

Sharing Solutions

ABMP's 13th Annual School Issues Forum

Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (ABMP) hosted the thirteenth annual School Issues Forum March 25–27, 2009, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at La Posada de Santa Fe Resort & Spa. The event included school owners, directors, and key members of the massage and bodywork community. Attendees enjoyed an opportunity to network, educate, inspire, and talk shop with peers about school issues. Fifty participants from across the country—representing more than 130 schools—discussed issues impacting massage and bodywork schools and enjoyed Santa Fe's Southwestern culture.

There's Always Room for Good Schools

In the opening session, "There will Always be Room for a Good School," ABMP President Les Sweeney and ABMP Chairman Bob Benson presented ABMP's freshest survey data and provided a perspective on what the future may hold for massage education (see page 3 for additional details). "The massage education environment has experienced dramatic changes over the past several years, changes that have been



amplified by the greatest economic downturn this country has seen in at least two generations. An increased competitive environment, reduced funding availability, and changing consumer demand for massage and bodywork services have made running a successful, profitable school more challenging than ever," Sweeney said.

Benson agreed and added, "While the survey results demonstrate a significant market adjustment, there will always be room for a good school, especially those that offer →



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Participants of the Thirteenth Annual School Issues Forum, Santa Fe, New Mexico

quality programs, excellence in teaching, supportive student services, differentiated marketing, and readily available financial resources for students.”

Key Areas of Profitability

To address the economic downturn and the challenges facing massage schools, ABMP’s education staff crafted forum sessions around key areas that impact a school’s profitability. These included recruitment, admissions, accreditation, financial aid, student retention, graduate placement, alumni services, and how teacher standards impact instructors and schools.

In one session, Lisa Seguin from ATI Career Training Center in North Richland Hills, Texas, facilitated small-group breakout sessions to generate ideas for cost-effective methods for recruiting new students. Groups completed planning forms for projects, including the use of social networking sites like Facebook to interact with prospective students, high school outreach and student referral programs, effective branding, community programs, campus events, and job fairs.

Gina Simpson from the Colorado School of Healing Arts shared her knowledge of accreditation and of the school’s recent experience of receiving recognition from the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCCT) as a School of Excellence. Simpson served as the moderator on a panel presenting each of the seven national accreditation agencies, their benchmarks, and the process of accreditation. She also talked about how today’s economy is shaping the financial aid environment and impacting students’ ability to get tuition funding.

Student retention was a popular topic, too. Su Bibik of the Kalamazoo Center for the Healing Arts in Kalamazoo,

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Michigan, facilitated the “Education Strategies to Reduce Attrition” sessions. Bibik used the work of Dr. Watson Scott Swail, author of “The Art of Student Retention,” an educational policy document developed for the Educational Policy Institute (www.educationalpolicy.org), to explain factors that influence student persistence and achievement.

A distinctive addition to this year’s School Issues Forum was the inclusion of exhibitors in a special panel titled “Supplier Insights” hosted by ABMP Chairman Bob Benson. Benson acknowledged that the exhibitors who represent their businesses at the forum bring more than great samples and tools for schools. They freely provide valuable insights into the massage profession from their unique vantage points. John Goucher from Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Jeff Riach from Oakworks, and Bob Poirier from Performance Health/Biofreeze described how relationships between massage schools and suppliers are changing and how some of the innovations may impact goods, services, distribution, and sales. ❖

Join us in 2010

The next ABMP School Issues Forum will be held April 22–24, 2010, in Alexandria, Virginia. For more information about attending or exhibiting, please contact Kathy Laskye (kathy@abmp.com). Handouts and PowerPoint slides from the 2009 forum sessions are available at www.abmp.com in the Resources for Schools and Instructors section.

Massage School Enrollment Trends

Survey Shows Slowed Growth

At the 2009 School Issues Forum, Les Sweeney, ABMP president, and Bob Benson, ABMP chairman, presented the latest survey data on massage school enrollment trends. The data shows that massage school student enrollment and graduations continued their decline from 2006 to 2008, even as the number of training programs for massage therapists continued to grow.

Collection of Data

To gather the survey data, state-approved massage therapy training programs were e-mailed a brief questionnaire in early 2009. Schools were asked to supply information about how many students were enrolled at the time of this survey; whether that number reflected an increase or a decrease over enrollment data from the school one year earlier; and the number of graduates in 2008. Non-respondents received no fewer than three follow-up phone calls.

Contacts were attempted for a total of 1,693 schools; of those, 1,568 are currently in operation. This survey methodology, which has been used by ABMP to gather enrollment trend survey data since 1998, yielded responses from 1,387 schools—81.9 percent of the 1,693 schools in our database.

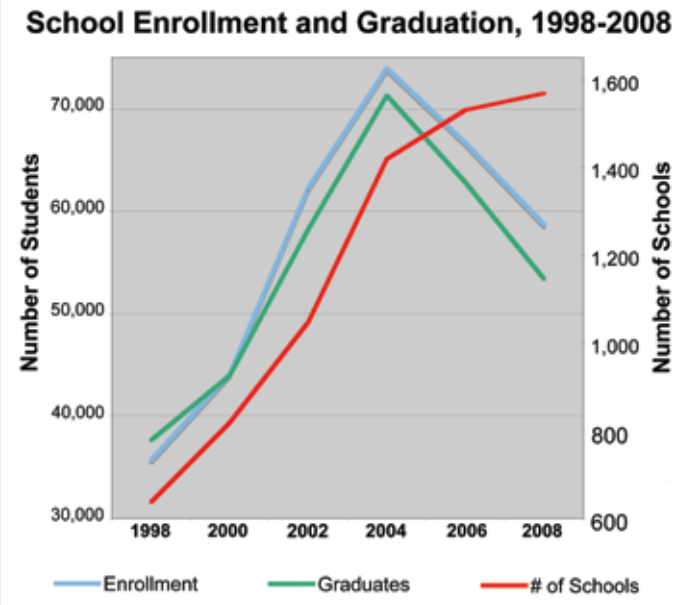
Results and Trends

In 2004, there were 1,419 massage schools graduating approximately 71,272 professionals, with an average of 50 graduates per school. In 2008, there were 1,568 massage schools graduating approximately 53,372 professionals, with an average of 34 graduates per school. This represents a decrease of approximately 25 percent in the total number of graduates from massage school programs from 2004 to 2008; during this same period, the average number of graduates per school dropped by approximately 32 percent.

“ABMP considers these results a continuing market correction that began after the peak in school activity in 2004,” Sweeney said. While the number of massage therapy schools grew over the last two years, the pace has slowed. From 2004 to 2006, the number of state-approved schools increased by 7.8 percent; that contracted to just a 2.5 percent increase from 2006 to 2008.

“We think the growth of massage programs has likely reached its end; in fact, the 2010 report could likely show a decrease in the number of schools,” Sweeney said. “The current economic crisis could accelerate that trend. The landscape has become more competitive. Those with quality instruction, passion for the field, and effective student recruitment and support are more likely to thrive.”

In 2009, proprietary schools compose 58 percent of the massage and bodywork school universe; career schools comprise 28 percent, and community colleges comprise 13



percent. Of these schools, 58 percent are Title IV eligible and recognized by the United States Department of Education. A comparison of the number of enrolled students to financial aid availability shows that 67 percent of enrolled students attend federal financial aid-eligible programs.

Consumer Use of Massage

It is also interesting to note consumer use of massage therapy trends, as collected by Harstad Strategic Research Incorporated in a study commissioned by ABMP. Harstad found that the use of massage therapy has dipped slightly from 2006 to 2008; 16 percent of those surveyed visited a massage therapist in 2006 compared to 14 percent in 2008. More concerning for massage is the number of visits individuals made to therapists decreased substantially from 2006 to 2008. In 2006, 31 percent reported that they visited a massage therapist five times or more during the year. In 2008, the number of those receiving five or more massages was down to 18 percent.

Looking Forward

So what might the massage education universe look like in 2012? Sweeney believes that the massage school universe could continue to adjust, to around 1,200–1,400 schools graduating approximately 40,000–50,000 professionals a year. ❖

For additional details from ABMP surveys, visit the Resources for Massage Schools and Instructors section of www.abmp.com.

INSTRUCTORS ON THE FRONT LINES

Regional Workshops Support Classroom Management



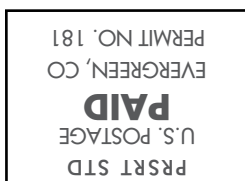
"If you are seeking effective ideas to enhance student performance and improve retention, don't miss this course."

—Connecticut Participant



ABMP invites you to attend Instructors on the Front Lines, a complimentary regional massage instructor workshop designed to support classroom management and student success. Instructors will learn practical solutions to building preparedness, responsibility, initiative, interest in learning, communication skills, and academic success in their student population. They also have the opportunity to network with other administrators and instructors to share ideas in a supportive environment.

For upcoming workshop dates and locations or to find out more, contact ABMP School & Instructor Liaison Taffie Lewis (800-458-2267, ext. 629, or taffie@abmp.com) or visit ABMP.com. 📍



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