



National Institute
of Whole Health

*Guidebook for Choosing
a Training or Educational Program
in Integrative Health*



Guidebook for Choosing the Best Integrative Health Career Program for You

The 21st century has begun with many positive and exciting changes. One of those changes is the popularity and widespread utilization of what is collectively referred to as Integrative Health* (IH) practices, modalities and treatments. Today one out of every two Americans use or have used IH and the numbers promise to keep climbing.

For those of us who have “labored in the field” for the past 30 years, moving this shift forward, it is very rewarding to see this happening. However, with this success come the requisite problems and cautions that accompany any burgeoning field of study or practice.

Over the past 30 years our program has spoken with, and facilitated the education of, tens of thousands of individuals entering the field of IH. Many people contact us for information not only about our program offerings, but also for information that could help them navigate the maze of this now popular health field. At this time, the field of IH education lacks centrally regulated guidelines or oversight of the many education and training programs currently being offered around the country.

Prospective students have asked us to produce a guidebook, and offer it free on-line. Those who have received this information have been very grateful for the guidance they have received from the guidebook. This information has helped them understand more about the IH field, how they could find the right school or training, and just what to look for before committing themselves to a course of study.

We hope that by sharing our experience in the IH education field, it will result in a win-win-win situation – for you, as a consumer of IH training or education – for the program or school you attend, which will enroll a well informed and committed student – and for the IH industry as a whole, which will be populated by dedicated, well trained professionals who offer new health care options and choices to millions of people across the country!

* As it is the most commonly used and referred to description, we use the term Integrative Health in this guidebook to refer to all offerings that are not exclusively medically based – Natural Health, Alternative Health, Integrative Health, Complementary Health Care, Holistic Health and Whole Health.

“The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly”

It's easy to get excited, enthusiastic and even euphoric about finding a career training or career enhancement program that sounds exactly like what you've been searching for! It is kind of like falling in love or starting a new relationship...after that first flush of excitement settles down, you sometimes realize there were things you missed, questions you didn't ask before becoming emotionally involved with someone who is, in reality, a relative stranger. Buying or committing to an educational relationship is very much the same. It is important to know who you are about to become involved with and who you will be entrusting your financial resources to.

So, before committing your time, energy, expectations and financial resources, it is always a good idea to take a step back and check out some basic information about the program or training you are considering. What your eyes or ears might initially “fall in love with”, after careful consideration, may prove NOT to be the best choice you first thought it was.

A helpful starting point is to begin by separating marketing hype and hoopla from the substantive and realistic facts about the program or the particular field of study itself.

“The IH field is a consumer’s nightmare. On one hand, it is not centrally regulated, which can allow for health career training without pre-requisite educational requirements. And on the other hand, there are no oversight organizations responsible for ‘minding the store’. You’re on your own when it comes to sorting out which programs are credible and which are not.”

The advent of the Web has been a double-edged sword in the pursuit of information. While it can bring the world to your doorstep, it can also deliver a lot of information that is confusing or unreliable as you attempt to discern which of the many offerings will provide you with the credentials and skills you need to be successful in the IH field.

There are many well marketed programs being offered, packaged to attract students who are looking to change careers or follow their desire to work in a health related field. But – just like with making any significant decision, you need to have a process for discernment and decision making based on more than just a program’s “curb appeal”.

“As with all consumer protection advice, when it comes to career training or health education programs, the well-worn adage - Buyer Beware! certainly applies.”

Most programs being offered in IH are credible, valuable trainings, while others – which can sound very appealing at first glance, may not be.

These types of programs may promise you unrealistic outcomes or earnings or not require prior education or work experience in the field of study they are offering. Some programs do not even require a high school diploma – and do not test or qualify their students before granting them a certificate from their program. When being trained to give health related advice, guidance or treatment, it is important to have an education or training that meets standard requirements and that will provide you the skills, information and credentials you need to be successful.

You may also want to clarify what the terms “Integrative Health Practitioner”, “Natural Health Practitioner”, “Holistic Health Counselor” or “Holistic Nutrition Counselor” means regarding the particular program you are attending. There are many schools around the country offering programs with such certification titles, and each of these programs offers varied trainings for such certification.

ALSO and very importantly: Choosing to enter the IH field requires that you understand this is more than just a career – this is also a ***calling and a vocation***. The IH field is about Mind, Body and Spirit awareness, and it will ask this of YOU as well as your clients!

“Providing” any form of health care, guidance or treatment comes with legal, ethical and even moral responsibilities. It is important for you to feel confident and secure in the quality of your education and training, so that you can provide the very best information or care to your clients.

Taking the Plunge

When you have clearly made the decision to move ahead and commit yourself to the IH field, you need to have a plan to identify the program or training that is best for you. One of the key approaches in starting your search is to flesh out what **specifically** you want to focus your training on. The more specific your interest, the easier it will be to find the right program to fit your needs and goals.

For instance, if you are looking to train as a homeopath, do you want a program in traditional, constitutional or general homeopathic care? You also want to discern what kind of education or training will best suit your lifestyle, time commitments, family obligations, current budget or job schedule. Do you want only a college degree program, a focused certification program, or a skills training? Do you want strictly in-person classes, or a distance learning program that is flexible and allows you to work at your own pace? Or, maybe you would prefer a program that offers a combination of these ways of learning?

The more specific you are about what you want to do with your training after you complete the programs, or why you want to re-train, the clearer you will be about which program will suit your needs and goals. If you are a nurse who wants to enter the IH field to enhance your clinical patient-care or to start your own IH practice, which program will give you the foundation you need for (1) clinical practice or (2) private IH practice? Are you a Yoga teacher who is interested in offering aromatherapy to your clients to enhance their yoga experience? If you know exactly what you are looking for, it is easier to find!

“Raise the bar – ask the tough questions!”

If you have NO previous health or medical training or education you **MUST** ask yourself a few practical and potentially sobering questions –

Is it realistic for me, without any previous education or training in a health related field, to take a part-time, three month, six month, or nine month program and be able to make a living and provide care for people?

Is it realistic to think that I will be sufficiently or properly trained to guide, advise, or treat people seeking IH care?

Is it realistic to expect that I could look in a newspaper, go to a clinic or health facility or a private practice, and get a job with my training?

“Use common sense criteria!”

In order to assist you in the process of exploring and choosing the right program, outlined below are 4 basic criteria questions for evaluating the quality of the many programs you will find offered around the country. They may be distance learning, in-person classes, correspondence, on-line or a combination of these options. You may be looking for a degree, certification or continuing education. With any of these options you will need to have a check list to help with your search.

Our practical and common sense approach invites you to ask and answer a series of pertinent questions relating to the school, program, organization, course work or training you are considering **BEFORE** you commit yourself.

“Be aware!”

We strongly urge all potential IH education consumers to be aware that many states do not require educational programs, other than degree-granting schools, to be licensed by their state Department of Education or regulated by an oversight organization. In many states IH training schools are classified as businesses. As with other businesses offering a product or service, the Consumer Protection Division of the state Attorney General’s office cautions the consumer “buyer beware”.

By the same token, many degree granting schools also offer programs without being licensed. However, there are integrative, distance-learning colleges whose degrees ARE licensed, properly accredited and well thought of. It is worth the effort to search them out! An unlicensed school or program, which is not approved by a national oversight organization, can mean that the school or program may not be meeting the educational standards in their training programs. It can also mean:

- (1) You may not be able to receive a refund if you withdraw.**
- (2) You can lose your money should they close or fail.**
- (3) The training you have received may have little value in the job market or in working in the IH field.**

“Measure twice, cut once”

The following questions identify important areas to examine or investigate when you consider purchasing a training or educational program for a career in IH. The advice to measure twice before you cut into a material applies to your search. Before you plunk down your money...measure twice (or maybe three times)!

- 1. Are they licensed by their state Department of Education? Or are they accredited by a national organization recognized as an expert in the field of study they offer? Is their license or accreditation on display or available for your review?**

Unlike degree granting institutions, career training programs **are not required to have accreditation**, but may be required to be licensed by the Department of Education in the state in which they reside. If they are not licensed by the Department of Education, are they approved or endorsed by a nationally recognized organization that is a regulating or overseeing body for that particular specialty?

A certification program or “degree program” can deflect from the fact that they are not licensed or well credentialed by purchasing an “accreditation” from a fee-for-membership organization. These organizations have no credibility other than the assumed credibility they attempt to imply. Organizations that would offer such a “credential” should be looked at carefully. The danger to you is that these “pseudo-credentialed” programs are not accountable to an oversight organization – which can be a real problem that can, on many levels, “come back to bite you”.

Take the time to check out the credentials (licensure, accreditation, endorsements) of any program or school you are considering. You can easily “Google” any subject or organization to get the answers to your questions and it is absolutely worth the effort!

ALSO: Unless a school or program’s core faculty have been approved or licensed to teach their specific course, by the state Department of Education or a nationally recognized organization, you have no confirmation that they have authentic credentials or experience in that field of study or practice. Unless an oversight organization or Department of Education can guarantee that the teacher has been evaluated, there is no way for you to know if the information you are being given meets the standards for that discipline or practice.

Most importantly – **DO NOT CONFUSE** “guest speakers” with the instructors or teachers who will present the substance of your education. Many schools or organizations have “guest” speakers or presenters, but they are generally not the faculty members who teach the substance of the curriculum who should be certified to teach the subject.

ALSO: An organization is only as credible as the individuals who guide and govern it. Does the organization identify the advisory board, the board of directors, or the administrators of their organization – including the experience, education and training of those individuals?

This is another wonderful use of the “Google” option. Search the names of the primary instructors, board of advisors or directors and check out the education and experience of the people leading the organization.

“Credibility counts”

2. Is the curriculum they are advertising credible?

To ensure that you are purchasing credible training or education that has met basic requirements for your field of study, ask if the curriculums being offered have been reviewed and approved by a Department of Education or by a national organization that specializes in an area of training which recognizes the education as legitimate. For example: the National Endurance Sports Trainers Association (NESTA), the American Nurses Association (AHNA), or the National Association of Social Workers.

Licensed or credentialed training or educational programs must have their advertising claims approved by an oversight organization, such as the state Department of Education, or an organization they are affiliated with or have purchased a franchise from. This prevents fraudulent, misleading or exaggerated claims about training, job placement or earning potential.

Remember: If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is! Ask yourself: “Would I seek and purchase advice, health care, or treatment from an individual whose training or education is limited to the program I am considering?”

ALSO: Below is an ACTUAL ad from the Web, and it is a wonderful example of the type of advertising you want to be skeptical of. Read this and ask yourself – Does this seem at all reasonable or believable? Sometimes good marketing can appeal to our ego: our desire to do something important or to do something we think is exciting or even glamorous. However, if you stop and think about what you are hearing and reading, and not just react to it emotionally, you can sort out the hype from the truth!

“Discover how you can earn up to \$85 an hour as a **Professional Yoga Instructor... and be certified in **90 days (or LESS!) - from HOME!**”**

ALSO: Credible schools or training programs are bonded or demonstrate appropriate fiscal soundness. You may wish to ask if the school or program you are interested in is bonded – to guarantee the safety and security of their students’ tuition payments in the event of a shortfall or bankruptcy.

You may wish to contact the state Auditor’s Office to see if there is a filing of the financial statement of the school you are considering. Such information is available through the Freedom of Information Act, and is there for your protection. You can also check to see if there have been any complaints to the state Attorney General’s office about that program and don’t forget to check with the Better Business Bureau. If they are a member of the BBB, all-the-better! Remember the “measure twice, cut once” rule!

3. Is the organization approved for Sallie Mae or other government career training student financing?

If the program you are looking into cannot offer career training loans to finance your education or training, you may want to re-think investing your money with a school or program that is not approved in this very important way. If your only option is to pay out of pocket, and there is no oversight organization regulating the financial relationship you have with this organization, you could discover you have little or no recourse if you want a refund.

ALSO: What is the organization’s refund policy? A critical requirement for all legitimate educational or training organizations is – what are the specifics of their refund policy? And is it clearly stated on their printed materials, registration forms, and/or website? Unless you have a guaranteed statement of their refund policy, and have been given either a contract or written guarantee that you could use to facilitate the return of your funds, you could find you have no recourse in getting your tuition payments refunded should you leave the program.

4. What organizations or agencies have endorsed or have a professional relationship with the program you are considering? What is the validity of their stated accreditation?

What other health care institutions endorse or have a professional relationship with the program you are considering? Does the massage program you are considering have a clinical relationship with a nearby community hospital or health care facility?

Ask a professional in the field you are considering about the reputation of the endorsing organizations or better yet, learn how to cross search the Web and get as many facts as you can about the program’s credentials.

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER: There are several ways for a program or school to be credentialed in the IH education field. The first is by being licensed by a state Department of Education. The second is being accredited or endorsed by a nationally recognized organization, acknowledged as a leader in the field, which serves as an oversight entity for a particular specialty. The third is by a privately held business or organization that simply holds itself out to be an “accrediting agent” and sells certificates of accreditation to those who pay their fee.

Some other things to consider:

1. What is the reputation of the program within the health field? You should look for more than just testimonials from their stated students or graduates. What do other health-related organizations say about their training? Look for statements from experts, other organizations, hospitals, clinics, etc.
2. Are there opportunities for internships or externships in the specialty training after you complete the course work of the program?
3. Is there eligibility for malpractice insurance with a nationally accredited or recognized insurance organization?
4. Are they working directly **in** or **with** a health care facility, such as a clinic, hospital, or licensed professional practice ?
5. If they are a distance learning program, are you paying for a correspondence course which provides you with only books and a curriculum binder? Or does it include faculty and/or mentor communication and interaction via e-mail, phone or Internet conferencing? Is hands-on training available, such as attending an on-site residency or in-person training? Do they have only a Post Office Box mailing address or is there a REAL “bricks and mortar” school behind the program?
6. If a degree is being purchased, who has licensed the degree? Who has accredited the degree? What states recognize the degree? And what is the value of the degree in the mainstream job market?
7. Are there hidden fees beyond the tuition payment for the program? (Examples: diploma, graduation fee, lab fee, books, supplies, etc.)
8. What percent of their graduates use their training in the job market, or apply the training directly to their employment? What is the value of their certificate or certification in a mainstream job market?

We hope this information will assist you in finding the training or program that is right for you! We want you to be successful, and just as importantly, find joy and fulfillment working in the IH field. We wish you the best on your journey and would like to leave you with these thoughts that were shared with us:

Love Your Work

You always have a choice, but you forget that you have it.

Do you remember the energy and enthusiasm you had on the first day of your first job? You consciously chose to do the work you had gladly accepted to do. But then you gradually fell asleep to the choice you made, and the day became “I have to” go to work, instead of “I want to” go to work.

You forgot to see all the opportunities which come with work – opportunities like learning, nourishing and being nourished by others, developing new relationships, expanding your personal capacity. Instead, you decided it was just something you had to do to “get the money.”

This is why most people are sleep-walking through their lives, and they don’t know it.

The solution is to choose your work every day, put the energy of love into your relationships every day, even if you don’t particularly like your job or the people around you. And you’ll be amazed at how your life transforms.

When you choose to put love into what you do, the universe will move heaven and earth to let you do what you love.

Reclaim your passion – enjoy your life, enjoy your work!

Peace and blessings to you,
The National Institute of Whole Health