



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.<sup>1</sup>

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”.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 RYTs 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”<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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 RYTs 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

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:



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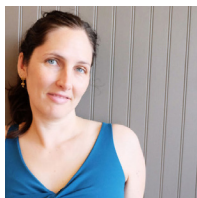
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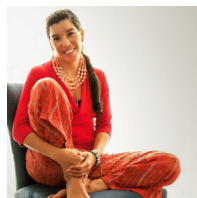
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## #YAstandards

### 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.

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