

Institutional Plan – Wisconsin School of Massage Therapy

March, 2024

Mission

The instructors at the Wisconsin School of Massage Therapy are committed to helping each student learn basic sciences and hands-on techniques necessary for becoming an excellent massage therapist who meets the needs of individual clients. WSMT also provides interesting and challenging continuing education hours for massage therapists to increase their knowledge and skills.

Market

WSMT is a small professional massage training school designed to help individuals attain the skills and knowledge they need to become professional massage therapists. Our customers/students range in age from 18-60 with many being over 30. We typically attract serious students with at least good educational backgrounds who possess a strong desire to do this work because they think they will find it meaningful. Many of them are employed full-time and they attend school in their off-hours. Therefore, until recently, our night class has always had higher enrollment than our day class. Our fall, 2010 day class was the largest enrollment we have ever had reaching our maximum of 12 students. 2017 update: Enrollment in massage school programs has sharply declined in the last year. This trend has happened throughout the country as reported by massage table manufacturers and bloggers in the industry in other parts of the country. Several schools in the southeastern Wisconsin region have closed or ended their massage training programs (Anthem, Herzing). Several schools have sold to new owners and have been greatly reduced (Milwaukee School of Massage and Blue Sky). We have been running fewer classes with fewer participants. Continuing education has become a very important income stream for us. The state of Wisconsin's new continuing education hours requirement for license renewal has helped boost our numbers in continuing education classes and we are becoming known for quality classes. 2020 update: Enrollments have improved but the trend now is to sign up at the last minute so we find we have to be extremely flexible. We require 3 people to start a class and we are often cultivating a tolerance for flexible start dates in those who have already signed up so we don't lose them while waiting for enough enrollees to start a class. Night class has become almost impossible to start due to low enrollment. 2021 update: The Coronavirus situation has created a lot more interest in massage school but candidates are primarily asking for in-person day classes. The vast majority of our students do not want online education for their massage training. 2022 update: We continue to attract a consistent student group who are seeking a quality program with a great track record. Our students tell us they chose WSMT for the following reasons (listed in order of importance):

- Our location is convenient for them or our schedules meet their needs.
- They like the small school environment.
- One of our graduates or someone else who is familiar with us has recommended us to them.
- We provide in-person classes only.

Often, however, it is a combination of factors which brings our students to us including the main reasons listed above, but also tuition, and free personal tour/interview.

WSMT began with advertising efforts in several print media outlets in the Milwaukee area. These various ads never produced much response considering their expense. As society has become more digitized we have noticed virtually all our potential student contacts come from 2 sources: our website, or a personal reference. Our website by far is the most important contact for us and it is also the most cost-effective. We work to grow our website to keep it up-to-date, dynamic, and attractive. It continues to become a larger target for search engines, appearing higher and higher up in their lists. It makes sense for us to spend energy on our website development because of its importance in potential student contact as well as to keep our graduates in our community as they are a great source of positive information about us in their communities. We regularly receive compliments from potential students about our website. They say it is easy to navigate and they found everything they were seeking when they used it. This is confirmation that we are on the right track with the website.

As additional opportunities to let people know about WSMT we also:

- Use signage on school property to attract attention for potential students and for the massage services available at the school.
- Provide chair massage services at the Washington County Humane Society's annual rummage sale.
- Provide imprinted clothing, and bags to students and staff.
- Donate massage gift certificates to various charitable events when asked and a Christmas tree to the Festival of Trees held at the Washington County Humane Society.
- Provide Introduction to Massage Therapy classes for potential students to learn about the field and to give massage work a try. We advertise these classes on our website and many potential students attend these classes. Potential students get a good overview of the profession as well as a chance to actually try their hand at massage with coaching. These classes give students a lot of confidence in WSMT because they have had a little time to work with us and get to know how we interact with students.

Our competitors are the other massage schools in the area and also the other trade schools which offer areas of study which give a similar amount of human interaction i.e. hair/nails, nursing/chiropractic/PT assisting. We differ from the others by offering small class sizes, a variety of schedules, a free personal tour/interview, and a tightly-designed curriculum that is responsive to learner and profession needs. We also focus only on massage therapy and many students appreciate our deep background in just this one field.

Management

The management consists of the Owners Jay and Manda Johnson (Director), but also the Assistant Director, Main Instructors, and the Educational Consultant (former owner). The owners will continue to work on larger business issues as well as problem solving as issues arise with students and staff. The Director also will continue to work with the Assistant Director, Main Instructors and the Educational Consultant on some business issues and many program and individual student issues. These interactions will keep the

organization working on a level of big ideas while at the same time responding to smaller, immediate needs of the program and the current group of students.

SWOT

Strengths

- In-person education
- Strong, stable staff
- Small class sizes, attractive atmosphere to students
- Excellent, concise curriculum, kept up-to-date
- Ability to be flexible to students' educational and financial needs
- Fiscal responsibility – keep expenses and income balanced and controlled
- Stable over time
- Newer, attractive and well-functioning facility
- We have been in business 22 years now with nearly 300 students graduating!

Weaknesses

- Not accredited, therefore, students cannot access Federal funding resources.

Opportunities

- Students finding us online
- Strong demand for continuing education
- Strong demand for our graduates
- Strong demand for student clinic massage
- Veterans continuing to find us
- Multiple income streams: Instructors providing massage at the school, product sales, continuing education classes.

Threats

- Costs escalating

Progress on 2023 Goals

- Make curriculum changes as needed to stay current with professional research and trends.

This goal is continual and on-going as we find new teaching methods, materials, and research to inform our work.

- Start at least 3 classes this year.

This goal was met.

- Continue planning a continuing education class, “Massage for Cancer Patients.”

This goal was put on hold as the Director had to attend to a sick family member.

2024 Goals

- Transition to new ownership for the school including training the new Director by working closely with the Educational Consultant (past owner).
- Start at least 3 classes this year.
- Make curriculum changes as needed to stay current with professional research and trends.

The Future

Five years from now WSMT will ideally be a very stable presence in the Milwaukee professional massage training scene. The positive word-of-mouth generated by our graduates and our engaging website will be strong forces in bringing us new students. We will expand in our new location to adequately meet our needs. Employers will pay attention when a WSMT graduate applies for a job with them because they know of the high-quality education the candidate received with us. Graduates will look to us to help them meet their continuing education requirements because we will be providing a wealth of valuable opportunities which will increase their skills and value to their clients. We will have a national presence as our WSMT Seminars will have presented continuing education in several other states. Overall, the school will be a very positive force in the profession and the community.

(1/2013 progress update: We have gotten specific positive feedback from employers, two of whom are now quoted on our website. We continue holding continuing education weekends in which more and more of our graduates and others participate).

(1/2014 progress update: We are definitely a stable presence in the Milwaukee Massage milieu in that students regularly turn to us as a reliable place to attend due to knowing someone who graduated from WSMT or by exploring very thoroughly our website. Employers continue to tell us how well trained our grads are. We now have more employer quotes on the website as well as links to graduates' own websites.)

(1/2015 progress update: More students are finding us through graduates and clients who have had good experiences with the school. Our website continues to also draw about ½ of the students we attract.)

(1/2016 progress update: Enrollments have dropped in the last year and we are working to increase our classes. We have managed our finances successfully to weather this inevitable downturn in the industry.)

(1/2017 progress update: The industry downturn has continued and we are trying to be the last school standing by flexibly finding additional income streams.)

(1/2018 progress update: The downturn continues and we have become as efficient as possible to meet our financial obligations and continue to excel. We continue to get pleading offers from employers to send our highly-qualified graduates to them so we know we are on the right track.)

(1/2019 progress update: Several competitors have closed or reorganized and the market is beginning to improve. We were able to get 3 new classes off the ground in fall, 2018, and our January, 2019 Day class started with 5 students even though our minimum is 3. Already there is interest in our May Accelerated class which is a great sign that we may get the 2 classes going here in spring, 2019. Last year we did not have enough interest to start the January Day class so things are looking better with enrollments.)

(1/2020 progress update: The 3 classes begun in 2019 were all larger than our minimum of 3. We are seeing interest from employers in developing relationships where they pay part/whole tuition to help alleviate the shortage of MTs in the workforce. This could be a very big positive development for the school.)

(1/2021 progress update: The Coronavirus presented many challenges which we have faced and come out on top. We have installed Hepa/UV air purifiers in every room at the school and we have hired an Infectious Disease Specialist MD as our advisor on reopening and operating safely. We have not had any virus contagion connected to the school. We have had strong interest in our 2021 classes.)

(1/2022 progress update: We have retained our Infectious Disease Specialist MD to help us navigate individual Covid cases. We have had individuals become ill and/or exposed and quarantined and we have had 2 individual class quarantine periods of 5 to 14 days. For the most part, however, we are carrying on successfully getting classes through the program and everyone has learned to adapt. There is strong interest in our proposed March night class with 2 already enrolled. We have not gotten a night class off the ground for a few years so this may be a good sign that growth is returning.)

(1/2023 progress update: We have started 3 larger classes this year and our next class already is at 6 so 2023 is off to a good start as well. We have a stable, content staff and we have become a well-respected school in the area with regular referrals from MTs who know of us.)

(3/2024 progress update: We are poised to start the first new class of the year in April. Interest has been strong and we have students enrolling for this class. We have been getting a lot of interest in our fall classes already as well. As new owners we look forward to utilizing more advertising opportunities to strengthen the position of the school by attracting more students.)