoga teaching today?***
- ***How are the gifts of yoga better served when supported with a solid ethical foundation?***

The CoCWG ultimately anchored its discussion in the ideas of *ahimsa* (non-harming), *satya* (truthfulness), accessibility, inclusiveness, and equity. Nearly every aspect of the CoC, the group believed, was either an attempt to avoid harm or to create honesty or clarity. Using these concepts, the CoCWG:

- Defined the relationship between yogic values and modern values as they pertain to consent
- Explored the role of the yoga community in adhering to a YA-approved CoC, including the promotion of politically neutral and inclusive language
- Examined YA's role in establishing and promoting yogic norms in all relationships across the broad spectrum of the yoga community
- Attempted to define the most appropriate type of romantic or sexual relationships between a yoga teacher and a student in the context the community-wide, yogic CoC

YA (could) help RYSs train RYT's to adapt their practices for students of all abilities and body types.

¹ Please see the [Integrity](#) Working Group Paper for more information on the topic of Integrity in yoga.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Asking the question the group said YA itself must answer—that being whether YA is a morally governing body even if it does not officially regulate—the **CoCWG recommended a revised and expanded YA-approved CoC** that, among issuing other guidance, would provide:

- 1) The yogic definition of right to consent and touch
- 2) The right balance between yogic values and modern values; inclusive language choices; trauma sensitivity; and a yogic definition of yogic teacher/student relationships
- 3) Additional language to expand the scope of the CoC to address the activities of those in the yoga profession to include a commitment to “developing strong ethical principles in their professional and personal lives”

The CoCWG... anchored its discussions in *ahimsa* (or non-harming), *satya* (or truthfulness), accessibility, inclusiveness, and equity.

BACKGROUND AND REFLECTION

The CoCWG felt many issues were relevant and vital to YA’s updated and modernized CoC and also said more discussion is needed by YA and in the yoga community. The group summarized main issues before offering suggested language and other solutions for the new CoC.

YOGIC VALUES + MODERN VALUES

The CoCWG discussed a “north star” value for the CoC but did **not** resolve to use Patanjali’s *yamas* (ethical rules) as core values for yogic conduct. Support for using the *yamas* was based on both the simplicity and power of these ethics to stand the test of time and on the fact that these values are the most widely known by the YA community. Pushback against using these values was that YA would potentially be reinterpreting the *yamas* for its own benefit and changing their meaning by virtue of highlighting the *Yoga Sutras* above other yoga texts.

Lack of resolution in this discussion reflected the CoCWG’s belief that this topic would need to be part of a larger debate.

ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE VALUES AND LANGUAGE CHOICES

While a new CoC should prioritize accessible and inclusive social values more than previous YA Codes of Conduct, some in the CoCWG advised making “politically neutral” language choices and demonstrating actions around inclusion given that certain language (such as that in anti-discrimination laws) doesn’t actually describe what discrimination looks like in practice.

THE SCOPE OF THE CODE

The CoCWG discussed specifically how the scope of the Code relates to personal conduct outside a teacher’s professional behavior. The group asked whether people could file a grievance against a teacher because of an action committed by that teacher that they deemed professionally or personally unethical. Should someone’s online communications, for example, be held

to the same standards as their conduct in the classroom? The CoCWG suggested this additional language for the CoC:

Yoga teachers should be committed to developing strong ethical principles in their professional and personal lives, and this should be understood as intrinsic to their practice and teaching.

There was no resolution here, as a question for the group also remained: What makes someone’s personal online content part of their public role as teachers?

SOLUTION

DEFINING CONSENT

While the CoCWG agreed that obtaining consent before touching a student was essential for a yoga teacher, the group disagreed about the level and definition of consent defined by YA. The group’s suggested values and definitions of consent were:

Affirmative Consent: a knowing, voluntary, and mutual decision among all participants to engage in an activity and, in this case, an instructional activity. Consent can be given by words or actions as long as those words or actions create clear permission regarding willingness to engage in the instruction. Silence or lack of resistance in and of itself does not demonstrate consent.²

Explicit Consent: can be given verbally, in writing, in gesture, or via another consent indicator. Silence or lack of resistance in and of itself does not demonstrate consent. The CoCWG believed YA is correct to recommend the use of “consent chips,” presented to students on arrival to the class and which the students can use to communicate easily whether they consent to being touched during the course of instruction.

Ongoing, Enthusiastic, and Informed Consent:

- **Ongoing Consent:** the idea that giving of consent is an ongoing process. If someone has offered consent at one time, that does not necessarily carry over to later in a class or to another day. Each time a teacher approaches a student to touch that student, consent must be given by the student.
- **Enthusiastic Consent:** the empowerment of students to respond to requests for consent clearly and specifically. In other words, if a student is asked for consent and does not respond, their consent has not been given.
- **Informed Consent:** some students may not understand what they are agreeing to when being asked for consent. It is the duty of the teacher to be clear so that students are appropriately approached and asked. The question, “may I give you an adjustment?,” is not enough information. The teacher needs to describe the adjustment they want to give in enough detail for the student to make the most informed decision at that time.

YA (could) assist RYSs and RYTts in recognizing and examining how language, teaching style, and class content can interfere with accessibility and create an environment where students may not feel included, welcomed, or safe.

² Language adapted from the New York State “Enough is Enough” Bill S5965, 2015.

TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Teacher-Student Orientation

The CoCWG discussed the power differentials in teacher-student relationships, and some advocated for a greater emphasis on student empowerment in the background and purpose of the Code, extending the idea of empowerment to all elements of yoga. Imbalance of power can lead to ethical violations on the part of the teacher, the CoCWG noted, and it is the teacher's duty and responsibility to teach that transformation is the student's own and no one else's.

Romantic Relationships

The CoCWG agreed that romantic relationships must be forbidden between a yoga Trainer and a Trainee during training, but the group debated whether this ban would be carried into all teacher-student relationships. The group said this is an issue for more debate and discussion.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION, STANDARDS, AND RESOURCES

The CoCWG offered suggestions for additional educational content on the topics that follow that YA could create, encourage widely, or insert into the CoC while also reinforcing it across other standards and in YA-approved curricula. The group particularly emphasized the importance of trauma sensitivity training for yoga teachers and recommended YA provide education on this topic and/or include it in the CoC. Please see the [Core Curriculum](#), [Inclusion](#), and [Teacher Qualifications](#) Working Group Papers for more conversation on this topic.

Accessibility, Body Image, and Implicit Bias

Many in the CoCWG wanted YA to increase its efforts to promote diversity, accessibility, inclusivity, and equity. The group suggested these standards could feed from other Working Group Papers into the CoC. For the Inclusion inquiry in particular, the group recommended that YA:

- 1) Define terms such as "discrimination" and educate teachers on the lack of inclusion in yoga, possibly using an online course called, for example, Accessibility, Body Image, and Implicit Bias³
- 2) Assist Registered Yoga Schools (RYSs) and Registered Yoga Teachers (RYTs) in recognizing and examining how language, teaching style, and class content can interfere with accessibility and create an environment where students may not feel included, welcomed, or safe
- 3) Help RYSs train RYT to adapt their practices for students of all abilities and body types; the CoCWG recommended formal training in adapting practices to make the RYSs' teaching accessible to seniors or people with disabilities or larger bodies

Touch and Consent Education

The CoCWG recommended that this complicated topic requires the creation of educational content that would a) clarify yoga history of implied consent and b) explain best practices for the transition to an environment of explicit consent. Please see the [Core Curriculum](#) Working Group Paper, Appendix A, "Hallmarks of Ethical Classrooms," for more information on this topic.

Resources

The CoCWG felt that YA could create a system of listing resources around its CoC. These resources are listed in the Bibliography.

The CoCWG recommended that this complicated topic (of touch and consent) requires the creation of educational content that would a) clarify yoga history of implied consent and b) explain best practices for the transition to an environment of explicit consent.

³ Title is CoCWG's.

ADVISORY GROUP

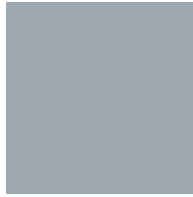
Our heartfelt thanks go to the following Advisors who spent much time and energy meeting, discussing, debating, and resolving issues on YA's CoC to the benefit of YA's membership. The Advisors were:



SANTIBA CAMPBELL



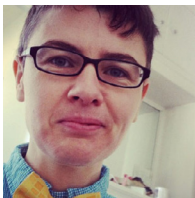
JONATHAN DICKSTEIN



TEO DRAKE



DONNA FARHI



ANN GLEIG



JIVANA HEYMAN



CAROL HORTON



ANDREA JAIN



TAMARA JEFFRIES



MELANIE KLEIN



OCTAVIA RAHEEM



ROOPA SINGH

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The CoCWG assembled initial resources below and recommended the following approaches for YA to assemble further resources (and perhaps publish them) to the benefit of the YA community and the yoga community more widely. This glossary could be either:

- 1) Organized in a way that prioritizes works by emphasis/importance in order of:
 - a) Foundational works that have stood the test of time
 - b) A diversity of perspectives on a given issue where appropriate
 - c) Produced materials in-house that YA has vetted thoroughly; Or
- 2) Consider carefully any item on the list given its potential “blowback” and be prepared to issue a best-standard statement on the item or issue

The CoCWG suggested also that such resources could be placed elsewhere on the YA website rather than linking them only to the Code.

Animal Welfare

Adams, Carol J. *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, 1990 and 2015.

Brueck, Julia Feliz (ed.). *Veganism in an Oppressive World: A Vegans-of-Color*.

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Kaza, S. "[Finding Safe Harbor: Buddhist Sexual Ethics in North America](#)," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24: pps 23-35, 2004.

Prebish, C. "[Journal of Buddhist Ethics 20](#)," pp 375-400 from *Mahayana Ethics and American Buddhism: Subtle Solutions or Creative Perversions?* 2013.

Buddhism, Social Change, Organizations

[AN OLIVE BRANCH](#)

[Buddhists for Racial Justice](#) and <https://northamericanbuddhistalliance.org/resources/>

Buddhism, Zen, Ethics

[San Francisco Zen Center](#)

[Rochester Zen Center](#)

[Soto Zen Buddhist Association](#)

Description: EBCM has been at the forefront of diversity and inclusion work in meditation-based convert Buddhism and has been called the most "diverse sangha in America" and has (They are insight heavy but also run yoga classes and have other Buddhist lineages teachers, mostly Zen)

Website: <https://eastbaymeditation.org>

East Bay Meditation Center (EBMC)

EBMC Diversity and Inclusion resources:

EBMC Diversity Practices:

[EBMC's Agreement for Multicultural](#)

[EBMC's Accessibility Policy](#)

[POC resources](#)

[Ethics, Restoration and Resolution Process, Policies and Procedures](#)

<https://eastbaymeditation.org/resources/ethics-restoration-resolution/>

<https://eastbaymeditation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ERRDocument.pdf>

EBMC's Practice Groups:

[Every Body, Every Mind sangha, POC Sangha , Dharma in Motion, Alphabet Sangha](#)

Trauma & Trauma-Informed Yoga

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White Awake

<https://whiteawake.org>

A number of white awareness Buddhist groups are forming using White Awake as their foundation.



#YAstandards

YOGA ALLIANCE & THE YOGA ALLIANCE FOUNDATION

Founded in 1999, Yoga Alliance is a member-based, non-profit organization that serves yoga schools and teachers across the globe, providing a world-recognized, best-in-class credential and unifying its members around a shared ethical commitment. In addition, YA delivers a strong value proposition to its members through community-building initiatives, educational resources, advocacy efforts, and social impact programs. Its sister organization, the Yoga Alliance Foundation, supports leveraged impact and direct service programs that expand the reach of and participation in yoga.

iwanttohelpya@yogaalliance.org
1560 Wilson Blvd, Suite 700, Arlington, VA 22209
[@yogaalliance](#) | 1-888-921-9642



WORKING GROUP PAPER

Inclusion

APRIL 2019

#YAstandards

In 1999, in its role as a voluntary, member-based organization serving yoga schools and teachers, **Yoga Alliance (YA)** sought to ensure and preserve the quality of yoga education and practice by establishing and disseminating standards for the education of yoga teachers and by maintaining a registry of teachers who met these standards. In 2018, **YA** launched a review of its standards, calling it the **Standards Review Project (SRP)**.

One result of the **SRP** is this collection of eight collaborative, condensed, and edited working group papers to which key yoga stakeholders for **YA** and for the yoga community at large contributed. These papers represent the recommendations by each working group of the best practices for the standard, or key inquiry area, in question. There is one working paper for each; what follows is the working group paper on the notion of **Inclusion** in yoga.

INCLUSION UPFRONT

YA asked the Inclusion Advisory Working Group (IAWG) to work “backwards” toward solving the problems of exclusion in yoga. Yoga has evolved from once being a localized male activity to being a global activity done mainly by women. YA asked the IAWG generally, “how can yoga reach EVERY BODY?,” and asked specifically:

- *Who is excluded from yoga in its current structure: culturally, physically, financially, geographically?*
- *What is the role of YA in fostering Inclusion in yoga?*

The **IAWG** answered these questions by recommending and defining a required addition to the YA-approved Core Curriculum called ***Curriculum of Modules for Diversity, Accessibility, Inclusion, and Equity***, or the “DAIE Curriculum.” This Curriculum includes module names, recommended hours for each module, and module descriptions. It also addresses potential issues of implementing this new curriculum standard.

Lead Teacher Trainers (need) to understand how to... (make a pose)... accessible... to people with different abilities and body types.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The IAWG took YA's request to work backwards to heart, asking themselves:

- What are the important skills and knowledge that Registered Yoga Schools (RYSs), and by extension Registered Yoga Teachers (RYTs), should have with regard to diversity, knowledge, skills, and experience.
- Does YA have a role in further, proactive steps to promote Inclusion in yoga at large? If so, what is that role?

BACKGROUND AND REFLECTION

The IAWG defined yoga as the **practice and teaching of union, or unity**.

The group observed that this aspiration, from ancient times to modernity, has not been optimally practiced, taught, or learned. They recognized that many people today feel excluded from yoga classes and the overall practice because of their race, culture, religion, gender identity, sexuality, socio-economic status, body composition, neuro-diversity, and/or physical ability.

If yoga is to be honestly practiced, taught, and learned by RYSs and RYT alike, the IAWG asserted that proactive steps must be taken to promote Inclusion in yoga in an effort to:

- 1) Promote equity
- 2) Reduce harm
- 3) Honor and leverage cultural differences
- 4) Foster diversity and accessibility in all areas of yoga while honoring the integrity of yoga's cultural and historical roots

The IAWG agreed that these steps would best involve:

- 1) YA providing recommended curriculum for an RYS
- 2) YA serving in an advocacy function to frame yoga as a practice of both individual and community growth and connection

The IAWG agreed that through appropriate training, Teacher Trainers of all levels and RYT themselves could learn to adapt sequences to meet the needs of all students. The group encouraged YA to consider the practical issues of encouraging schools that use scripts and set sequences to adapt their practices for diverse student needs.

The Inclusion Advisory Working Group recommend(ed) and define(d) a required addition to the YA-approved Core Curriculum called Curriculum of Modules for *Diversity, Accessibility, Inclusion, and Equity*.

SOLUTION

This section includes module names and descriptions as well as recommended hours for completing the modules.

CURRICULUM OF MODULES FOR DIVERSITY, ACCESSIBILITY, INCLUSION, AND EQUITY (DAIE CURRICULUM)

Introduction to Diversity, Accessibility, Inclusion & Equity Module (Intro to DAIE)	
TIME	3-5 hours Minimum of 1-2 hours required for svadhyaya (self-reflection) on how this content has been experienced in the trainees' DAIEly lives and the lives of those they teach or wish to teach
OVERVIEW	Introduction to the issues of DAIE and challenges in the lack of inclusion in yoga Certain knowledge and skills to make yoga classes more diverse and inclusive Definitions of diversity, accessibility, inclusion, and equity as core concepts
DETAILS	Familiarity with current definitions and usage of inclusive language, such as: "equity," "diversity," "colonization," "de-colonization," "under-represented," "under-resourced," "ableism," "racism," "anti-racism," "sexism," "class-ism," "trans-phobia," "fat-phobia," "inclusion," "body image," "body inclusivity," "privilege," "belonging," "disability," "special needs," "accessibility," "non-denominational"
NOTE	Lead Trainers (LTs) leading this module will understand how legal protections and anti-discrimination laws apply to teaching yoga and operating yoga studios and schools

If yoga is to be honestly practiced, taught, and learned by RYSs and RYTt alike... proactive steps must be taken to promote inclusion in yoga in an effort to promote equity, reduce harm, honor and leverage cultural differences, and foster diversity and accessibility in all areas of yoga while honoring the integrity of yoga's cultural and historical roots.

¹ The notion of Lead Trainer(s) and Other Trainer(s) come from YA's section of its website on [Standards Guidelines](#) (all RYS).

Adaptive and Inclusive Teaching Module²

TIME	7-14 hours, with: 2-4 hours on inclusive language 2-4 hours on consent, choice, and student empowerment 3-6 hours on adaptive yoga 7-14 hours
INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE	2-4 hours—The power that language choice has in creating equitable experiences Appropriate yoga language techniques that mitigate harm Using language that is inclusive, especially of people who may not typically feel included in yoga spaces The creation of a yoga experience free from words or phrases that might be triggers of trauma Connection between language choices and <i>ahimsa</i> (non-harming), <i>satya</i> (truth), and <i>asteya</i> (non-stealing)
CONSENT, CHOICE, & STUDENT EMPOWERMENT	2-4 hours—The ethical attainment of consent to touch students, set healthy boundaries, and sustain the paradigm of inviting student choice as having evolved from traditional student acquiescence to guru The benefits of offering consent cards and having the skills to explain consent and student choice The guiding of students to do their own self-reflection in every class Practicing consent within the practicum with various role-playing situations
ADAPTIVE YOGA	3-6 hours—The perspective of fitting the practice to the individual and not trying to fit any body into a practice The teaching of yoga postures and practices for differently-abled bodies The use of props and tools as well as cueing posture adaptation The creation of inclusive spaces

Clarity is needed by (“lead” Teacher Trainers) to understand how to teach for issues such as breaking down a pose and making it accessible physically to people with different abilities and body types, with adaptation or prop use.

² Though there were mixed feelings about this module, because it confronts many other standards issues, the IAWG agreed that RYT 200s should graduate from their programs with the understanding of the limitations of their knowledge around the issue and the edges of their competency. For RYT 300s or RYT 500s, the expectation could be higher.

The Science of Trauma and Yoga Module

TIME	4-8 hours
OVERVIEW	Recent strides in research on trauma, including that trauma is suffering that is stored in the body and brain
DETAILS	<p>The fundamentals and neurobiology of trauma</p> <p>How trauma is stored in the body</p> <p>The polyvagal theory</p> <p>The different types of trauma (shock; developmental; and systemic, identity-based trauma)</p> <p>The balance between yoga being an effective tool in addressing trauma versus being a trigger</p> <p>The common signs or signals of trauma and how this information relates to and works with accessible and inclusive teaching methodologies</p>
NOTE	This could be called “The Science of Being Trauma-Informed” module and integrated through the entire RYS curriculum

The Ethics of Cultural Sensitivity: Roots and Context of Yoga Module

TIME	4-6 hours
OVERVIEW	<p>Yoga’s origins, seminal texts, parampara (succession of knowledge), colonization and its impacts, the neo-colonial lens of modern yoga, cultural honoring and respect of lineage, cultural appropriation vs. cultural appreciation, and education on yoga ethics</p> <p>Accurate historical context and teaching with Samkhya (a school of Indian philosophy) and other yogic philosophy as a useful tool for teaching inclusion</p> <p>How alcohol and drug use is inappropriate in yoga classes and yoga contexts details</p> <p>How to contextualize the use of statues</p> <p>The value of the Sanskrit language and terms</p> <p>The use of iconography used in yoga studios or classes</p>
NOTE	<p>LTs would use supportive texts or evidence from the Yoga Sutras and other seminal Vedic texts to support this education and training</p> <p>LTs would consider including some form of historical context when teaching yoga, including yogic ethics as a foundation of integrity, and using the yamas and niyamas (ethical behaviors and observances) as the practice of alignment between knowledge and the actions we take</p> <p>An RYS may wish to consider the background and positionality of who lectures about yoga history and colonialism to prevent hurt, humiliation, and dissolution of yoga history</p>

PRACTICUM CONSIDERATIONS

The **IAWG recommended adding the DAIE Curriculum to the YA Practicum section of the RYS Standards**, asserting the need for inclusive metrics and values for ensuring that future RYT's are able to execute the DAIE Curriculum's key learnings.

To be successful, the IAWG said clarity is needed by LTs to understand how to teach for issues such as:

- 1) Inclusive language and cueing that offer options and center the student experience
- 2) Breaking down a pose and making it physically accessible to people with different abilities and body types, by adaptation or use of props
- 3) Sequencing skills that demonstrate adaptability
- 4) Considering case studies designed to address diversity, accessibility, inclusion, and equity
- 5) Applying seva (service) in under-resourced communities

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The **IAWG recommended that YA further address DAIE** overall **across all of its standards**.

Specifically, the DAIE Curriculum would ideally be interwoven throughout all RYS yoga teacher training (YTT) programs.

Additionally, the IAWG suggested that RYSs recruit LTs and Speciality Trainers (STs) with diverse backgrounds and experiences, including those who can, for example, speak on anti-discrimination law and on how best to integrate into school and studio practices.

IAWG recommendations for hours of training for each level of an RYS program and for LTs/Other Trainers (OTs):

LEVEL	TIME	DETAILS
RYS 300	18-30 hrs	See descriptions above
RYS 300 & 500	30-45 hrs	<p><i>Covering all above and include more experiential learning that emphasizes: The ability to teach with consideration of core DAIE Curriculum Experiential practices to deal with common mistakes, and to problem-solve and resolve these</i></p> <p>Continually deepen one's awareness utilizing a self-reflective inclusivity check in: is what I am doing fostering connection or disconnection? Do I offer choice?</p>
LTs/OTs	55 hrs	<p><i>First 45 hours same as RYS 300 and RYS 500, above, plus an additional 10 hours covering:</i></p> <p>Identifying and addressing gaps in programs</p> <p>Examination of own programmatic strengths and gaps in faculty and student population of RYS</p> <p>Learning about the benefits of and how to create scholarships for bringing in diverse participants into YTTs</p> <p>Consideration for cultural competency with teaching and opportunities abroad, RYS recruitment, and apprenticeship and mentorship programming</p> <p>Considerations for inclusive school marketing, development, and recruitment</p> <p>Continuing training and education (CEs)</p>

YA'S FUTURE ROLE TO FURTHER INCLUSION

The **IAWG recommended that YA address the knowledge, skills, and experience essential for DAIE** as described above. After that, **the IAWG recommends the below actions to further expand the concepts of DAIE** across its membership and the yoga community at large:

- 1) Convene a committee to work on equity, including financial constraints and the use of scholarships to address these constraints
- 2) Work with trauma yoga experts, including yoga therapists, to develop curriculum for the use of yoga in supporting individuals dealing with symptoms of trauma
- 3) Work with DAIE experts to align on core DAIE definitions as well as to develop a rubric and to compile case studies
- 4) Work with cultural issues experts to align on the cultural issues
- 5) Work with survey experts to develop a survey and/or grading rubric required for post-YTTs that gather feedback directly from RYT's to assess the delivery and quality of the DAIE Curriculum while also bringing top of mind the concepts of DAIE
- 6) Create forums, tools, and other resources to discuss and address power dynamics, abuse, and respect of authority
- 7) Acknowledge the importance of the quality of mindfulness and *sattva* (truth) in the DAIE Curriculum among trainers and teachers

The IAWG suggested that YA be thoughtful with respect to with whom they partner on the above work, ensuring community and industry respect according to one's knowledge, skill, and experience. The IAWG wanted those from marginalized communities and/or those who make a living teaching these concepts included in compensation, citation, and reference conversations and practices.

On the whole, the IAWG had strong beliefs that all LTs be infused with DAIE expertise as well as be trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive. The **IAWG recommended the formation of a future IAWG committee to develop LT-specific training**, addressing issues such as adapting sequences to meet the needs of all students.

ADVISORY GROUP

Our heartfelt thanks go to the following Advisors who spent much time and energy meeting, discussing, debating, and resolving issues on Inclusion to the benefit of YA's membership. The Advisors were:



JACOBY BALLARD



SUSANNA BARKATAKI



LISA CARBONE



CINDIA DE LA TORRE



PHINDILE DHLAMINI



MARSHAWN FELTUS



JIVANA HEYMAN



HALA KHOURI



CRYSTAL MCCREARY



MARYAM OVISSI



LUVENA RANGEL



MELANIE WILLIAMS

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WORKING GROUP PAPER

Core Curriculum

APRIL 2019

#YAstandards

In 1999, in its role as a voluntary, member-based organization serving yoga schools and teachers, **Yoga Alliance (YA)** sought to ensure and preserve the quality of yoga education and practice by establishing and disseminating standards for the education of yoga teachers and by maintaining a registry of teachers who met these standards. In 2018, **YA** launched a review of its standards, calling it the **Standards Review Project (SRP)**.

One result of the **SRP** is this collection of eight collaborative, condensed, and edited working group papers to which key yoga stakeholders for **YA** and for the yoga community at large contributed. These papers represent the recommendations by each working group of the best practices for the standard, or key inquiry area, in question. There is one working paper for each; what follows is the working group paper on the notion of a **Core Curriculum** in yoga.

CORE CURRICULUM UPFRONT

Yoga Alliance (YA) chose Core Curriculum as one of its eight areas of inquiry because defining and preserving the quality of yoga education and practice relies, by necessity, on the formation of yoga courses (curricula) that in turn form yoga programs, or yoga teacher training (YTT) programs, of Registered Yoga Schools (RYSs). Harnessing the power of yoga through curricula, and grounding it through programs which train yoga practitioners to deepen their practice and/or to become teachers, is the fundamental inquiry of Core Curriculum.

YA presented the Core Curriculum Working Group (CCWG) with the following questions:

- ➔ ***What content, if any, needs to be standardized within RYS curriculum in training yoga practitioners to become yoga teachers?***
- ➔ ***Do yoga curricula need a “common core”? What basic knowledge should every yoga teacher share?***

(There are) three fundamental qualities for determining the definition of being a yoga teacher. These qualities are knowledge, skills, and experience.

The CCWG asked YA to revise its existing standards, called [“Educational Categories of Study and Practice.”](#) Today, these consist of Training & Practice; Teaching Methodology; Anatomy & Physiology; Yoga Philosophy, Ethics, & Lifestyle; and Practicum. The group set out to define and use these terms in its suggested revision of these standards.

The CCWG first recommended three fundamental qualities for determining the definition of being a yoga teacher. These qualities are:

- **Knowledge**, which comprises familiarity with content that forms the foundation of a teacher’s ability to share yoga in a class for the general public; however, this knowledge need not necessarily be shared during the class

- **Skills**, which include actions that a teacher should be able to perform both during a led class as well as within their own practice
- **Experience**, which includes both observation and practice

The CCWG recommended that any new YA-approved Core Curriculum should promote safer, more competent yoga teaching that is accessible and inclusive while also being inspirational and aspirational. The group defined these words as:

- **Safer**, which means improvements in the quality of the teaching and training of Anatomy & Physiology and Teaching Methodology as well as in interpersonal relationships
- **More competent**, which means that Lead Trainers¹ (LTs) demonstrate practical skills in every Core Curriculum subject rather than skills in merely one or a few
- **Accessible and inclusive**, which means including all of the general public, defined by YA as inclusive of a wide variety of mental and/or physical abilities, ages, ethnicities, gender identities, racial identities, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, body images, educational backgrounds, academic social achievements, family composition, geographic backgrounds, languages, learning styles, beliefs, cultures, and yoga experience levels
- **Inspirational and aspirational**, which means promoting the recognition and experience of yoga as more than asana through the sharing of a wide range of yoga practices and teachings that respects yoga's history and the diverse needs and backgrounds of students

The CCWG also addressed considerations such as: the current state of diversity now reflected in RYs, Registered Yoga Teachers (RYTs), and practitioners; the rapid rise of the number of yoga classes offered worldwide; and the continuous challenge of the implementation of any yoga programming, including for large-scale efforts such as insurance companies, school boards, and similar organizations.

Many Core Curriculum topics were also addressed in the Working Groups for [Teacher Qualifications](#), [Teacher Trainer Qualifications](#), and [Online Learning](#).

¹ The notion of Lead Trainer(s) and Other Trainer(s) come from YA's section of its website on [Standards Guidelines](#) (all RYs).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The CCWG agreed that a reorganization and expansion of YA's Educational Categories of Study and Practice is necessary. The evolution of these categories presented other mission-critical issues and questions for YA and its membership to resolve together, RYSs and RYTtS alike. The group asked:

- 1) What are the minimum hours for learning in educational categories, and how are they integrated?
- 2) What are the best learning formats, including those that take place online? How are in-person and online learnings integrated? How are these learnings tested?
- 3) In the context of this paper, what are the best definitions of concepts such as "knowledge," "skills," "experience," and "inclusion"?

BACKGROUND AND REFLECTION

The CCWG first cited what today's RYSs agree to teach within YA's "Educational Categories of Study and Practice" (or Core Curriculum) to trainees in their YTTs who can then obtain a RYT 200 credential from YA upon successful completion. This curriculum is designated as follows:

- Techniques, Training, and Practice
- Teaching Methodology
- Anatomy & Physiology
- Yoga Philosophy/Ethics/Lifestyle
- Practicum

The CCWG addressed three main issues influencing their recommendations:

- 1) **Minimum hours.** The CCWG recommended that RYSs calculate time spent per category as accurately as possible given the integration of categories. For example, a two-hour session on trikonasana (triangle pose) might be broken down as 30 minutes of Anatomy & Physiology; 30 minutes of Teaching Methodology; 30 minutes of Techniques, Training & Practice; and 30 minutes of Practicum (or practice teaching)
- 2) **New learning and testing formats.** The CCWG discussed different formats that could be used in each category and how many hours should be slotted for each, including: in-person Trainers within a traditional classroom setting; virtual Trainers conducting a live, interactive training online; virtual Trainers providing learning via static, pre-recorded presentation; and traditional homework
- 3) **Inclusivity of diverse yoga lineages.** The CCWG acknowledged that their recommended Core Curriculum standards could conflict with a lineage or a specific teaching environment. For example, in countries or settings with challenges to freedom of speech that might interfere with a Trainer's ability to present the Core Curriculum, the CCWG recommended that the Trainer request a waiver of these teaching requirements and use alternative texts and topics for consideration instead

Any new YA-approved core curriculum should promote safer, more competent yoga teaching that is accessible and inclusive while being inspirational and aspirational as well.

The CCWG acknowledged that yoga practices such as chanting or mantra may be presented as religious rituals by some schools or as secular meditative practices by other schools. The group **recommended that RYSs always offer alternatives when the school presents the material in a manner that conflicts with a student’s beliefs**. Similarly, any yoga lineage unable to meet the standards of the Core Curriculum because of the core beliefs of the lineage may similarly apply for a waiver and propose alternatives. None in the CCWG opposed YA allowing such waivers, assuming that YA would apply reasonable standards when considering such requests.

SOLUTION

The **CCWG recommended new and expanded educational categories** from the current five categories into eleven new ones.

CURRENT	NEW/PROPOSED
Techniques, Training, & Practice	Yoga History
Teaching Methodology	Yoga Philosophy
Anatomy & Physiology	Yoga Teacher Ethics
Yoga Philosophy/Ethics/Lifestyle	Anatomy, Physiology, & Biomechanics
Practicum	Yogic Anatomy
	Asana
	Pranayama (breath control)
	Meditation
	Teaching Methodology
	Professional Interests
	Practice Teaching

The CCWG described each new category in detail using the filters of knowledge, skills, and experience to describe how these categories should best be taught. The CCWG also included additional details with respect to learning hours, verification, and testing. In addition to suggesting a minimum number of hours spent on each proposed subject area, the **CCWG recommended implementation of improved assessment and testing methods that verify teachers’ ability to apply their knowledge of the Core Curriculum**. The group supported assessments that combine Trainer and YA testing methods, with some saying that YA should offer schools optional assessment tools or combine graded or pass/fail methods to accommodate more self-reflective, feedback-oriented testing.

Importantly, other than Practicum, the CCWG did not identify any new Core Curriculum area as inappropriate for Online Learning (please see the [Online Learning](#) Working Group Paper for more on this inquiry).

The Core Curriculum Working Group addressed issues surrounding the diversity now reflected in RYSs, RYT’s, and practitioners, combined with the rapid rise in the number of yoga classes offered worldwide.

(1) YOGA HISTORY

Knowledge

The CCWG determined that teachers need to be able to demonstrate the knowledge of yogic time periods, geographic origins, definitive characteristics, and teachings. These are:

- 1) Renunciation of origins of yoga
- 2) Vedic, or orthodox, traditions of yoga including the six darshanas, or “viewings” or traditions: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta
- 3) Heterodox traditions: Jain, Buddhist, Ajivika, Ajñāna, and Cārvāka
- 4) The *Upanishads*
- 5) The *Bhagavad Gita*
 - a) Three expressions of yoga: *bhakti* (devotion), *jñāna* (wisdom), *karma* (selfless action)
 - b) Recommended reading: Chapters 2, 3, 4, 6, and 12
- 6) *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali
 - a) Expressions of *samādhi* (total freedom), options for practice, the eight limbs of yoga
 - b) Recommended reading: Chapters 1 and 2
- 7) Yoga in the *tantric* (energetic) traditions
- 8) Pre-Modern yoga, including the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*
- 9) Modern yoga, including colonialism
- 10) Post-Modern yoga, including the evolution of any specific lineage featured in the training
- 11) Current issues in yoga, such as the [International Day of Yoga](#) and other expressions of yoga in India today, including #MeToo and sexual abuse in yoga communities; appropriation of yoga as a form of entertainment or exercise; religious politics and yoga; the commercialization of yoga; the past and present role of gender in yoga

Skills

The CCWG said that teachers should be able to:

- Accurately summarize the above aspects of yoga history in a class setting when relevant in a manner accessible to students, including the ability to reference relevant texts
- Convey historical source or context of other practices shared during class, such as asana, pranayama, meditation, and philosophy in a manner relevant and accessible to students

Experience

The CCWG recommended that trainings provide the opportunity for teachers to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrating the above skills
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under Trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **ten hours of learning**, two of which could be in a static virtual learning environment (SVLE) and three of which could be in an interactive virtual learning environment (IVLE), but there was no resolution on this solution. Most in the CCWG agreed that these skills in Yoga History must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(2) YOGA PHILOSOPHY

Although the recommended Yoga History requirement includes the history of yoga philosophy, the **CCWG recommended that trainings also feature the personal study and practice of Yoga Philosophy as a distinct Core Curriculum subject.** This could include Trainer interpretations of yoga's teachings on the nature of reality (metaphysics), knowledge (epistemology), value (axiology), and logic. The CCWG acknowledged that presentations on Yoga Philosophy may overlap with presentations on the *personal* study and practice of Yoga Philosophy.

Knowledge

Most in the CCWG agreed that YTTs must identify with an existing yoga philosophy and/or create and disclose their own yoga philosophy to ensure that yoga not be reduced to a practice of only physical postures. The group said that the philosophy must clearly define yoga and should address key concepts in Indian philosophy/*dharmic* (dutiful) cultures, such as suffering, karma, *dharma* (duty), liberation, and *seva* (volunteerism). After completing any training, RYT's should have:

- In-depth knowledge of their RYT's' definition of yoga or yoga philosophy
- An understanding of how that yoga philosophy relates to other yoga practices and/or limbs of yoga
- In-depth knowledge of published texts or unpublished material relating to the philosophy
- An understanding of the historical context or source(s) of the philosophy
- Awareness of practical methods to apply personally and reflect on the philosophy

Skills

The CCWG recommended that teachers be able to:

- Summarize accurately the above aspects of yoga philosophy in a group/private class setting when relevant and in an accessible manner, including referencing relevant texts and history
- Convey how philosophy relates to other practices shared during class, such as asana, pranayama, and meditation in a manner that is relevant and accessible to students

Experience

The CCWG said that trainings provide the opportunity for teachers to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrate the above skills
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under trainer observation
- Personally reflect on the school's yoga philosophy through practical exercises

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **ten hours of learning**, two of which could be in an SVLE and three of which could be in an IVLE, but there was no resolution on this solution. Most in the CCWG agreed that these skills in Yoga Philosophy must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(3) YOGA TEACHER ETHICS

Please also see the [Code of Conduct](#), [Integrity, Inclusion](#), and [Scope of Practice](#) Working Group Papers for more information regarding ethics in yoga teaching.

Knowledge

The **CCWG recommended that teachers have in-depth knowledge of the *yamas* and *niyamas* (ethical principles and external observances, respectively) or similar lineage-based yogic ethical precepts.** The group outlined in a document called “Hallmarks of Ethical Classrooms” the eight essential aspects of ethical classroom environments. Please see Appendix A for this document.

The CCWG agreed teachers must generally possess:

- An understanding of how yogic ethics relate to other yoga practices and/or limbs
- In-depth knowledge of texts relating to yogic ethics
- An understanding of the historical context or source(s) of yogic ethics
- Awareness of practical methods for personally applying and reflecting on yogic ethics

Skills

The CCWG said that teachers should be able to:

- Accurately summarize the *yamas* and *niyamas* or similar lineage-specific precepts in a group/private class setting when relevant, including referencing relevant texts and history
- Embody and abide by their own interpretation yogic ethics during and beyond class to the best of their ability
- Foster an ethical classroom environment to the best of their ability, which includes applying their knowledge of the eight *Hallmarks of an Ethical Classroom* described in Appendix A
- Convey how yogic ethics relate to general conduct and other yoga practices shared during class, such as *asana*, *pranayama*, meditation, etc. when relevant and in an accessible manner.

Experience

The CCWG recommended that trainings provide the opportunity for teachers to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrating the above skills
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **10 hours of learning**, two of which could be in an SVLE and three of which could be in an IVLE, but there was no resolution on this solution. Most in the CCWG agreed that these skills in Yoga Teacher Ethics must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(4) ANATOMY, PHYSIOLOGY, AND BIOMECHANICS

Knowledge

- 1) **Systems:** The CCWG recommended teachers have exposure to the following systems, including their components:
 - a) Nervous system
 - i. Neuroscience of meditative absorption, or samadhi
 - ii. Relaxation, the senses, and energy
 - iii. Autonomic/involuntary nervous system and its relationship to the “fight, flight, or freeze” stress response and the “submit, rest, or relax” response
 - iv. Vagal tone, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and hypervigilance
 - v. Mind-body connection including voluntary vs. involuntary breathing
 - b) Cardiovascular/circulatory system
 - c) Endocrine system
 - d) Digestive system
 - e) Respiratory system
 - f) Effect of spinal posture and muscles that affect breathing
 - g) Why/how air enters and leaves the body
 - h) The relationship between the autonomic nervous system, vagal tone, and breathing
 - i) Musculoskeletal system
 - i. The anatomy and physiology of the skeletal system, including the axial and appendicular skeleton
 - ii. The muscular system
 1. The major muscles involved in asana including their origin, insertion, and primary functions and actions
 2. Types of muscle contractions (isometric and isotonic)
 3. The major muscles involved in breathing, including the diaphragm
 - iii. Joints
 1. The biomechanics of the joints of the axial skeleton, including the pelvis and spine, and the joints of the appendicular skeleton including the hip, elbow, knee, wrist, shoulder, and ankle
 2. The types of joints (fibrous, cartilaginous, synovial, and facet)
 3. The six different types of synovial joints (pivot, hinge, saddle, plane, condyloid, and ball-and-socket)
 4. The types of joint movements (abduction, adduction, flexion, extension, rotation, and circumduction)
 5. Joint stabilization
 - iv. Basic understanding of tendons, ligaments, and fascia
- 2) **Research**
 Some in the CCWG said that teachers should have awareness of relevant, peer-reviewed literature regarding the effects of asana, pranayama, and meditation on these systems; some disagreed
- 3) **Anatomy of Activities**
 The CCWG recommended that teachers have a general understanding of the anatomy and physiology related to the following activities and experiences:
 - a) **Balancing**, which describes the relationship between visual, proprioceptive, and vestibular input
 - b) **Stretching**, including passive/static stretching, active/static stretching, proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation, loaded stretching, and contraindications for these stretching techniques
 - c) **Safe movement**, flowing from joint physiology, injury awareness, preventions and relative contraindications; this relates to “risk awareness,” one of the eight hallmarks of an ethical classroom described earlier in this paper

d) **Trauma**, including various definitions and the effect of trauma on the nervous system (please see the [Inclusion](#) and [Code of Conduct](#) Working Group Papers for more information on trauma-informed teachings of yoga)

4) **Misalignment and Contraindications**

Advisors recommended that teachers possess adequate knowledge of anatomy to detect and resolve students' misalignment during asana practice and to advise students which asana, pranayama, and/or meditation practices are contraindicated or inadvisable for any other reason

5) **Alternatives**

The CCWG said that teachers must possess sufficient knowledge of anatomy and physiology to offer safe alternatives to asana, pranayama, and meditation practices; to ensure teachers inform students of these alternatives and adaptations in a manner that is relevant and accessible, the CCWG recommended teachers have knowledge of the relevant cueing methods described in the Teaching Methodology section of this paper

6) **Sequencing**

Advisors recommended that teachers have sufficient knowledge of anatomy such that teachers are able to safely sequence asana, pranayama, and meditation

Skills

The CCWG said teachers should be able to:

- 1) Describe to students the general effects of asana, pranayama, and meditation on the anatomical actions and systems described above, when/if relevant and in an accessible manner
- 2) Describe to students the relevant anatomy and physiology involved in the practice of the specific asana, pranayama and meditation techniques the teacher offers during class, when relevant and in an accessible manner
- 3) Disclose to students relevant risks associated with the *specific* asana, pranayama, and meditation practices the teacher offers during class
- 4) Apply their understanding of anatomy and physiology to detect and resolve asana misalignment that would be injurious to students
- 5) Make an effort to learn of student injuries and/or conditions and clarify contraindications related to their issue in asana, pranayama, and/or meditation practices
- 6) Offer students relevant asana and pranayama alternatives and adaptations, employing recommended cueing methods described in the Teaching Methodology section of this paper
- 7) Safely sequence a practice which may include asana, pranayama, and meditation

The Core Curriculum Working Group addressed three main issues influencing its recommendations:
1) minimum hours,
2) new learning and testing formats,
and 3) inclusivity of diverse yoga lineages.

Experience

The CCWG recommended that trainings provide the opportunity for trainees to:

- 1) Observe Trainers demonstrating the above skills
- 2) Adequately demonstrate the above skills under Trainer observation
- 3) Practice asana, pranayama, and meditation safely according to the students' own injuries and/or conditions

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **40 hours of learning**, 8 of which could be in an SVLE and 10 in an IVLE, but there was no resolution by the group on the number of hours, verification, and testing required for this category.

(5) YOGIC ANATOMY

Knowledge

Regardless of whether a school's lineage gives credence to yogic anatomy, some in the CCWG noted that RYSs should expose teachers to yogic anatomy as it appears in yoga history and texts.² This includes awareness of general definitions of the major terms in these texts. The CCWG did not reach an agreement on their recommendations for Yogic Anatomy.

Skills

The CCWG recommended that if yogic anatomy is part of a particular school's system of yoga, trainees should be able to teach and demonstrate their knowledge of the above topics in group or private classroom setting when relevant and in an accessible manner.

Experience

Advisors recommended that trainings provide the opportunity for trainees to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrate the above skills
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under Trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **10 hours of learning**, 1 of which could be in an SVLE and 2 of which could be in an IVLE. Most in the CCWG agreed that these skills must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(6) ASANA

Knowledge

The CCWG said that RYT's must be familiar with various definitions of asana including:

- 1) Knowledge of how the asana is understood historically, in major texts, and according to the school's lineage, including the purpose and potential of asana within the yogic system and its relation to definitions of yoga and to other practices of yoga such as ethics, meditation, pranayama, pratyahara (sense withdrawal), and samadhi
- 2) Understanding of the effects of asana according to anatomy, research, historical texts, lineage, and/or modern interpretations

² The CCWG recommended texts including the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita, and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.

- 3) Exposure to modern manifestations of asana including:
 - a) Lineages from India, e.g., Ashtanga, Hatha, and Bikram
 - b) Current fusion forms, e.g., hot yoga and dance yoga
 - c) Types of yoga asana classes, e.g., Vinyasa, Power, Gentle Flow, Yin Yoga
- 4) In-depth knowledge of specific asanas chosen by the school or lineage but which must include *sukhasana* (simple seated sitting pose), *tadasana* (mountain pose), and *savasana* (corpse pose). This includes knowledge of:
 - a) Reflection on why the asana is performed in a manner that promotes self-inquiry, self-motivation, and self-discernment
 - b) How to prepare for the asana, get into various options/stages of the asana, maintain the chosen option/stage, and get out of the asana safely
 - c) How to apply their understanding of anatomy and physiology to detect and resolve asana misalignment that would be injurious to students
 - d) The anatomical and physiological effects of the asana including relevant joint mechanics, muscle contraction, muscle stretching, risks, and relative contraindications
 - e) Alternatives to and adaptations of the asana for common injuries and/or conditions, which may involve the use of props
 - f) Sufficient warm-up and preparation for the asana
 - g) Yoga anatomy of each asana, such as the asana's potential effect on prana
 - h) Lineage-based breathing recommendations, if any
- 5) An understanding of the difference between relaxation and savasana
- 6) In-depth knowledge of how to sequence a complete practice including asana, pranayama, and meditation to achieve a particular effect/intention, safely and competently
- 7) Knowledge of groups of asanas with similar effects and their shared anatomy, alignment, risks, relative contraindications, and role in sequencing

Skills

The CCWG recommended that RYT's be able to demonstrate knowledge of the above topics in group and/or private settings when relevant and in an accessible manner as well as demonstrate the ability to offer general information about the above content to students with the exception of the topic of sequencing. Teachers should be able to demonstrate, or cue an assistant or student to demonstrate, any asana which they are teaching based on their own experience of regular practice of the asana according to their ability.

Experience

The CCWG recommended that an RYS provide the opportunity for trainees to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrate the above skills
- Practice asana regularly including sitting, savasana, and other asanas of the school's choosing, including their adaptations, alternatives, and stages appropriate for the teacher
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **50 hours of learning**, 5 of which could be in an SVLE and 10 of which could be in an IVLE. Most in the CCWG agreed that these skills must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(7) PRANAYAMA

Knowledge

The CCWG agreed that RYT's must be familiar with the definitions of pranayama and have:

- 1) Knowledge of how pranayama has been defined and practiced historically, in major texts,³ and according to the school's lineage including pranayama's purpose and potential within the yogic system and its relation to other practices of yoga such as ethics, meditation, asana, pratyahara, and samadhi
- 2) Understanding of the effects of pranayama on anatomy and yogic anatomy according to research, historical texts, lineage, and/or modern interpretations
- 3) Methods for controlling the inhalation and exhalation (valving) through the throat such as during ujjayi pranayama, using the tongue such as in sitali pranayama, or through the nostrils such as in nadi shodhana
- 4) Knowledge of how to safely and competently sequence a series of pranayama exercises as well as a practice that includes a combination of asana, pranayama, philosophy, and meditation exercises to achieve a particular effect/intention
- 5) In-depth knowledge of specific pranayama exercises and pranayama-related kriyas chosen by the school or lineage but which should include nadi shodhana/anuloma viloma, ujjayi, three-part breath, and potentially kapalabhati. This requires knowledge of:
 - a) How to prepare for, begin, maintain, and end the practice of pranayama exercise or pranayama-related kriya
 - b) The relevant anatomical and physiological effects of the pranayama exercise or pranayama-related kriya including joint mechanics, muscle contraction, muscle stretching, risks, and relative contraindications
 - c) Methods to detect and address misalignment to the extent possible during practice of pranayama or pranayama-related kriya
 - d) Alternatives to and adaptations of each required pranayama exercise for common injuries, conditions, and abilities, such as:
 - i. Nadi Shodhana alternative: concentrating on alternating nostrils rather than physically manipulating them, tongue in kechari mudra, eyes in shambhavi mudra
 - ii. Ujjayi alternative: concentrating on or light constriction of glottis with tongue in kechari mudra
 - iii. Three-part breath alternative: actively manipulate only the lower, middle or upper lobes of the lungs rather than all three areas, keeping in mind the energetic effect of each
 - iv. Kapalabhati alternative: modifications in pace and intensity, or bhasrika
 - v. Sitali alternative: breathing in through teeth, breathing out through nostrils

³ The CCWG suggested texts including the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita*, *Kumbhaka Paddhati* and the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Please see these works for all pranayama terms in this section.

Skills

The CCWG recommended that teachers be able to demonstrate knowledge of the above topics in group and/or private settings when relevant and in an accessible manner as well as demonstrate the ability to offer general information with the exception of the topic of sequencing.

Experience

The CCWG agreed that trainings provide the opportunity for trainees to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrate the above skills
- Practice the above-mentioned pranayama exercises regularly including their adaptations, alternatives, and stages appropriate for the trainee
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Most in the CCWG recommended **15 hours of learning**, 2 of which could be in an SVLE and 4 of which could be in an IVLE. Most in the CCWG agreed that these skills must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(8) MEDITATION

Knowledge

Most in the CCWG said that teachers must be familiar with the definitions of meditation, pratyahara, *dharana* (concentration) and *dhyana* (absorption) and have:

- 1) Knowledge of what meditation is historically, in major texts,⁴ and according to the school's lineage including meditation's purpose and potential within the yogic system and its relation to other practices of yoga such as ethics, pranayama, asana, pratyahara, concentration, and samadhi
- 2) Understanding of the effects of meditation according to best-practices research, historical texts, lineage, and/or modern interpretations
- 3) Knowledge of how to safely and competently sequence a series of meditation exercises as well as a practice that includes a combination of philosophy, asana, pranayama, and meditation to achieve a particular effect/intention
- 4) In-depth knowledge of specific meditation exercises chosen by the school or lineage but which must include at least one of each of the following types of meditation/concentration exercises:
 - a) Pratyahara-associated exercises: savasana and yoga nidra
 - b) Dharana-based exercises: breath-focused, mudra-focused mantra-focused, chanting, yantra-focused, trataka and body-focused
 - c) Dhyana-based exercises: self-reflection, pratipaksha bhavana, sankalpa, Buddhist-tradition mindfulness, Zen, vipassana
 - d) Samadhi-focused exercises: mantra japa, deity yoga, seedless/expansive meditation

The group noted that the above knowledge requires baseline knowledge of:

- a) How to prepare for, begin, maintain, and end the practice of meditation
- b) The relevant anatomical, physiological, and psychological effects of the meditation exercise including risks and contraindications

⁴ The CCWG suggested texts including the Yoga Sutras, Dhammapada, Hatha Yoga Pradipika, and Gheranda Samhita. Please refer to these texts for definitions and explanations of terms in this section.

- c) Methods to detect and address how students' postures could be made more conducive to meditation
- d) Alternatives to and adaptations of the meditation exercise for common injuries and/or conditions, such as:
 - i. Breath-focused alternative: external sound-focused or other lineage-appropriate, sense-focused technique
 - ii. Body-focused alternative: yantra or mudra-focused (mudra for hands, eyes, tongue, whole body, or other options)
 - iii. Yoga nidra alternative: body-based rotation of consciousness or sankalpa/affirmation concentration
 - iv. Savasana alternative: breath-focused concentration or relaxation

Skills

The CCWG recommended that teachers be able to demonstrate knowledge of the above topics in group and/or private settings when relevant and in an accessible manner as well as demonstrate the ability to offer general information with the exception of the topic of sequencing. The group recommended that trainees be able to practice previously mentioned meditation exercises to the best of their ability.

Experience

The CCWG recommended an RYS provide the opportunity for trainees to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrate the above skills
- Practice above-mentioned meditation exercises regularly including their adaptations, alternatives, and stages appropriate for the trainees
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **10 hours of learning**, 1 of which could be in an SVLE and 3 of which could be in an IVLE. Most agreed that these skills must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(9) TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Knowledge

The CCWG determined that best practices in Teaching Methodology comprised the following list. Which is more fully explained in Appendix B.

- 1) Practice selection
- 2) Sequencing
- 3) Pacing
- 4) Environment
- 5) Verbal communication to include offering cues which are inclusive and respectful of students' various abilities, levels of experience, and levels of mobility
- 6) Visual communication
- 7) Touch/physical communication
- 8) Classroom management

Skills

The CCWG recommended that teachers be able to engage the methods described above when relevant and in an accessible manner.

Experience

The CCWG recommended that an RYS provide the opportunity for trainees to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrate the above skills
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under Trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

The CCWG recommended **25 hours of learning**, 3 of which could be in an SVLE and 6 of which could be in an IVLE. Most agreed that these skills must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(10) PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS

Knowledge

The CCWG recommended that teachers have knowledge of the following topics relevant to the professional interests of RYT's:

- 1) Contract clarity between teachers and their hiring entities
- 2) Professional organizations for the advancement of yoga and yoga instruction
- 3) Timeliness and consistency, including the need for teachers to start and end classes on time, as well as consistently following through on teaching commitments
- 4) Cleanliness of the teacher's body, dress, and instruction space to the fullest extent possible
- 5) Marketing, including professional methods for self-promotion and promotion of class offerings
- 6) Liability, waivers, and insurance
- 7) Self-care methods to ensure the sustainability of a teacher's profession
- 8) Venues for teaching and formats such as group classes, private classes, workshops, and retreats
- 9) Credentialing/registration process for graduating teachers
- 10) Other relevant topics, including: financial management, negotiation, project management, time management, critical thinking, diplomacy, emotional intelligence, non-verbal communication, conflict management, decision making

Skills

Advisors recommended that teachers demonstrate timeliness, consistency, and cleanliness as described above and obtain and maintain liability insurance.

Experience

Advisors recommended that teachers practice self-care as described above.

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Most in the CCWG recommended **10 hours of learning**, 1 of which could be in an SVLE and 2 of which could be in an IVLE. Some agreed that these skills must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(11) PRACTICE TEACHING

Knowledge, Skills, and Experience

Practicum provides teachers with the ability to apply the knowledge and skills described in each Core Curriculum subject above, according to the CCWG. Practicum activities and formats could include:

- **Mentorship.** A teacher guiding a practice or class under Trainer observation for feedback, or discussing teaching practices and experiences with an experienced yoga teacher, including the time spent receiving feedback.
- **Observation.** A teacher observing Trainers or experienced teachers demonstrating the above skills and knowledge in-person, in an IVLE, or in an SVLE.
- **Assisting.** A teacher assisting Trainers or experienced teachers with demonstration of the above skills and knowledge.

The group agreed that experience in teaching comes only from teaching.

Hours, Testing, and Verification

Many in the CCWG recommended **15 hours of learning**, all of which must be in-person and not via SVLEs or IVLEs. They also agreed that Practicum activities and hours may be fulfilled both during and after a trainee's participation in the training school program.

ADVISORY GROUP

Our heartfelt thanks go to the following Advisors who spent much time and energy meeting, discussing, debating, and resolving issues on the Core Curriculum to the benefit of Yoga Alliance's membership. The Advisors were:



JAFAR ALEXANDER



MARLA APT



SUSANNA BARKATAKI



JASMINE CHEHRAZI



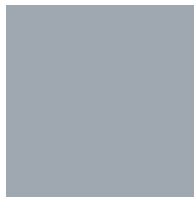
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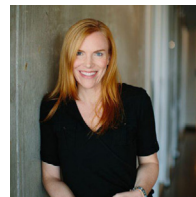
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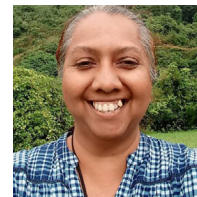
BRAHMANI LIEBMAN



RAY LONG



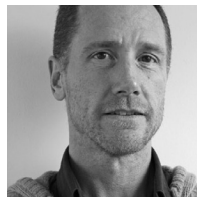
HEATHER PETERSON



NIVEDITA ASHOK PINGLE



SWAMI RAMANANDA



MARK SINGLETON



SIERRA ROSE STANGE



JUDY WEAVER



CORA WEN

Special thanks to Andrew Tanner and Hilary Mughloo of Yoga Alliance for facilitating the conversation and taking notes.

APPENDIX A: HALLMARKS OF ETHICAL CLASSROOMS

CONSENT FOR PHYSICAL CONTACT

Many in the CCWG believed that physical contact with students is unnecessary, with others acknowledging that skillful, consensual assists can foster powerful and positive yoga experiences. The CCWG agreed that teachers must have knowledge of methods for ethically requesting consent should it ever become necessary to engage in physical contact with a student during a teacher's career. Waiver-based consent was proposed as sufficient, but the group valued three-step consent well. This entails:

- 1) **Pre-practice, general consent:** at the start of class, the teacher explains their intention in offering physical assistance/contact and asks students for their consent for general physical contact either:
 - a) Individually as they arrive or are on their mats;
 - b) Individually or as a group with a clear hand position/gesture; or
 - c) With a "chip" or card.
- 2) **Pose-specific consent:** at the start of class the teacher distinguishes between *general* consent for contact vs. consent for contact during a *specific* practice/pose. For instance, a teacher may explain "If at any point during a particular pose you don't want to be touched and you see that I am approaching you to offer physical assistance, please shake your head or say 'no.' If I am in the process of assisting you physically in a practice and the contact is no longer welcome, please shake your head or say 'no.'" The teacher ensures that students are aware of their approach before making physical contact so that the student has ample opportunity to say "no" before contact is made.
- 3) **Post-contact consent:** A teacher surveys a student's breathing upon physical contact. If the teacher senses a high level of discomfort or significant change in breathing the teacher refrains from additional physical contact during that pose/practice.

ETHICAL TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

(Please see the [Code of Conduct](#) and [Scope of Practice](#) Working Group Papers for the fundamental inquiry into ethics in yoga.)

The CCWG struggled to define ethical teacher-student relationships but generally agreed that teachers must be aware of the boundaries of the scope of practice.

The group agreed that teachers must be aware of the power dynamics that create the potential for abuse. The CCWG recommended that teachers be able to distinguish between:

- 1) Devotional teacher-student or guru-disciple relationships, such as that described in the Upanishads and exemplified by Arjuna and Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita
- 2) Non-devotional teacher-student relationships, featuring student-focused teaching models and the teaching of yoga as a form of service between equals. The group agreed such relationships feature mutual respect, openness to questioning, and a spirit of inquiry

The CCWG recommended that teachers should be explicitly aware of which type(s) of teacher-student relationship(s) their training promotes. This disclosure may help to prevent the abuses of power stemming from the misperception of non-devotional teacher Trainers as gurus (or dispellers of darkness).

Finally, the CCWG recommended that Trainers disclose explicitly to both YA and to trainees if their yoga lineage/tradition is one in which intimacy is an accepted and a performed form of yoga practice. The group was unable to agree on whether the teacher-student relationship must end between a teacher and any student(s) with whom they are physically intimate or dating, regardless of the lineage. The group also said that Trainers should abstain from sexual relationships with teachers in training. The CCWG stated that teachers always treat their students equally during class, regardless of whether an intimate relationship exists beyond class time.

ETHICAL SCOPE OF PRACTICE

The CCWG agreed that teachers must have an awareness of their role as limited to yoga instruction. Accordingly, teachers must not assume the role(s) of doctor, physical therapist, counselor, mental health therapist, Ayurvedic care provider, salesperson, and/or any other type of health or wellness care provider. Should the teacher have requisite credentials and coverages to practice in such occupations and choose to expand their role beyond that of a yoga teacher, the teacher should inform students accordingly and explicitly request their consent to apply other modalities in the yoga classroom setting.

Please see the Scope of Practice Working Group Paper for the in-depth inquiry into this topic.

CULTURAL APPRECIATION VERSUS APPROPRIATION

The CCWG agreed that teachers must be aware of various interpretations of cultural appropriation and their relationship to yoga's history, including colonization. Some in the group identified yoga being paired with alcohol, or other inebriating or desecrating acts, as examples of cultural appropriation. The CCWG recommended that teachers have knowledge of methods to express cultural appreciation during class, including:

- 1) Citing lineage, source, and/or history of teachings shared during class in a manner that is relevant and accessible to students; and
- 2) Providing a well-rounded exposition of yoga during class, as opposed to reducing students' experience of yoga to the practice of asana only, in a manner that is relevant and accessible to students

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

The CCWG agreed that it is essential for teachers to be aware of various interpretations and applications of cultural competency. They recommended that teachers have knowledge of methods to express cultural competency during class, including demonstrating:

- 1) Awareness of their own cultural identity;
- 2) Willingness to understand the differences that make each class and student unique; and
- 3) Respect for the diversity of students bodies, identities, orientations, mental and emotional states, and levels of experience.

Please see the [Inclusion](#) Working Group Paper for more discussion.

ETHICAL MARKETING, CLAIMS AND IDENTITY

Many in the CCWG said that teachers should have knowledge of actions and effects of yoga according to anatomy, physiology, and/or research. Should the effect of a practice not be verifiable through such methods, the teacher must have knowledge of methods to describe the effect that avoids making inaccurate, unethical claims. Such options may include informing students of the teacher's personal experience of the effect, inviting students to imagine the effect, or citing the lineage that traditionally claims the benefit. For example, it would be inaccurate to cue, "this pose will eliminate toxins and cancer cells" as opposed to "imagine that this pose strengthens your ability to eliminate toxins and cancer cells." Some in the CCWG recommended that schools provide trainees with information on how to accurately speak about the benefits of yoga.

Others in the CCWG said that teachers must make an effort toward expressing consistency in their identity as yoga teachers both during and beyond class time. For instance, a person who presents themselves as a teacher of yoga during class and in marketing materials would also need to make an effort to engage in conduct beyond class time that befits a yoga teacher according to their yoga lineage. For instance, teachers should make an effort to live according to the yamas and niyamas or equivalent lineage-based ethical precepts both during and beyond class time (see again [Scope of Practice](#)).

RISK AWARENESS

Several in the CCWG recommended that teachers possess sufficient knowledge of anatomy to inform students of relevant risks of each asana the teacher offers to their students. This requires awareness of joint physiology, best practices for prevention of injuries and/or conditions, and contraindications. Others in the group recommended that teachers should be aware of their duty to ask students to disclose their injuries and/or conditions, if any, so that the teacher may provide tailored practice options (or at least inform the student of which practices to avoid).

ETHICAL TRANSGRESSIONS AND METHODS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

The CCWG agreed that teachers should have awareness of the YA grievance policy⁵ and be informed of their duty to cooperate with YA grievance investigations. The group recommended that teachers be aware of their duty to report unethical or illegal behavior of other teachers to YA and other appropriate authorities. Several in the CCWG also recommended that RYSs direct training participants to YA sites to view reviews of teachers and schools and so that training participants can post reviews themselves while also directing their future students to do so, allowing these sites to form another platform for accountability.

⁵ https://www.yogaalliance.org/About_Us/Policies/Grievance_Policy

APPENDIX B: TEACHING METHODOLOGY

PRACTICE SELECTION

Teachers' abilities to select relevant knowledge and practices of yoga depends on the teachers' awareness of student injuries, conditions, wellness goals, general needs, living conditions, culture, current events affecting the students, and other diverse factors that form students' receptivity to yoga. The CCWG acknowledged that obtaining detailed information from students individually about these factors is not feasible in many group classroom environments but that teachers should still endeavor to obtain sufficient information about students. The group recommended that schools should ensure that their graduates can teach in a manner that ensures presentation of yoga's multidimensional capacities, addressing the various layers and methods of practicing yoga according to the teacher's chosen tradition.

SEQUENCING

Once teachers do their best to identify relevant knowledge and practice options, the CCWG said, they must know how to safely sequence those practices and convey their relevance through the sequence theme or intention. This includes knowledge of how to sequence:

- 1) A series of asana exercises
- 2) A series of meditation exercises
- 3) A series of pranayama exercises
- 4) A combination of asana, pranayama, and meditation exercises
- 5) Any of the above exercises with relevant history, philosophy, anatomy, and yogic anatomy integrated

PACE

Teachers must be able to evaluate students' abilities and offer the appropriate practices at the appropriate pace and in the appropriate order. Teachers may also invite students to practice at their own pace but must make such invitations in earnest and allow appropriate time and space for such variations of pace.

ENVIRONMENT

Teachers must make efforts to create a *sattvic* (harmonious) and safe space to the extent possible. This may involve arriving early to clean the practice area and perform any ritual or personal practice that fosters a *sattvic* state of being for the teacher and space. Some in the CCWG agreed teachers should avoid cultivating competitive classroom environments. Proposed methods for doing so include:

- Teaching practice options appropriate for all, including clear options for the students who may have the least experience or level of mobility in the class as well as concurrent options for the most advanced or mobile students present
- Explicitly stating that the classroom is not a space for competition between students and/or that all practice options are equal
- Cueing various options for practice in a manner not denoting hierarchy of options offered or that of student achievement

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

The CCWG said teachers must be able to:

- 1) Verbally cue practices, their alternatives, and adaptations simply, safely and with accurate anatomical descriptions
- 2) Use appropriate vocal tone
- 3) Project their voice to help students hear verbal cues clearly
- 4) Practice conscious or nonviolent communication whenever appropriate, which may include, for instance, offering invitations and opportunities for inquiry rather than judgement and commands to trauma survivors who would benefit from exploring choice as a practice of self-empowerment
- 5) Offer cues which are inclusive and respectful of the students' various abilities, levels of experience, and levels of mobility. Recommended cueing methods include:
 - a) **Multi-option cues.** Teachers present a choice of multiple practice options simultaneously, without hierarchy, allowing each student to choose the option safest for their body
 - b) **Process-oriented cues.** As opposed to goal-oriented cues, cues which focus on the journey of one's experience in a practice rather than an end goal
 - c) **Cuing options objectively.** Cues which state what anatomical alignment must objectively exist before a student may safely explore a posture alternative or adaptation
 - d) **Tailored cues.** Appropriate for the students present, as opposed to memorized cues or scripts
- 6) Offer cues inspiring self-challenge, self-engagement, self-empowerment, and self-inquiry to offer a balance between effort and ease
- 7) Offer cues that guide students into an experience but which refrain from telling students how to feel
- 8) Cue in a manner that honors the eight hallmarks of ethical classrooms identified in the ethics section of this paper, including cultural competency
- 9) Offer cues with appropriate word choice; this may include the use of positive speech

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Teachers must be able to offer visual demonstration of practices including demonstrations *before* students engage in the practice, demonstrations *concurrent* with student practice, and demonstrations *after* student practice whenever appropriate. Demonstrations may be made by the teacher, a teaching assistant, or a consenting student. Such demonstrations may be in-person or through the use of audio/visual equipment (video or photographs). Teachers may choose to demonstrate a practice for the entire class or may need to approach an individual student to offer a tailored demonstration. Visual demonstrations may involve the use of props in some traditions.

TOUCH/PHYSICAL COMMUNICATION

Teachers may offer safe, consensual, and appropriate assistance during yoga practices through physical contact, the CCWG noted, recommending that physical contact be as limited as possible unless a school's lineage demands more engagement. Touching genitals and breasts, however, is impermissible under all circumstances as confirmed by the YA policy on sexual misconduct. Methods to limit contact involve teachers' use of minimal parts of their body to perform the adjustment as well as teachers' selection of appropriate areas of the student body for contact. Following are various types of adjustments the CCWG offered:

- **Corrective physical adjustments:** hands-on corrective action. Not recommended in acute-trauma outreach settings unless working with a consistent group of the same students for a predetermined, continuous length of time
- **Non-corrective physical adjustments:** hands-on action to enhance students' experience of an asana (such an assist is not focused on corrective action)
- **Positive touch assists:** touching with little to no desired outcome beyond sharing a positive touch experience
- **Passive vs. active assists:** passive assists involve teacher-induced movement whereas movement in active assists is performed by the student
- **Directional energetic assists:** without engaging in physical contact, a teacher may move her/his/their hand near a part of a student's body to convey the internal or external movement of an asana. These adjustments are often paired with concurrent verbal cues

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

The CCWG said teachers must be prepared to manage the following situations during class to the best of their ability:

- Student display of strong emotional reactions to practices; while remaining clear on the limits of the Scope of Practice, teachers must be prepared to direct students to appropriate specialists or their health care providers
- Emergencies, including the ability to contact and direct emergency services
- Sexual harassment, which may involve the use of nonviolent communication to immediately describe the behavior that may constitute sexual harassment, define sexual harassment for all individuals present and invite the behavior to stop, or contact or arrange for contact of emergency services
- Basic conflict resolution, such as the use of nonviolent communication to resolve conflict, and conflict prevention, such as well the use of community agreements⁶
- Late-arriving and early-departing students and how to communicate boundaries for class attendance using nonviolent communication or similar techniques
- Favoritism, cliques, and the need for teachers to engage students fairly and in an inclusive manner

⁶ Some in the CCWG insisted that this is necessary for teachers leading classes in non-studio settings and in cultures with different expectations relating to conflict.



#YAstandards

YOGA ALLIANCE & THE YOGA ALLIANCE FOUNDATION

Founded in 1999, Yoga Alliance is a member-based, non-profit organization that serves yoga schools and teachers across the globe, providing a world-recognized, best-in-class credential and unifying its members around a shared ethical commitment. In addition, YA delivers a strong value proposition to its members through community-building initiatives, educational resources, advocacy efforts, and social impact programs. Its sister organization, the Yoga Alliance Foundation, supports leveraged impact and direct service programs that expand the reach of and participation in yoga.

iwanttohelpya@yogaalliance.org
1560 Wilson Blvd, Suite 700, Arlington, VA 22209
[@yogaalliance](https://www.yogaalliance.org) | 1-888-921-9642



WORKING GROUP PAPER

Teacher Qualifications

APRIL 2019

#YAstandards

In 1999, in its role as a voluntary, member-based organization serving yoga schools and teachers, **Yoga Alliance (YA)** sought to ensure and preserve the quality of yoga education and practice by establishing and disseminating standards for the education of yoga teachers and by maintaining a registry of teachers who met these standards. In 2018, **YA** launched a review of its standards, calling it the **Standards Review Project (SRP)**.

One result of the **SRP** is this collection of eight collaborative, condensed, and edited working group papers to which key yoga stakeholders for **YA** and for the yoga community at large contributed. These papers represent the recommendations by each working group of the best practices for the standard, or key inquiry area, in question. There is one working paper for each; what follows is the working group paper on the notion of **Teacher Qualifications** in yoga.

TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS UPFRONT

Yoga Alliance (YA) chose Teacher Qualifications as one of its eight areas of inquiry because its founding mission, to define and preserve the quality and safety of yoga education and practice, still holds true today. YA continues to be focused on maintaining a credentialing system that results in Registered Yoga Teachers (RYTs) who teach the highest-quality and safest-possible yoga classes globally.

YA asked the Teacher Qualifications Working Group (TQWG) the following questions for defining the best standards for Teacher Qualifications in yoga:

- ***What prerequisites, if any, should there be to take a yoga teacher training (YTT) course?***
- ***Are the current 200-hour and 500-hour systems sufficient?***
- ***Do YA-approved Teacher Qualifications standards need more hours or levels? Do they need both?***

Addressing the basics of application prerequisites, Practicum procedures and testing (online and in-person), and minimum-age requirements for participating in a YTT, the TQWG recommended four solutions for a best-practices Qualifications Standard for YA-approved RYT 200 (or “foundational”) or RYT 500 (or “professional”) Registered Yoga School (RYS):

- 1) Redefine the types of training hours and number of acceptable hours, including:
 - a) A minimum training duration balanced with a maximum number of training hours per day
 - b) The quality and quantity of time spent on mentorship hours
- 2) Clarify YA-approved Practicum guidelines and procedures
- 3) Ensure the administration and evaluation of a final written exam
- 4) Request YA to research further, manage the creation of, and approve a variety of speciality training courses that will serve as adjuncts to the RYS YTT programs

Please see the SRP [Core Curriculum](#), [Integrity](#), and [Teacher Trainer Qualifications](#) Working Group Papers for deeper inquiries into these topics.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The consistent concern of the TQWG was the perceived low standard of many current RYS programs and, for that matter, non-YA YTTs producing unprepared and unqualified yoga teachers.

The driving belief among the TQWG was that YA should improve its standards in many ways, starting with the most prevailing and fundamental problem of the minimum time required to become an RYT 200. Today, that time is 18 days, or 10 hours a day over 18 consecutive days. An RYS 200 trainee could start and finish their program and become a teacher of yoga in two-and-a-half weeks.

BACKGROUND AND REFLECTION

The TQWG redefined the RYT 200 and 500 designations, **biasing types of hours over the value of the number of hours themselves**. They asserted that an RYT 200 could be designated an **RYT Foundational 200** while the RYT 500 could be designated an **RYT Professional 500**. The spirit of this redefinition is to emphasize that any 200-hour program should be considered the baseline, or foundation, for any yoga teacher's (hopefully) lifelong journey of learning and training.

The TQWG did not agree on:

- The concept of “contact,” or in-person, vs “non-contact,” or not-in-person, hours within any RYS program as “mentoring,” “observing,” and “assisting” hours
- Whether any of these hours should count as contact hours; throughout the conversation, the TQWG acknowledged the rise of online learning and its impact on YTTs

Please see the [Teacher Trainer Qualifications](#) and [Online Learning](#) Working Group Papers for more information.

An RYT 200 could be designated a RYT Foundational 200 while the RYT 500 could be designated an RYT Professional 500.

SOLUTION

Though the quantity of hours, specifically 200 hours, was debated, the **TQWG agreed that current RYS 200 standards are enough as long as the quality of content and competencies, and overall accountability systems**, are addressed and put in place and that **all hours are contact**. The group pointed out that increasing the number of hours of a low-standards school would not lead to better prepared students and rather focused on what they agreed was the more important task of “upleveling” current RYS 200 programs. In other words, the TQWG wanted to increase the quality demands on these programs and establish accountability measures to ensure quality and safety of programs going forward.

The TQWG offered solutions on Hours; Prerequisites; Testing; and Other Considerations.

HOURS: DEFINITIONS AND DESIGNATIONS

The TQWG's common concern was the quality of YA-approved RYT 200, RYT 300, and RYT 500 programs. Understanding how important Lead Trainers¹ (LTs) are to the quality of a program, the group proposed that LTs should be present for all required hours except for a later-determined percentage of hours taught by a Specialist Trainer (ST). (Please see the [Teacher Trainer Qualifications](#) Working Group Paper for an in-depth inquiry and suggested overhaul of these requirements.)

Types

The TQWG recommended that all RYS hours should be contact whereas in YA's current standards, 10% (or 20 hours) can be non-contact within an RYS 200. The group also said that if YA continued with non-contact hours, these hours should not be counted at a 1:1 ratio; one non-contact hour should not equal a full hour of training.

The **TQWG believed mentorship hours should count as contact hours.** Debating the benefit of a mentorship program at the RYS 200 level overall, the group emphasized the importance of an RYS maintaining a high quality of mentoring while keeping the teachings synchronized with its YA-approved program. With respect to hours of observing or assisting, the **TQWG generally recommended these not count as contact hours and instead be considered in the same way that reading, studying, and doing homework are considered.**

The TQWG said that an RYS 200 should be conducted at a minimum of 21 days in an intensive format and over a minimum three-month period of time for other programs.

PREREQUISITES FOR ENROLLMENT

The TQWG debated the value of prerequisites for enrollment in an RYS and did not reach agreement. The **TQWG did agree that the minimum age for RYS registration should be 18 years of age**, though there was no agreement on this needing to be the case by the time of enrollment or by the time of graduation.

TESTING

Practicum Procedures and Guidelines

The **TQWG recommended that all RYSs should conduct a Practicum exam**, or observed practice teaching with feedback, before graduating a student. This Practicum, the group said, would apply regardless of the type of yoga school conducting the Practicum. The group suggested a "Practicum Grading Rubric" (idea and label are the TQWG's) that would show a trainee's ability to:

- Teach more than just cues
- Hold space for the whole class and for individual students at the same time

Any 200-hour program should be considered the baseline or foundation for any yoga teachers' hopefully lifelong journey of learning and training.

¹ The notion of Lead Trainer(s) and Other Trainer(s) come from YA's section of its website on [Standards Guidelines](#) (all RYS).

- Project the voice and use effective and safe verbal or hands-on assists
- Offer appropriate variations and modifications when necessary

Written/Final Test

The **TQWG supported the need for a final written exam** in which:

- The RYS defines and publishes its own certification requirements to demonstrate what is on its written exam, what the grading scale is, what the mentorship/relationship process is relative to the exam, what the practicum exam looks like, or
- The RYS follows a YA-approved required criteria that includes a signed agreement of understanding and compliance with regard to trainee attendance and performance, practicum performance, and written exam results

The TQWG expressed concern over the following issue: while an automatic certification and thus automatic invitation to become an RYT is not desirable, “YA-standardized,” on the other hand, runs the risk of discouraging differences in curricula, methodologies, and lineages and could impact the ideas of diversity, accessibility, inclusion, and equity. The **TQWG said these issues must be addressed before their improved Teaching Qualifications Standards could be approved by YA.**

For inquiries into assessment and other related issues, please see the [Core Curriculum](#), [Integrity](#), and [Online Learning](#) Working Group Papers for discussions.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Definitions and Designations

The TQWG recommended alternate titles for the levels of an RYT, such as RYT Foundational 200 and RYT Professional 500. Most in the group agreed that 200 hours can, if in service of quality and safety, lead to a foundational understanding of teaching. The TQWG acknowledged the benefits of the professional levels (RYS 300 and RYS 500) for deepening skills such as observing bodies, performing hands-on and verbal assists, and specializing in specific areas.

Specialty Training for RYT 200

The TQWG discussed the need for speciality knowledge at the RYT 200 level on a wide range of issues like anatomy, accessibility, inclusion, trauma, pathologies (such as cancer), and more.

Though distinct from a possible RYT 500 and/or specialty credential on “yoga for cancer,” the TQWG did express a desire for inclusion of some type of foundational understanding of what they as yoga teachers can, and more importantly cannot, do.

The TQWG noted that the skill set required for teaching on a topic such as yoga for cancer requires a degree of expertise and responsibility beyond that which

Though the quality of hours, specifically 200 hours, was debated, the Teacher Qualification Working Group agreed that current RYS 200 standards are enough as long as the quality of content and competencies, and overall accountability systems, are addressed and put in place—and that all hours are contact.

could be conveyed in an RYT 200 program. Given its overarching concerns on quality of RYS programs, the TQWG also implored YA to avoid empowering teachers to think they can handle teaching related to trauma. The group said that this work must be left to trained professional therapists.

Please see the [Scope of Practice](#) Working Group Paper for more information on a YA-approved Scope of Practice in yoga.

Continuing Education

The TQWG stepped briefly outside its scope of Teacher Qualifications to discuss Continuing Education (CE), agreeing that teachers of CEs should be experts in their subject matter and not limited based on whether or not they were RYT.

Certificate Tiers

The TQWG discussed whether there should be two separate certifications upon graduating from an RYS 200: one for those interested in teaching and one for those interested in deepening their practices. There was no agreement.

Online Training

Many in the TQWG had reservations over online learning with respect to learning how to teach yoga, agreeing generally that the best way to learn was in-person. The group also generally agreed that if online learning were included in a YA-approved RYS, YA should increase the total number of hours to obtain a certificate/qualify to be an RYT. Please also see the [Online Learning](#) Working Group Paper.

Yoga Alliance's Role

The TQWG believed that it is YA's role to empower an RYS to offer better and stronger programs and to encourage each RYS to take this seriously, rewarding those who train and produce high-quality, safe, and competent yoga teachers. YA must take on a bigger role in supervising RYSs, the group said, pointing to accountability areas with respect to specialty credentials for such styles as restorative yoga and yin yoga.

The TQWG pressed further with these next-step ideas and suggestions:

- Individual teachers offering an RYT 200-hour course without the backing of a school would perhaps need to be re-evaluated through YA's new standards
- YA could make 200 hours a suggested minimum and further establish metrics and communications explaining that all trainings are not made equal, educating potential RYT on the appropriateness of an RYS for them and assisting RYSs in explaining clearly what their programs offer
- YA could start a rating system on schools

Yoga Alliance could make 200 hours a suggested minimum and, further, establish metrics and communications explaining that all trainings are not made equal, educating potential RYT on the appropriateness of a RYS for them and assisting RYSs in explaining clearly what their programs offer.

ADVISORY GROUP

Our heartfelt thanks go to the following Advisors who spent much time and energy meeting, discussing, debating, and resolving issues on the standard of Teacher Qualifications to the benefit of Yoga Alliance's membership. The Advisors were:



TRINA ALTMAN



DIANNE BONDY



DONALEE CAMPBELL



RYAN CUNNINGHAM



DAVID EMERSON



MATY EZRATY



LESLIE GLICKMAN



SANDY (SARAJ) HICKS



AMY IPPOLITI



VAL SPIES



PETER STERIOS

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iwanttohelpya@yogaalliance.org
1560 Wilson Blvd, Suite 700, Arlington, VA 22209
[@yogaalliance](https://www.yogaalliance.org) | 1-888-921-9642



WORKING GROUP PAPER

Teacher Trainer Qualifications

APRIL 2019

#YAstandards

In 1999, in its role as a voluntary, member-based organization serving yoga schools and teachers, **Yoga Alliance (YA)** sought to ensure and preserve the quality of yoga education and practice by establishing and disseminating standards for the education of yoga teachers and by maintaining a registry of teachers who met these standards. In 2018, **YA** launched a review of its standards, calling it the **Standards Review Project (SRP)**.

One result of the **SRP** is this collection of eight collaborative, condensed, and edited working group papers to which key yoga stakeholders for **YA** and for the yoga community at large contributed. These papers represent the recommendations by each working group of the best practices for the standard, or key inquiry area, in question. There is one working paper for each; what follows is the working group paper on the notion of Teacher Trainer Qualifications in yoga.

TEACHER TRAINER QUALIFICATIONS UPFRONT

The field of yoga teacher education is vast and complex, and Yoga Alliance (YA) chose Teacher Trainer Qualifications to help define, honor, and embrace a system of teaching that historically has passed from teacher to student. Yoga Teacher Training (YTT) is rooted in a wide array of disciplines, including but not limited to:

- Historic pedagogy in teaching yoga
- Western anatomy and physiology
- Yoga philosophy, lifestyle, and ethics
- Online learning methodology, a relatively recent discipline also examined in the [Online Learning Working Group Paper](#)

Training yoga practitioners to become yoga teachers includes not only a mastery of syllabus design and lesson planning expertise but also experience and understanding in facilitating learning among diverse groups of individuals with different learning styles and levels of experience. The success of a Registered Yoga School (RYS) and its YTT program in producing yoga teachers who are able to teach quality-based and safe yoga is derived from how the program is led, administered, and taught. The ability of the trainers of an RYS YTT program, designated by YA as Lead Trainers¹ (LTs) or Speciality Trainers (STs), to lead and/or teach YTT programs, is dependent on where these LTs and STs have studied, with whom, and for how long.

YA posed the following questions to the Teacher Trainer Qualifications Working Group (TTQWG):

- ***Is the current YA requirement of being an E-RYT 200 enough to lead a YTT? If not, what definable requirement is enough?***

¹The notion of Lead Trainer(s) and Specialty Trainer(s) come from YA's section of its website on [Standards Guidelines \(all RYS\)](#).

- *Would LTs need a specific level of education beyond the scope of an RYT 500? If so, could that education include mentorship and coursework (and further, in what areas of mentorship and coursework)?*
- *Should the number of required prerequisite teaching hours for LTs increase?*
- *Should there be separate requirements for areas such as anatomy, philosophy, and ethics?*
- *Should ongoing professional learning for LTs be required?*
- *Who should deliver a course for preparing teachers, or Registered Yoga Teachers (RYTs), to become teachers of teachers, or LTs?*
- *Should there be a limit to the number of STs within an RYS?*

The **TTQWG** recommended overhauling the existing qualification standards for RYS YTTs that produce RYT both at the 200 (or “foundational”) and 300 and 500 (or “professional”) levels. The group explored all current RYS curricular areas to determine the necessary new competencies required for both LTs and STs. The group recommended updated, upgraded mechanisms for ensuring that these competencies could be achieved and assessed. **The group recommended a new level of expertise called Experienced Lead Trainer (ELT).**

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The TTQWG began its discussions by acknowledging the vast and complex field of expertise required to become an LT. These areas include, but are not limited to:

- Yoga technology
- Anatomy
- Philosophy
- Lifestyle and ethics
- Pedagogy, which the group described as good practices, in teaching what is defined as yoga

The group discussed how each of these areas contribute to the development of the skill set of an LT or an ST, saying yoga pedagogy is particularly connected to syllabus design and lesson planning. The group explored the necessity for an awareness of, and skills in, the facilitation of diverse groups with various learning styles and levels of experience.

BACKGROUND AND REFLECTION

Currently, all LTs for any RYS program must be registered with YA at the E-RYT 200, RYT 500 or E-RYT 500 level. A Lead Trainer is defined as one of the following:

- 1) An E-RYT 200 is an RYT 200 who has been teaching yoga for at least two years since completion of an RYS 200 and has taught at least 1,000 hours of yoga classes since that time. The person must have accumulated the 1,000 of yoga teaching experience after having met RYT 200 requirements.
- 2) An RYT 500 has at least 2,000 hours of classes and four years of teaching experience since completing an RYS 200 or RYT 500 with at least 500 of these hours having been accumulated after completion of the RYS 500.

The required contact hours and other qualifications differ based on LT designation and the type of RYS program.

RYS PROGRAM TYPE	LEAD TRAINER REQUIREMENTS
200	65 contact hours per LT 200 No more than two LT 200s
300	135 contact hours per LT 300 No more than five LT 300s E-RYT 500 credential mandated
500	200 contact hours per LT 500 No more than five LT 500s E-RYT 500 credential mandated

At times, an RYS might employ Other Faculty (OF) to teach certain speciality areas. If not registered with YA, OFs must have:

- A relevant degree, credential, or other substantial education in the subject they will teach
- A minimum of 500 hours of teaching experience, or two years of relevant experience, in the subject they will teach

Training yoga practitioners to become yoga teachers includes not only mastery of syllabus design and lesson planning expertise; it requires experience and understanding in facilitating learning among diverse groups of individuals with different learning styles and levels of experience.

SOLUTION

The **TTQWG proposed a complete overhaul of nearly every aspect of LT requirements for an RYS**, including fundamental shifts for LTs such as new definitions, qualifications, specialized education, and competencies. The group addressed the fulfillment and evaluation of qualifications, including how to handle current LTs, and what to do about non-YA YTTs and their Teacher Trainers.

NEW TRAINER DEFINITIONS AND DESIGNATIONS

The **TTQWG agreed that an LT 200 should have the highest YA credential** for the role: E-RYT 500. A credential of this kind ensures that the LT has accrued appropriate and integral knowledge, skills, and experience of yoga through RYS credentialing on all levels of the Core Curriculum and has furthermore put this knowledge to practical use in the field via teaching over a minimum of five years.

The TTQWG therefore recommended new definitions for LTs who oversee and lead RYSs and/or who co-deliver trainings with STs—the Lead Teacher Trainer (LTT) at the 200, 300, and 500 levels as well as the Experienced Lead Trainer (ELT) at the same leveled RYSs and/or who co-deliver trainings with STs—the Lead Teacher Trainer (LTT) at the 200, 300, and 500 levels as well as the Experienced Lead Trainer (ELT) at the same levels.

LTT 200

- E-RYT 500
- Five years of experience as an RYT
- Minimum of 100 contact hours
- New competencies as defined later in this working group paper

LTT 300 & 500

- E-RYT 500
- Eight years of experience as an RYT
- Prior LT for a minimum of three RYS 200s over the course of three years
- Minimum of 150 contact hours
- New competencies as defined later in this working group paper

Co-Trainer

- E-RYT 200
- Minimum of forty and maximum of 80 contact hours
- New competencies as defined later in the “Specialized Education and Competencies for New LT Roles” Section

Specialty Trainer

- RYT 200
- Specialist in area of RYS 200 curriculum not required to be taught by an LT
- Minimum of 3 and maximum of 39 contact hours
- Maximum of four STs alongside the LT for cohesion

ELT 200

- E-RYT 500 and LT 200
- LT for a prior seven RYS 200s over the course of seven years
- Qualified to teach “Becoming a Trainer” course
- Qualified to lead “Becoming a Trainer” mentorship/apprenticeship programs²

ELT 300

- E-RYT 500 and LT 300
- LT for a prior ten RYSs, of which five must be RYS 300s
- Qualified to teach “Becoming an LTT 300” course
- Qualified to lead “Becoming an LTT 300” mentorship/apprenticeship programs³

A “lead” (Teacher) Trainer should have the highest YA credential for the role.

² Please see suggested overview of this course set forth by the TTQWG, in the Specialized Education and Competencies section of this paper.

³ Ibid.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR NEW LEAD TRAINER ROLES

In addition to the new LT definitions and designations, the TTQWG proposed new competencies for these LT roles, including but not limited to facilitation experience and mentorship:

Facilitation Experience

- Any aspiring LT must have between 60 and 100 hours of experience teaching yoga workshops and courses in other levels of yoga practice in order to demonstrate mastery of knowledge outside of regular yoga class teaching

Mentorship

- Any aspiring LT must apprentice and/or assist in a minimum of two RYSs as a prerequisite
- Any aspiring LT should pursue mentorship and/or specialized education to establish pedagogical competencies. Elements include RYS preparatory sessions and apprenticing and assisting RYSs

The group also posed these other considerations about **apprenticeship and/or mentorship programs**:

- These programs should be led by LTT 200/300/500s
- Virtual mentorship options could be developed for people who cannot apprentice for an entire RYS live (please see the [Online Learning](#) Working Group Paper for more information on this topic)
- Apprenticeship is distinct from assisting or teaching in an RYS program

SPECIALIZED EDUCATION AND COMPETENCIES FOR NEW LEAD TRAINER ROLES

Overview

The TTQWG distinguished between the skills required for teaching others to teach yoga versus teaching people for their own practice, saying that the former requires skill in group facilitation and in delivering large amounts of material over various formats at different times. RYS graduates will teach others, which exponentially increases the requirement to teach safely, competently, and with skill. The group questioned if LTs might require further education and/or special competencies to design, establish, and later evaluate the outcomes and impact of their teaching.

The **TTQWG identified baseline prerequisites for all LTs and STs** and considered how such competencies might be taught, learned, and assessed. The group proposed two courses: “Becoming an LT 200” 20-hour course and “Becoming an LT 300” five-hour course. With regard to pedagogy, to include Online Learning, the group recommended that YA:

- Create the standards for an LT course to include pedagogy, mentorship, and assessment, from which it can then credential future LTs as LTT 200, LTT 300, LTT 500, ELT 200, and ELT 300.
- Support the created standards, above listed in New Trainer Definitions and Designations, via a detailed curriculum for the “Becoming a...” LT courses
- Host conferences as a venue for continuing education

Any aspiring “lead” (Teacher) Trainer (must) apprentice and/or assist in a minimum of one to two RYSs as a prerequisite.

Though not under the purview of this Working Group, the TTQWG also widely agreed that YA should offer a course for all current and future RYT, LTs, and STs for commitment to such practices as those outlined in the Integrity, Scope of Practice and Code of Conduct Working Group Papers and through YA's anti-harassment grievance process and sexual misconduct policy.

Content Expertise

The TTQWG said that content expertise of any LT includes teaching methodology competency beyond that of an RYT 500; this is because an LT must have knowledge of, and experience with, adaptive yoga practices that include the ability to understand which practices are relevant at what time and in which circumstances they are taught.

The TTQWG recommended that LTs have content expertise, including specialized knowledge of and experience in:

- 1) Yoga philosophy and history
- 2) Meditation
- 3) Pranayama (breath control)
- 4) Yoga anatomy, defined by the group as "subtle body anatomy," though able to be delivered by an ST
- 5) Anatomy and physiology relating to yoga, though able to be delivered by an ST
- 6) Asana

Group/Class Management

The **TTQWG recommended that an LT must be competent in managing groups and group dynamics**, specifically being able to:

- 1) Employ safe and inclusive pedagogy
- 2) Handle disruptive students
- 3) Recognize if individual students need support to graduate
- 4) Handle breakdowns, breakthroughs, and mental health issues
- 5) Create learning agreements and establish classroom norms (phone usage, recording, photography, conscious communication guidelines, etc.)
- 6) Create *sangha* (community) for trainees after graduation

Curriculum Design

The TTQWG recommended that LTs possess skill in designing curriculum to including designing and designating electives hours, such as being able to:

- 1) Understand how to prepare students before they begin the RYS (through pre-reads and other preparatory assignments)
- 2) Design an integrated timetable that is optimal for both learning and retention
- 3) Understand how to help trainees develop the skills required for being good teachers
- 4) Understand how to incorporate informal assessment and make curricular modifications for various learning styles

OTHER POSSIBLE REQUIRED COMPETENCIES FOR NEW LEAD TRAINER ROLES

The TTQWG identified other competencies such as: instructional techniques and lesson planning, assessment strategies, and school management.

Instructional Techniques and Lesson Planning

- Understand how training is different from teaching
- Have knowledge and skill in planning and delivering lessons and units that are dialogic as opposed to didactic
- Have knowledge and skill in various learning styles (visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, etc.)
- Have knowledge of instructional strategies in adult education, including the use of technology
- Understand the importance of using inclusive language in the YTT classroom
- Understand how to adapt certain aspects of the lessons or YTT classroom for those with disabilities (visual, auditory, learning or physical)

For more information on many of these topics, please see the [Online Learning](#) and [Inclusion](#) Working Group Papers.

Assessment Strategies

- Understand the role of assessment in instruction
- Have knowledge of different methods of assessment including their benefits and shortcomings
- Understand remediation if a student does not pass an assessment
- Have skill in using grading rubrics and assessment methods as objectively as possible to avoid subjective bias when assessing RYT candidates

School Management

- Be able to manage a teaching team
- Understand the RYS's legal issues on policies such as a refund policy, liability, and grievance policy
- Have a strategy to increase diversity in the YTTs

Ethics & Lifestyle

The TTQWG suggested that LTs abide by a certain ethical lifestyle as it pertained to being yoga teacher trainers, such as:

- 1) Understanding the relationship of influence between teacher and student and how to ethically conduct oneself in such a role
- 2) Understanding how to be inclusive, skillful, and culturally competent
- 3) Committing to a yogic lifestyle and embodying the values being taught, including committing to one's own personal practice and practice with a senior teacher(s)
- 4) Understanding and abiding by the YA grievance process and sexual misconduct policy
- 5) Understanding the role of karma yoga, or selfless actions in yoga, within teaching/training

FULFILLMENT AND EVALUATION OF QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE NEW LEAD TRAINER ROLES

Current LTs

The **TTQWG recommended that current RYS LTs be assessed by:**

- Taking the “Becoming an LT 200” course
- Sending in video samples of their LT teaching as well as submitting written statements on how they take into account diverse learning styles and interactive teaching methodologies

The **TTQWG recommended that YA approve a mandatory ethical commitment course through the SRP to be taken by all current and future RYS LTs and possibly also by STs.**

For any non-current LT or ST wishing to register to be an LT during the new standards implementation process, the TTQWG suggested grandfathering these teachers into the new designations if they do not meet the increased baseline qualifications of E-RYT 500. The TTQWG suggested providing two years for current RYS LTs to meet these new standards. The group also wanted YA to offer these new courses online for wide accessibility, in workshop format at YA events and conferences, and via notable members of the YA teaching community.

New LTs

The **TTQWG recommended that new RYS LTs be assessed to demonstrate how they meet the new proposed LT qualifications by:**

- 1) Taking YA’s Ethics Course and the “Becoming an LT 200” course, or
- 2) Providing a certificate from a private educational organization, or
- 3) Proving a degree in Education, or
- 4) Showcasing significant professional experience as a corporate trainer, facilitator, or coach, and/or
- 5) Taking an assessment to prove the above
- 6) Proving 100 hours of led-workshops and/or a predetermined number of YTT apprenticeship hours

New Specialty Trainers

For any new ST with a focus on yoga philosophy and history, the TTQWG recommended the person have:

- An RYT 500 credential that included a total of at least 50 hours in yoga philosophy, or
- An RYT 200 credential and specialized yoga philosophy course, or
- Extensive experience, degree, and/or certificate

For any new ST with a focus on anatomy, the TTQWG recommended the person have:

- An RYT 200 credential and specialized continuing education yoga and anatomy course, or
- An RYT 200 credential and professional degree such as physiotherapist, massage therapist, movement specialist with significant knowledge/skill in anatomy, or
- Another professional degree with significant knowledge/skill in anatomy and experience in its application to yoga

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION & BACKGROUND CHECK FOR LEAD TRAINERS

The TTQWG suggested that current and prospective LTs submit letters of recommendations to describe their knowledge, skills, and experience. Using such a master-teacher-endorsed review structure would more quickly raise ethical concerns around the potential LT and would also illustrate the LT's active study or participation in another RYS or yoga school.

The TTQWG discussed the relevance of background checks and did not arrive at a conclusion.

CONTINUING EDUCATION REQUIREMENT FOR LEAD TRAINERS

The **TTQWG recommended CE hours for LTs** beyond those required for an RYT, suggesting that mentorship should qualify as a CE. The group agree that **15 to 20 hours of relevant CE every two years** would be appropriate.

The **TTQWG recommended YA expand its CE avenues and approved curricula to include other fields of study that complement yoga teaching and training**, such as science and psychology.

OTHER POSSIBLE CHANGES TO TEACHER TRAINER STANDARDS

The TTQWG pointed to other possible changes to LT standards, including consideration for LTs who speak English as a Second Language and trainings in languages other than English.

ADVISORY GROUP

Our heartfelt thanks go to the following Advisors who spent much time and energy meeting, discussing, debating, and resolving issues on the standard of Integrity to the benefit of Yoga Alliance's membership. The Advisors were:



JAFAR ALEXANDER



MARIA GARRE



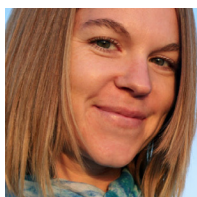
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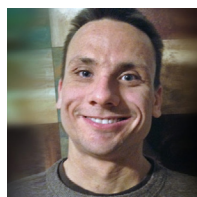
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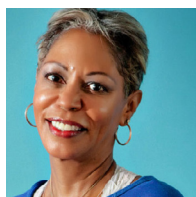
AMBER KARNES



SHELBY LAFRINERE



RYAN MCGRAW



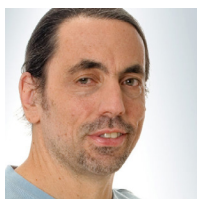
NIKKI MYERS



ARTURO PEAL



SHERRY SIDOTI



RAVI SINGH



ROD STRYKER



KATIE THORWORTH



CHETANA J. TORRENS



MICHELE WINSHIP

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#YAstandards

YOGA ALLIANCE & THE YOGA ALLIANCE FOUNDATION

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iwanttohelpya@yogaalliance.org
1560 Wilson Blvd, Suite 700, Arlington, VA 22209
[@yogaalliance](https://www.yogaalliance.org) | 1-888-921-9642



WORKING GROUP PAPER

Integrity

APRIL 2019

#YAstandards

In 1999, in its role as a voluntary, member-based organization serving yoga schools and teachers, **Yoga Alliance (YA)** sought to ensure and preserve the quality of yoga education and practice by establishing and disseminating standards for the education of yoga teachers and by maintaining a registry of teachers who met these standards. In 2018, **YA** launched a review of its standards, calling it the **Standards Review Project (SRP)**.

One result of the **SRP** is this collection of eight collaborative, condensed, and edited working group papers to which key yoga stakeholders for **YA** and for the yoga community at large contributed. These papers represent the recommendations by each working group of the best practices for the standard, or key inquiry area, in question. There is one working paper for each; what follows is the working group paper on the notion of **Integrity** in yoga.

INTEGRITY UPFRONT

Yoga Alliance (YA) chose Integrity as one of its eight areas of inquiry because integrity influences all actions and relationships in yoga. Within a self-governing, voluntary community such as YA, Integrity can only exist when it is recognized, defined, and applied as a shared value across all stakeholders of the community. From Registered Yoga Teachers (RYTs) and Registered Yoga Schools (RYSs) to the Lead Trainers (LTs) who run the Yoga Teacher Training (YTT) programs to YA itself, Integrity sets the standard for accountability.¹

YA asked the Integrity Working Group (IWG):

- 1) Taking as a given the geographic dispersion of yoga schools (and therefore the impossibility of YA site visits for every school), what is the exact criteria for a yoga school to gain a YA credential to become an RYS with the implication that it can be trusted to deliver an appropriate, high-quality, and safe curriculum for RYT 200 (or “foundational”) yoga teachers? Specifically:
 - a) What vetting can be applied during the school application process for admitting a new RYS 200?
 - b) What ongoing reporting, reviewing, recertifying, or other oversight is needed on an annual, biannual, or other basis to ensure ongoing buy-in once YA adopts a more modern, technologically-driven system for vetting schools and teachers?
- 2) Using the same caveat of geographical dispersion in the question above:
 - a) Does YA have an independent responsibility to vet teachers beyond their earning of a YA-approved RYS certification before registering with YA?
 - b) If YA does independently vet accredited RYTs, what ongoing reporting, reviewing, recertifying, or other oversight is needed on an annual, biannual, or other basis to ensure ongoing buy-in/compliance?
- 3) What are the pros and cons of testing for all parties? Specifically:
 - a) Who should develop an exam? Who should take an exam? How, and where, should the exam be administered? How frequently should it be administered? What should it cover?
 - b) Should YA approve yoga schools to become RYSs if they do not demonstrate the desire and ability to administer a practicum and/or other type of exam?
- 4) How would YA implement retroactive measures for current RYSs and RYTs?

Given the Integrity Working Group’s belief that the public expects “certified” yoga schools, and thus certified yoga teachers, to meet certain levels of quality and safety, the group recommended that YA label and designate the meaning of “in Integrity”.

¹ The notion of Lead Trainer(s) and Other Trainer(s) come from YA’s section of its website on [Standards Guidelines \(all RYS\)](#).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

At the onset, the IWG noted the challenge of YA requirements that would classify a school or teacher as being “in Integrity”, beyond even YA’s challenge of being a non-regulatory, advocacy body attempting to set standards.

The IWG nonetheless believed that the expectation of students and the general public is that the RYS credential has guidelines through which schools provide appropriate training in an effort to graduate skillful teachers. Similarly, the RYT credential implies that a teacher understands general principles around safety, ethics, anatomy, and philosophy, among other topics relevant and appropriate to a YTT.

The IWG recommended that all YA-registered RYS YTT programs must:

- ***Deliver what they say they will deliver***
- ***Ensure physical and emotional safety***
- ***Meet legal requirements***
- ***Promote inclusion***

While the **IWG agreed that YA has a responsibility to vet all RYS curricula, LTs and Specialty Trainers (STs), assessment methods, training space, and insurance of new schools**, it did not reach an agreement on whether new schools should be under probation in their first year and, if necessary, receive “hand-holding” from either YA or an already established school in an effort to meet any new or updated standards.

The **IWG did agree that minimum requirements for LTs are necessary** to bring transparency to the relationships and expectations between YA, RYSs, RYT, and the general public; they also agreed that experience is nearly always more important than hours in training.

While the **IWG agreed on the need for RYT to be able to demonstrate what they had learned from the RYSs’ curricula**, the group was unable to agree on the method of testing itself. The **IWG also agreed on the need for any practitioner to have a baseline level of experience before applying to enter an RYS program**, but the group was unable to agree on what those requirements should be.

Finally, the IWG addressed many operationally-driven issues such as the need for insurance, CPR training, and legal considerations.

Please see the [Teacher Qualifications](#) and [Teacher Trainer Qualifications](#) Working Group Papers for more inquiry into this topic.

The group recommended E-RYT 200 as a sufficient minimum requirement for a “lead” Teacher Trainer and recommended two letters of recommendation to verify their qualifications with at least one from a yoga teacher and another from a professional reference.

BACKGROUND AND REFLECTION

The IWG began its conversation noting that many in the yoga community and media believe that the number of “out of Integrity” YTTs (both RYS YTTs and non-YA YTTs) is growing. The IWG cited the ease in ability of a school to cut and paste curricula and manuals of other schools, change few details, and then apply for and receive an RYS credential. The group also discussed examples of schools that do not deliver on what they say they will as another example of being “out of Integrity.”

YA has defined the phrase “out of Integrity” as “not meeting the current Yoga Alliance standards.” Given the IWG’s belief that the public expects “certified” yoga schools, and thus “certified”² yoga teachers, to meet certain levels of quality and safety, the group recommended that YA label and designate the meaning of “in Integrity.”

The IWG acknowledged many issues to be addressed for YA to create an “in Integrity” designation, among them:

- Accrediting new programs and reviewing current programs will require “heavy lifting,” meaning that it will be time- and resource-intensive to do so
- Ongoing reporting, reviewing, recredentialing, and general oversight of all RYSs (including level of detail, frequency, student feedback) are essential as is assessing whether or not the output, or graduate skill, matches the advertising or promised skill
- YA must be able to revoke an RYS credential
- Requirements are necessary for LTs, curriculum, space, and legal issues
- Testing of students who have completed an RYS 200 is necessary, but is it the responsibility of the RYS or of YA? Beyond organizational accountability, is there a core level of knowledge to be tested to ensure the RYT is “in Integrity”?
- Online platforms for testing, ongoing education, and student feedback must be considered
- Is YA responsible for the ongoing vetting of yoga teachers? If so, what format would that take, and how would it be executed and managed?

The Integrity Working Group agreed that transparency around teacher-student ratios is necessary and recommended a 1:10 teacher-student ratio as best practice.

² Yoga Alliance does not certify schools or teachers. The teachers are certified by schools. Yoga Alliance provides a credential for schools and teachers in the form of the Registered Yoga School (RYS) and the Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT) credentials.

SOLUTION

The IWG proposed four solution areas: Credentialing Criteria; Ongoing Reporting and other Issues; Assessment; and Grandfathering. The group also offered a final section of reflections on YA's accountability in establishing new "in Integrity" norms for itself and the community at large.

CREDENTIALING CRITERIA

Minimum YTT Participant Requirements (or Prerequisites)

The IWG believed that many students enter RYS 200 programs as a way to deepen their practice rather than to learn how to teach, often because a YTT is presented as the best way for doing so. The IWG thus presumed that many YTTs care more about practice and less about teaching.

The IWG therefore discussed the benefits and disadvantages of establishing minimum requirements (i.e., two-years' experience of practicing yoga) for applicants of a YTT program. The group was unable to agree on minimum requirements but **did recommend that if RYSs do have requirements for application, the RYSs should publish those requirements** to make them widely known and seen as a community standard.

LT Experience and Requirements

The IWG said the LT is crucial with respect to enabling an RYS to deliver what it promises to deliver, agreeing that an LT experience was more important than their number of training hours. The group recommended **E-RYT 200 as a sufficient minimum requirement for a LT** and **recommended two letters of recommendation to verify a LT's qualifications** with at least one from a yoga teacher and another from a professional reference. The IWG did not arrive at a recommendation for the requirement or veracity of an LT submitting video examples of teachings, though this subject arose as one YA will need to consider.

The IWG discussed the potential for online modules to train LTs on: lesson planning and learning styles; diversity, accessibility, inclusivity, and equity; pedagogy; and other educational topics.

For additional conversations on these issues, please see the [Teacher Trainer Qualifications](#), [Online Learning](#), and [Inclusion](#) Working Group Papers.

RYS REQUIREMENTS AND OVERSIGHT

The IWG believed the application and vetting process for a new RYS should be comprehensive. The group said that RYS applicants should include, at minimum, the following in their applications to YA:

- Their example of their RYS-created and administered practical exam and/or their LT's description of the pathways that ensure consistency and knowledge from homework, home practice, and teacher-student relationships, among other factors
- Their mission statement (of yoga teaching methodology) and/or their overall RYS's mission statement
- Their training manual for content and plagiarism check
- Their training schedule

Ultimately...an RYS should teach what it says it will teach... one simple, though integral, question to the graduating RYT's could be: "Did you feel ready to teach at the end of the program?"

The IWG discussed the possibility of a probationary period for the first year of a YA-approved RYS. During its first year, a new RYS could be mentored by YA or a more “tenured” RYS to ensure compliance with YA standards. The group reached no consensus on the details of this probationary period.

LT-to-Students Ratios

The **IWG** agreed that transparency around teacher-student ratios is necessary and **recommended a 1:10 teacher-student ratio as a best practice.**

YA/RYS INTERNATIONALIZATION

Given the growing demand for yoga education in non-English speaking countries, the IWG discussed YA as a credentialing body with requirements solely in English. The IWG suggested that YA and international RYSs share responsibility in making sure that credentialing information is not lost in translation, but there was no consensus on any solution.

ONGOING REPORTING, REVIEW, RECREDENTIALING, AND OTHER OVERSIGHT

The IWG focused on developing a recredentialing process that results in meaningful oversight without being overly burdensome for schools.

The **IWG generally agreed that while the initial registration process should be comprehensive, the recredentialing could be streamlined.** There was concern that the recredentialing process could be another level of paperwork that depletes teachers’ time and resources.

ONLINE REPORTING

The IWG suggested online data collection as a simple way of gaining insight into an RYS and their YTTs. Examples include hours in class, topics covered, teacher-student ratios, number of students to begin, and number of students to graduate. This information could be collected via student evaluations and from schools during recredentialing.

Ultimately, the IWG restated that an RYS should teach what it says it will teach. An anonymous, online survey from all graduates could prove useful in ensuring this kind of compliance. One simple, though integral, question to the graduating RYTs could be: “Did you feel ready to teach at the end of the program?”

RECREDENTIALING

The **IWG agreed that recredentialing was necessary** if for no other reason than to remind each RYS to keep up with the basic standards. An RYS in good standing could file for recredentialing less frequently than a new school or a flagged school.

The majority of the IWG agreed that annual reviews of all the materials of a school would be too burdensome for both the RYS and YA. However, if RYS content were to change drastically within a short time frame, and if YA were made aware of it, YA would need to have the capabilities of flagging this for further investigation as it could signal an Integrity concern.

The group offered the following recredentialing methods for YA to consider:

- Ask lead teachers to confirm things like insurance, background tests, facilities' accessibility and safety, and CPR training
- Review all materials (manuals, tests, etc.) with less frequency over time and/or with more frequency during a probationary period (if one were set)
- Ask graduates to fill out evaluations after each YTT to discern how closely the class stuck to the plan
- Offer instructional videos/webinars and online testing for RYS trainers
- Enable students to give feedback on LT performance, the quality and sufficiency of resources and facilities, and the comprehensiveness of the program
- Ask students to confirm things like hours in class, topics covered, student-teacher ratios, etc.
- Collect basic statistics (i.e., the number of students who signed up versus the number of those who successfully completed the training)

The IWG suggested that recredentialing could take place every three to five years with an RYS in good standing and/or receiving good reviews on the YA site needing to file less frequently than new schools or schools with low rankings.

Revocation

The IWG agreed that revocation would occur if there was a breach of ethics by the RYS, including multiple or severe student injuries and/or plagiarism. The group felt that the biggest question with respect to recredentialing was that of grievance and accountability and asserted that YA should have a process to follow up with consistently “bad” feedback of an RYS.

OTHER ISSUES: LEGAL, OPERATIONS, AND SPACE ACCESSIBILITY

The IWG agreed on operating issues such as the necessity of insurance and CPR requirements. With respect to accessibility requirements, the IWG said that while RYSs should try to meet them, these would vary by country and could make it difficult for YA to “mandate” anything. The group said, however, that an RYS should clearly describe their spaces or environment and provide clear exits, include pictures, and abide by local building code standards.

Refund policies should be published, the IWG said, to allow for partial or full refunds within 3-5 days of a program start date. YA should also require an RYS to provide YA with a work-study written contract with a minimum amount equal to or above the minimum wage.

The group reached no resolution on when and how to use background checks to ensure an RYT, LT, RYS, or even that YA itself is “in Integrity.”

ASSESSMENT

The IWG discussed YA's possible role in RYT vetting and focused on assessment issues surrounding the evaluation of quality and safety of, in particular, new teachers.

Testing

The IWG agreed that graduates of an RYS should be able to demonstrate that they learned the material in the credentialed RYS curriculum but did not reach consensus on how to accomplish this. The group did suggest that:

- Tests are a relatively easy and straightforward way of assessing basic knowledge, but they do not necessarily capture the ability to teach
- Many industries, from personal training to the financial industry, rely on third-party testing, which raises the issue for YA and its credentialed RYSs
- A certification and/or credential implies that a person has a basic level of knowledge; but given the vastness of yoga and diversity of Yoga Alliance's schools, is it fair to administer a test of general yoga knowledge?
- Testing could be a barrier for certain students who might otherwise excel at teaching

Grandfathering

Given that compliance or "in Integrity" updates would take time to complete for all designations within the YA community, the IWG suggested that YA move quickly and use its resources to raise awareness and educate the yoga community. The IWG did not offer a recommendation regarding YA's specific role in enforcing the concept of Integrity and refers readers instead to the seven other SRP Working Group Papers for in-depth analysis of Integrity in each of these inquiries.

The IWG agreed that any current RYS should have between one and five years to comply with the new rules with RYSs potentially being randomly assigned compliance due dates during that time. A new RYS should comply within 12 to 18 months, the group said. Other certification requirements of a particular school (e.g., Iyengar, Ashtanga) should be considered and potentially grandfathered into the new rules, the IWG said.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: YOGA ALLIANCE ACCOUNTABILITY

The **IWG recommended that YA provide a platform to vet schools to ensure that schools are safe.** The group also suggested YA be accountable to the general public in these ways:

- Require that registered yoga professionals uphold certain ethics
- Maintain a reliable and accessible database of active RYS and RYT credentials
- Create a space for teachers to develop continuing education and other training, locally as well as online
- Provide RYSs with resources such as standard questions for trainee assessments
- Consider cost-efficient and effective international testing techniques

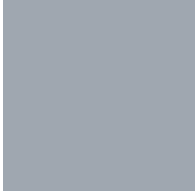
The IWG agreed that YA has the responsibility to:

- Require and /or provide a competency exam before 200- and 500-hour credentials are given; this exam should be offered in different languages
- Offer an online or paper-based survey of students to ask whether basic teacher competencies were taught in their RYS
- Offer continuing education requirements, including ongoing minimum education requirements for all designations in the YA community
- Require proof of karma work, or selfless service
- Have a recertification process for RYT's that could potentially include teaching a class to a local, more senior teacher

The IWG said that YA is not responsible for vouching for the individual RYT; this is the responsibility of the RYS. The group said that YA itself should not promise more than it can realistically deliver, working to discern when and where it might need to become involved in an “in Integrity” situation with an RYS or RYT.

ADVISORY GROUP

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DIANE ALARCON



STEPHEN BISHOP



DIANNE BONDY



KELLEY CARBONI-WOODS



JULIE CHAVANU



PHINDILE DHLAMINI



JACCI GRUNINGER



JUSTIN JETTON



JUDITH HANSON LASATER



CYNDI LEE



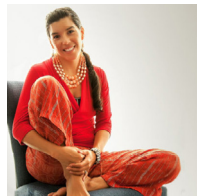
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WORKING GROUP PAPER

Online Learning

APRIL 2019

#YAstandards

In 1999, in its role as a voluntary, member-based organization serving yoga schools and teachers, **Yoga Alliance (YA)** sought to ensure and preserve the quality of yoga education and practice by establishing and disseminating standards for the education of yoga teachers and by maintaining a registry of teachers who met these standards. In 2018, **YA** launched a review of its standards, calling it the **Standards Review Project (SRP)**.

One result of the **SRP** is this collection of eight collaborative, condensed, and edited working group papers to which key yoga stakeholders for **YA** and for the yoga community at large contributed. These papers represent the recommendations by each working group of the best practices for the standard, or key inquiry area, in question. There is one working paper for each; what follows is the working group paper on the notion of [Online Learning](#) in yoga.

ONLINE LEARNING UPFRONT

Society has entered an age when online learning is as ubiquitous and popular as yoga. This new reality requires Yoga Alliance (YA) to examine its existing training standards in online learning. If YA wishes to continue to define and preserve the quality and safety of yoga education and practice worldwide, it must set the standard for best practices for this discipline.

Over the last ten years, with continued growth in yoga studios worldwide, the number of yoga teacher training (YTT) programs and, concurrently, the number of completion certificates given by yoga schools (both Yoga Alliance Registered Yoga Schools (RYSs) and non-YA-affiliated schools) has increased exponentially. Market forces have made 200-hour YTTs an essential part of the business model for yoga retreats, yoga studios, and professional yoga teachers.

YA asked the Online Learning Working Group (OLWG) if the reward for embracing online learning for yoga is worth the risks. YA leadership, along with senior yoga teachers, has been cautious with respect to stepping into the online learning space. Fear for students' and others' safety, and concern over losing the essence of the teacher/student relationship, have been the drivers of this circumspection, overlapping with concerns pertaining to the quality and safety of the online learning experience overall.

The OLWG took on two main questions about the appropriate role of online education in yoga:

- ***What, if any, elements of an RYS's program should be taught online?***
- ***What controls must be in place to offer quality online education?***

The OLWG recommended a blended approach to Online Learning. It discussed some benefits that might come to RYSs, such as attracting students and making parts of the YTTs easier to manage. It also highlighted some concerns; in addition to those surrounding safety and the teacher/student relationship, the OLWG also expressed concern about drawing students away from traditional RYS programs, thus not serving YA members. The OLWG even reflected on the potential of a 100% online YTT program

This subject matter intersects with and influences the SRP Working Group Papers of [Teacher Qualifications](#), [Teacher Trainer Qualifications](#), and [Core Curriculum](#); please see them for further inquiry.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The OLWG reviewed the following questions and explored: 100% online training, including a video-submitted practicum; 100% online training with the exception of an in-person practicum; and 50% online training, allowing for 100% online for Speciality Trainer (ST) sections. The group also reflected on the ability for specialty credentials and/or continuing education (CE) hours to be able to be delivered 100% online. The group asked:

- Who should be allowed to teach online? Do these educators need skills different from regular teaching? What specific skills or safety issues are needed in teaching yoga online?
- Should YA provide online education or leave the education to the schools? Would there be a benefit from a mix of both?
- What systems are necessary to ensure the quality of the educational experience?
- How is yoga tested online? Can a yoga teacher be tested solely or partially or at all via an online format?

BACKGROUND AND REFLECTION

As with other Working Groups, the OLWG noted that some in the yoga community have expressed concern over the quality and safety of current-day YTT programs, including those affiliated with YA as RYSSs, because they may be producing teachers who lack basic anatomy and physiology, yoga history, and yoga philosophy knowledge. It was through this lens that the OLWG worked to identify the types of yoga training most successfully able to be accomplished online.

The OLWG noted the importance of the yoga community as a self-regulating body, with YA as its best-standards guide, as it developed its opinions of best practices in learning to teach yoga online, which it agreed was different from merely learning about yoga online.

The OLWG bifurcated its discussion between strengths and weaknesses and then addressed other important issues regarding learning yoga online.

If YA wishes to continue to define and preserve the quality and safety of yoga education and practice worldwide, it must set the standard for best practices for (online learning).

ONLINE LEARNING: STRENGTHS

- **Academic Aspects:** information management, methodology delivery, group discussions, at-home practice/teaching, individual or team projects, and practicum. The group said some YTT students have difficulty retaining content via “live,” in-person environments, and an online environment could give these students more opportunities to revisit the syllabus material and digest key learnings.
- **Increased Exposure to Senior and/or Speciality Teachers:** the OLWG noted that all students would benefit from the increased access to senior teachers that Online Learning might provide via mediums such as live streaming.

- **Resource-Rich and Adaptable Content:** more resources and course material could be made available with the opportunity to increase intersectional learning via online books, videos, audio, online handouts, and other types of materials. The online format could be adapted to suit more types of learners.
- **Levelling of the Playing Field:** the OLWG felt that online group discussions level the social “playing field.” Whereas in-person discussions have a tendency to be dominated by extroverts who need less time to reflect on their ideas before expressing them, online discussions give others a greater chance to also contribute. This could increase opportunities for diversity and cultural exchanges.
- **Increase in Accountability:** Online Learning could lead to greater accountability for students via more rigorous standards. Both RYS and RYT accountability increase via the sharing and evaluation process in practicum through recorded assignments.
- **Standardized Body of Yoga Teaching:** including all of the above benefits, Online Learning can aid in building and storing a standardized body of yoga teaching methodology that is very accessible and that fills current gaps in teaching methodology (such as teaching yoga to older beginners or to vulnerable populations).

ONLINE LEARNING: WEAKNESSES

Lack of Hands-On Elements: including physical movement, or the overall practical components of in-person learning. All of the physical aspects of a YTT program taught online could create exceptional demands on both Lead Trainers (LTs) and trainees with regard to time, resources, and videography/digital skills. For example, while the principles of assisting and adjusting students in yoga asana could be taught and demonstrated to great effect online, it could be difficult for trainees to demonstrate their learned understanding to faculty members.

Technical Abilities and Challenges: the OLWG observed that a heavily online YTT program could be a non-inclusive environment for many yogis if they lack technical abilities and/or access to resources.

Teaching Assessment/Practicum Issues: via an online YTT program, trainees would not be able to lead a practice class and have their teaching assessed. Examples underlying this concern included: how to use props or other special equipment like massage balls and foam rollers, the ethics of touch (including consent), and appropriate touch techniques.

Security/Piracy Issues: the OLWG noted that Online Learning introduces a new aspect surrounding the business of yoga. Like all online activity, Online Learning might not be entirely secure. In keeping with standard online privacy issues, the chances of infringement on copyrights of syllabi, curriculum, and reading materials are potentially higher than in an offline situation.

The Online Learning Working Group recommended a blended approach to online learning that would give RYSs many benefits, such as attracting students and making parts of the YTTs easier to manage.

Student Connectedness/Motivation: the OLWG discussed a wide range of issues around YTT student morale, motivation, and engagement. Large classes or cohorts, for example, across many time zones, while possible, and potentially advantageous, could be challenging in a variety of ways with respect to relating to student/student relationships, teacher/student relationships, and school (e.g., lineage)/student relationships.

APPROPRIATE ONLINE LEARNING CATEGORIES

The OLWG focused on the suitability of YA's Core Curriculum Educational Categories to the online environment, and the group agreed, as did the Core Curriculum Working Group (CCWG) in its inquiry, that most categories could be successfully taught online. The OLWG said specifically that courses such as yoga anatomy and yoga teaching methodology would enable a wider dissemination of innovative teaching methods, including teacher demonstration and peer and teacher discussions. (Please review the [Core Curriculum](#) Working Group Paper for more discussion.)

The only Educational Category the group found problematic was Practicum in YTTs. While the OLWG agreed that Practicum hours could be implemented through video-submitted practice teaching, the group (as well as the CCWG) said that Practicum should likely best remain as an in-person category. Were this to be the scenario, the OLWG offered a creative, community-based idea of neighboring RYS studios swapping YTT students and allowing free or discounted teaching for an intensive period of Practicum at their studio for the partner studio's YTTs.

APPROPRIATE CONTROLS FOR EDUCATIONAL CATEGORIES

The OLWG believed that teaching online requires more experience than teaching in person. Online teachers, they said, need to have physically seen a lot of people in person in order to teach YTT students "sight unseen" effectively and safely.

The group suggested that the minimum experience for an RYT to register to teach an online course for continuing education credits could include the E-RYT 500 designation plus at least 10 years' teaching experience and a minimum of 500 teaching hours per year as well as a certification or degree completion in the specific subject areas. YA could consider providing online education as a potential addition to the YA continuing education portfolio, the OLWG said.

The OLWG uniformly agreed that the quality of an online YTT module should be at least as high as that offered in person.

SAFETY ISSUES

The OLWG said that teaching online holds different challenges than those offered in person, still acknowledging that the YTT students' responsibility to keep themselves safe remained the same online or in person. LTs and Teacher Trainers in both environments must have the knowledge, skills, and experience not to misdirect a student.

The OLWG discussed a main safety concern of students learning to teach asana/pranayama via online only, commenting that for this category, some percentage of in-person hours should be required.

The Online Learning Working Group noted the importance of the yoga community as a self-regulating body, with Yoga Alliance as its best-standards guide, as it developed its opinions of best practices in learning to teach yoga online.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (LMSS)

The OLWG found LMSs necessary to ensure a high-quality online educational experience. LMSs: enable the monitoring of student engagement with content and active usage for accountability; create a platform for dynamic cohort learning and interactivity; and support video conferencing capabilities, forums for discussion, and quizzes to potentially integrate with course assignments. They support efficiencies of course material and the timed release of syllabi and create a focal center for learning.

Members of the group acknowledged that many students frequently have difficulty and/or anxiety navigating technology, and this would need to be an important consideration when designing the dashboard and interface of the virtual classroom. Designated tech support provided by the RYS would be a necessary addition to assist students who feel challenged by the online environment.

DIDACTIC VERSUS LIVE ONLINE

The OLWG discussed how a didactic approach online (i.e., the teaching of the process of learning online) would serve two benefits. First, it would help students settle into the online learning environment, and, second, it would underpin the delivery of the online teaching methodology itself.

Members of the group considered a mix of didactic and actual live learning to be ideal. Demonstrating asana, showing anatomy, and even communicating between teacher(s) and students could be accomplished didactically. Live online interaction, the OLWG asserted, could support efforts like Q&A sessions, philosophy discussions, and even regular class times where a teacher would normally be talking to students. Studios could choose pre-recorded materials only, a mix of pre-recorded and live class time, or fully live interactions just like they normally would for in-person training.

TESTING AND COMPETENCY

The OLWG was clear about testing and competency: the real test of a yoga teacher is not how they answer test questions, but how they teach. The group said that a single way to gauge this across all yoga would be impossible, and that each RYS must be solely responsible for testing and competency. (Please review the [Core Curriculum](#) Working Group Paper for more conversation around assessment.)

The group agreed that it is necessary for YA to uphold the standards for YTTs and that a base level of testing should be required to maintain quality and consistency. The OLWG discussed that testing should focus on “core fundamentals” or “specific basic learning” in each Educational Category to ensure quality of understanding versus simply fulfilling a set number of hours per topic.¹

The OLWG group believed that testing and assessing competency could be achieved by setting assignments in person. The group suggested students’ assignments could be captured on video or through reflective journals shared with a tutoring team and/or put up for peer review. Testing could be restricted by YA, potentially, to subjects like anatomy and physiology.

Most categories could be successfully taught online... (though the) practicum would likely best remain as an in-person category.

¹ Quotes are OLWG members’.

SOLUTION

ONLINE LEARNING: MAXIMIZING STRENGTHS, MINIMIZING WEAKNESSES

Overall, the OLWG recommended that YA develop standards for Online Learning. The group said YA can establish and enforce standards in an effort to ensure the quality and safety of teaching of yoga to the end practitioner.

Online learning is an established and integral part of learning in mainstream educational systems, and this “anytime, anywhere” learning is advantageous to creating opportunities for inclusion and accessibility in yoga. Online YTTs create opportunities for people to participate in the training(s) of their choice because they can remove barriers such as time constraints, location, and cost.

The OLWG did acknowledge that Online Learning is less suited to matters involving physical movement, although the group agreed that much could be taught online (please see the [Core Curriculum Working Group Paper](#) for an in-depth inquiry into yoga curricula).

The OLWG recommended YA create an RYS online credential to give meaning to these programs and to encourage RYSs to aspire to uphold standards.

The OLWG suggested that YA could support Online Learning through forums for ongoing discussions such as Facebook Groups, an LMS platform, and other interactive sessions (i.e., Zoom calls).

The OLWG suggested that YA or the Yoga Alliance Foundation explore the possibility of an “internet accessibility initiative” through a partnership with an organization like CREDO Mobile to facilitate access to online education in underserved communities and/or inner-city schools.²

The OLWG also suggested that YA develop a series of clauses within its [Code of Conduct](#) relating specifically to Online Learning, ensuring that RYSs provide all sessions/content as advertised. YA could also develop and provide tutorials for RYSs on how to use various course platforms and other communication tools to enhance the online student experience, including understanding, knowledge base, and learning.

Given that online yoga programs already exist, the OLWG expressed concern over the potential for “pirated programs,” as this practice is already seen via offline YTT programs.

For continuing education courses, the OLWG recommended that YA establish a compensated network of peer review experts to evaluate such courses, ensuring quality, safety assurance, and compliance.

TEACHER/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

The OLWG acknowledged that the student/teacher relationship would change via an online environment and considered guidelines for student/teacher interaction in Online Learning. **The group said it would rather see this aspect left to the RYSs.**

Acknowledging the bond between students and their teachers as one that has endured throughout yoga’s 5,000-year history, the group said that while the in-person experience could not be replaced, a blended learning environment could provide students the best of both worlds.

The OLWG also considered the specific skill sets and understanding of the fundamental roles and responsibilities to the online student experience and learning outcomes essential for courses online.

² Visit credomobile.com for information on this organization. This is an endorsement or suggestion by the OLWG, not by YA.

The group acknowledged that the numerous channels of communication (video conferencing, i.e.) can be used with appropriate frequency to solidify the student/teacher relationship. However, the OLWG acknowledged an important element of this evolution of learning: greater commitment on the part of both teacher and student is needed to foster a meaningful teacher/student relationship online. The group agreed the online model can leverage platforms like Facebook Groups for ongoing discussion and learning between trainings. As a central place for questions, additional resources, and relationship building, these platforms currently have no parallel.

The OLWG saw the main issues of maintaining and improving the teacher/student relationship online as:

- The changing dynamic of the teacher/student relationship
- The amount of contact time between teacher and student
- The qualifications and skills of teachers to educate online
- The important tutorial support for RYSs

APPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL CATEGORIES

The OLWG agreed that all categories could be taught online and that YA's role could be to ensure that RYSs remain in compliance with the standards, but it did not reach a conclusion on how this would happen. The group briefly touched on the need for Lead Trainers (LTs) to be trained on how to teach online, perhaps leading to an accreditation by YA.³ For more information on LT requirements, please review the Teacher Trainer Qualifications Working Group Paper.

ROLE FOR YA GOING FORWARD

The OLWG wanted YA to consider:

- Providing training and other support to RYSs and their program directors to facilitate bringing components of their YTTs online
- Offering a mandatory ethical commitment course online that would cover [Scope of Practice](#) and [Code of Conduct](#) while reviewing YA's grievance procedure and anti-harassment policies prior to RYT acceptance, which could be completed annually at the time of registration renewal
- Requiring proof of liability insurance at the time of registration renewal (though the group noted this was outside of their scope to determine how)

The OLWG said that YA should primarily be focused on the assessment of schools' standards, including the ongoing monitoring that standards are being met.

³ Footnote LTs per Ovissi

ADVISORY GROUP

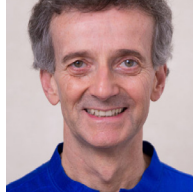
Our heartfelt thanks go to the following Advisors who spent much time and energy meeting, discussing, debating, and resolving issues on Online Learning to the benefit of YA's membership. The Advisors were:



HEATHER HOLLAND



SARA IVANHOE



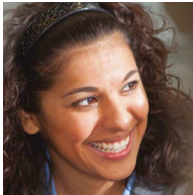
GYANDEV MCCORD



CHRISTINA MROZ



MARY RICHARDS



KAREN SAHETYA



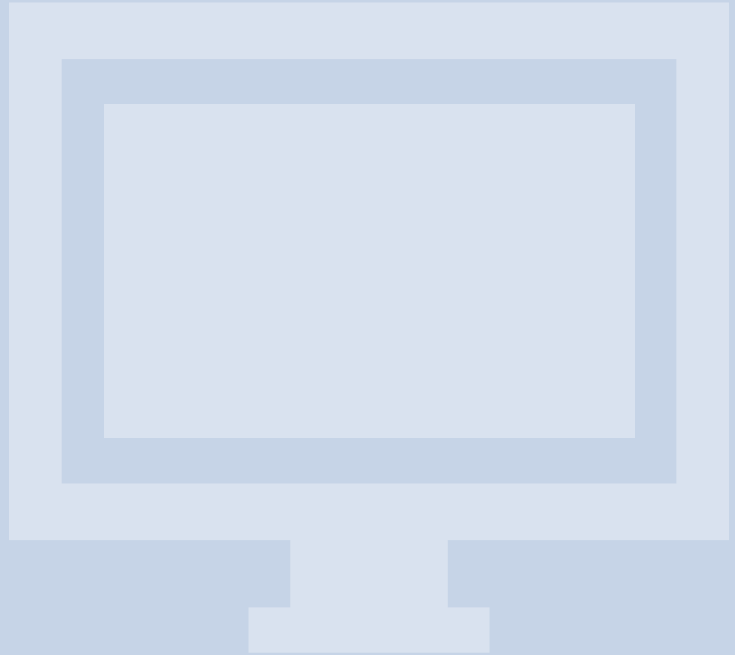
EVA NORLYK SMITH



TARO SMITH



HAYLEY WINTER



#YAstandards

YOGA ALLIANCE & THE YOGA ALLIANCE FOUNDATION

Founded in 1999, Yoga Alliance is a member-based, non-profit organization that serves yoga schools and teachers across the globe, providing a world-recognized, best-in-class credential and unifying its members around a shared ethical commitment. In addition, YA delivers a strong value proposition to its members through community-building initiatives, educational resources, advocacy efforts, and social impact programs. Its sister organization, the Yoga Alliance Foundation, supports leveraged impact and direct service programs that expand the reach of and participation in yoga.

iwanttohelpya@yogaalliance.org
1560 Wilson Blvd, Suite 700, Arlington, VA 22209
[@yogaalliance](https://www.yogaalliance.org) | 1-888-921-9642