



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 <i>(Intro to DAIE)</i>	
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 RYT's 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 *ahimsa* (non-harming), *satya* (truth), and *asteya* (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 RYTs 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:



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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.

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