

CHOOSING THE RIGHT MESSAGE THERAPY SCHOOL

Making the decision to enter the massage and bodywork field is an exciting and life-changing choice. There are countless reasons why people choose a career in massage therapy – whether that is the ability to earn a competitive annual income (~\$80,000 full-time equivalent¹), work part-time with a flexible schedule, or be your own boss. The first step towards making your decision your reality is education.

The most critical factor in the decision-making process is determining **what you want to accomplish with your training**. Are you interested in offering massage as a form of relaxation or for therapeutic purposes? Do you dream of working with medical patients, athletes, or a variety of clients? Are you passionate about working with children or pregnant women?

Most schools should be able to provide the details you will need to make a thoughtful decision, including information about the programs or courses offered, the flexibility of the schedule, financial obligations, and financing options.

VARIATIONS ON MESSAGE THERAPY CAREERS

In addition to the type of practice, you may want to explore various massage techniques or modalities to see which approach or philosophy most appeals to you – acupressure, Swedish, Structural Integration (Rolfing), Reiki, sports massage, Shiatsu, deep tissue, etc. Each technique offers particular benefits, and massage schools may offer training in a variety of these techniques or be highly specialized.

There is no such thing as a “standard massage therapy practice.” Individuals often choose this profession because of the flexibility it offers in terms of work hours, independence, and choice of practice locations and types.



PHOTO BY BETH BANNING

Massage therapists may work full- or part-time. Due to the physical demands of massage, a full-time practice is defined as one involving 17 or more hours of actual bodywork per week. Massage therapists invest additional time on scheduling, billing, housekeeping, marketing, etc. According to a 2005 AMTA survey of members, 38% reported they work full-time (performing more than 17 hours of actual massage), and 62% work part-time (fewer than 17 hours of actual massage).

Income levels for massage therapists vary by region of the country, experience, and type of practice. For example, massage therapists working in urban areas earn significantly more than massage therapists working in rural areas. Self-employed massage therapists typically earn more per hour than do those employed by another individual or organization.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008-2009), massage therapists who “complete formal training programs and pass the national certification exam are likely to have very good opportunities.”

¹ <http://www.naturalhealers.com/qa/massagecareers.html>.

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MASSAGE THERAPY GROWING AS A CAREER OPPORTUNITY

As public acceptance of massage has grown in the United States, the number of massage therapists has risen dramatically. AMTA estimates that the number of massage therapists in the United States, including students, has risen from 250,000 to 300,000. According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment for massage therapists is expected to increase 20% from 2006 to 2016.

The number of massage therapy training programs in the United States has also increased. With over 1,000 schools currently offering training to obtain professional certification and/or licensing, students enjoy a wide range and are able to choose the best school for their needs.

Training programs in massage therapy generally require a high school diploma, though postsecondary education is useful. Previous studies in subjects such as science (especially anatomy and physiology), business and humanities are also helpful.

THE PATH TO A CAREER IN MASSAGE THERAPY

Pursuing a career in massage therapy often involves three steps:

1. Complete an education training program that qualifies you to practice in your chosen location and any potential future location;
2. Become nationally certified by passing the National Certification Exam for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork; and
3. Meet the requirements of your state or municipality (such as obtaining a license or other credential, if you practice in an area where massage therapy is regulated).

“Accreditation of a school or program may be one of the most important criteria to consider.”



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IPSB IS APPROVED TO OFFER FINANCIAL AID TO THOSE WHO QUALIFY

Be sure to ask the school about its faculty. Are they practicing massage therapists? What are the education levels of the faculty? What percentage of the faculty are published or considered experts in their field? If you are interested in learning multiple bodywork modalities, be sure to check the school's catalog to examine the depth and breadth of its course offerings. Are you interested in Asian bodywork at a school with a Western focus? Can the school accommodate your desire to focus on pediatric massage? Does the school provide an internship program?

Education is also a financial investment in you. Is the school prepared to help you financially? Is it approved to offer financial aid? When you complete your program, does the school provide job placement assistance? And lastly, is the school invested in its students and alumni? Is the school an approved provider of continuing education credits and prepared to support your lifelong learning career?

ACCREDITATION OF SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS

Accreditation of a school or program may be one of the most important criteria to consider. Before approving the school to participate in Federal Financial Aid, the United States Department of Education considers a school's accreditation level in determining whether the education provided meets an accepted level of **quality training**. Several accrediting bodies offer voluntary accreditation of massage programs and/or schools, including the Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA). For more information about COMTA, please visit www.comta.org.

NATIONAL CERTIFICATION

Certification by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) demonstrates that a massage therapist has attained a particular professional credential. Regulatory bodies in 33 states (as of 2006) require massage therapists to pass the National Certification Exam before being allowed to legally practice. While California does not require NCBTMB certification, consumers and employers often recognize this certification as an important differentiator of a therapist's qualifications, and the certification communicates a commitment to safe, ethical practices. The NCBTMB also provides schools with the pass rates for their students. Be sure to ask a potential massage school for a copy of its school report. California pass rates range between 55 and 70%, whereas national pass rates range from 60% to 65%.

For more information about NCBTMB, please visit www.ncbtmb.org.

MASSAGE LAWS AND REGULATIONS

A majority of states regulate massage and several others are moving toward statewide regulation. Most states require a minimum number of training hours, as well as successful completion of an exam (such as the National Certification Exam) to demonstrate competency, and continuing education, in order for a therapist to practice. To learn about the State of California's requirements, please visit www.CAMTC.org.

The International Professional School of Bodywork is recognized for its:

- Institutional accreditation by the Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA)
- Approval to offer Federal Financial Aid to those who qualify
- Approval to train Veterans
- Approval to participate in the Workforce Investment Act
- Authorization to enroll International Students
- Approval by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB)

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