

Blended Learning in Entry-Level Massage Education

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### About the Author

Jeffrey Montoya has been a Licensed Massage Therapist in the State of Wisconsin since 2010 and is Board Certified (NCBTMB). He has five years teaching experience in entry-level massage education. Jeffrey is an Approved Continuing Education Provider through the National Certification Board of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork. He is currently a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Health Professions Education program at Logan University. He is also the President of The American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) – Wisconsin Chapter and on the AMTA Chapter Relations Standing Committee. In 2019, he was honored with the AMTA (National) Jerome Perlinski Teacher of the Year Award. He recently founded The Academy of Health, Inc. a not-for-profit -501(c)3 corporation in the State of Wisconsin with the goal of offering innovative entry-level and continuing education to advance the profession of massage therapy and bodywork.

### Blended Learning in Entry-Level Massage Education

Blended learning is the use of in-person (traditional) delivery of education together with online delivery of education in a course or a program of study. Blended learning has been shown to be as effective as traditional delivery of education in a variety of disciplines including health professions. Legal analysis of the Wisconsin massage statutes indicate that there is nothing in the statutes which prohibit the online delivery of entry-level massage education with approval of the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) and the Massage Therapy and Bodywork Therapy Affiliated Credentialing Board.

### The Blended Learning Model

Some research suggests the optimal model for entry-level massage education (in terms of student satisfaction and achievement) is one in which online learning components are blended with face-to-face teaching (McQuillan, 2010, p. 9). This is consistent with the findings in other health professions education. For example, McCutcheon, Lohan, Traynor and Martin (2015) concluded that online learning was no less effective than traditional means for teaching clinical skills to nursing students. Similarly, Higgins, Kirkland, Le-Jenkins and Rutledge (2019) found final scores of students who received online delivery of physical assessment skills in nursing education were equivalent to the scores of students who received traditional face-to-face delivery of instruction. Pei and Wu (2019) conducted a meta-analysis on online undergraduate medical education. They found no evidence that traditional delivery worked better than online delivery. On the contrary their findings suggested an advantage of online learning to enhance the undergraduate students' knowledge and skills. This is not a new finding. A 2010 meta-analysis published by the U.S. Department of Education found that, on average, students in online learning conditions performed modestly better than those receiving only traditional face-to-face

instruction. These findings revealed that students in online and blended programs often benefited from additional learning time and instructional elements.

According to the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) Profession Research Report (2020), 14% of schools offer online courses for their entry level program; No schools are solely using online learning in their entry level programs. The massage field is growing; but the number of persons entering the massage field is not keeping up with the growth. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) estimates that the field will grow 22% between 2018 and 2028. However, according to AMTA, (2019), “between 2016 and 2017, the number of estimated massage therapists grew by only 1%” (p. 25). Research in other fields has indicated, “online options may open opportunities for populations who would not otherwise pursue education” (Goodman, Melkers, & Pallais, 2019).

Anecdotal evidence and conventional wisdom suggest the psychomotor (hands-on) skills needed to learn massage therapy are best taught in the traditional (in-person) classroom environment. However, cognitive-based subjects such as anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, ethics, business, pathology, documentation, treatment planning, hygiene, or theory can be effectively taught online. A blended model of delivery of education would allow a program to leverage the best of both worlds of traditional (in-person) and online learning to maximize positive outcomes.

#### Wisconsin Statutes

Wisconsin Statute 460.04 (2)(b) requires a training program to consist of at least 600 classroom hours. “Classroom hour” is defined by MTBT 1.02 (5) as “a period of instruction consisting of not less than 50 minutes.” This does not specify that the classroom instruction must be in-person and cannot be online.

The Administrative Code does give instances in which “direct on-premises supervision” is required. For instance, MTBT 1.02 (18)(a) requires “direct on-premises supervision of a massage therapy intern or body work intern or more intensive supervision if required to avoid unacceptable risk of harm to the client.” Chapter MTBT 3 outlines the requirements for an applicant who does not graduate from a DSPS approved school to include “600 classroom hours of study” (3.01(5)) which shall include “100 classroom hours of supervised hands-on practice” (3.01(5)(f)).

At the March 17, 2020 Massage Therapy and Bodywork Therapy Affiliated Credentialing Board Meeting Jameson Whitney, legal counsel for DSPS, stated that the current Wisconsin Statutes and Administrative Rules, particularly, Chapter MTBT 3, do not forbid online delivery of education. Analysis by Andrea Brauer, Staff Attorney, Wisconsin Legislative Council concluded, “State law does not specify whether the education for massage and bodywork therapy licensure has to be in person or can be online. Instead, that is left up to the discretion of DSPS and the Massage Therapy and Bodywork Therapy Affiliated Credentialing Board” (Brauer, A, email communication. April 9, 2020-Appendix A).

#### Conclusion

A blended learning model for delivery of entry-level massage therapy education can be as effective as a traditional (in-person) only model. Wisconsin Statutes give authority to the Massage Therapy and Bodywork Therapy Affiliated Credentialing Board to allow a Wisconsin massage school to incorporate online learning into an approved training program. **I respectfully request that the Massage Therapy and Bodywork Therapy Affiliated Credentialing Board allow online delivery of entry-level education for curriculum content in non-psychomotor subjects.**

## References

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## Appendix A

**From:** Brauer, Andrea  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 09, 2020 1:38 PM  
**To:** Gibbs, Sarah <[Sarah.Gibbs@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sarah.Gibbs@legis.wisconsin.gov)>  
**Subject:** FW: Legislative Council Question

Steve asked me to respond to your question. State law does not specify whether the education for massage and bodywork therapy licensure has to be in person or can be online. Instead, that is left up to the discretion of DSPS and the Massage Therapy and Bodywork Therapy Affiliated Credentialing Board. The statutes and rules provide that applicants must have either graduated from a school of massage therapy or bodywork therapy approved by DSPS or have completed a training program approved under the affiliated credentialing board's rules. In addition, an applicant must complete at least 6 classroom hours on Wisconsin laws relating to the practice of massage therapy or bodywork therapy in a course of instruction approved by the affiliated credentialing board (and the law doesn't specify whether those classroom hours have to be in person). [s. 460.05 (1) (e), Stats.; ch. MTBT 3, Wis. Adm. Code.]

DSPS has issued [this](#) memo explaining recent changes that allow applicants more flexibility to take courses online through May 31, 2020. It's not clear from DSPS's website exactly how that applies to massage therapy. I don't see anything that would legally prohibit DSPS or the affiliated credentialing board from approving online courses but am not sure if they have done so. I will reach out to them for more information and be in touch.

Let me know if you need anything else in the meantime.

**Andrea Brauer**

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