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national yoga survey

Statistics about yoga in Australia are hard to find at the best of times: consequently misconceptions are commonplace in much of the media. It is anticipated that a web-based survey being conducted in Australia by RMIT University over the next few months will overcome this. AYL asks Stephen Penman collator of the statistics some relevant questions.

AYL: Who is behind the survey?

Stephen: The Complementary Medicine Department at RMIT University in Melbourne under the guidance of Professor Marc Cohen, a medical doctor and a yoga practitioner, is conducting a number of scientific studies into yoga. I am collecting the survey details as my background is in web-based data collection, and the pranayama research is by Philip Stevens: (Swami Samnyasanand), a neuroscientist and a teacher in the Satyananda tradition.

AYL: What sort of questions are people likely to encounter on the survey?

Stephen: Hundreds of people have had input into the questions, so the survey is very comprehensive. There are questions on your personal practice, for example, how often you practice, your style of yoga or meditation, your reasons for practising and what benefits you have gained, along with questions on yoga related injuries and other aspects of your lifestyle. There are also special questions for yoga and meditation teachers and therapists.

AYL: How will you ensure that all yoga styles and traditions are represented?

Stephen: We have worked hard to get the support of the teacher associations and lineage based groups so that we can reach as many teachers as possible through their newsletters and membership lists, which in turn means we can reach yoga participants through their teachers. Then there has been media coverage to tell the general public about the survey. Word of mouth in the yoga community has also been fantastic,

with many people visiting the website www.yogainaustralia.com and registering interest in the survey over the last year.

AYL: Will the survey look at all aspects of yoga or only yoga as a form of exercise?

Stephen: Definitely all aspects. We see yoga as a holistic and spiritual practice; however, by virtue of its health benefits, yoga is also seen as a complementary therapy along with meditation (other than as part of yoga practice), hypnosis, acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine and ayurveda, for example. Yoga is also a very popular form of exercise. So we will be looking at all aspects of yoga - as a spiritual path, a therapy and a form of exercise.

AYL: What about people who don't have access to the internet?

Stephen: That's a curly one. This is the first national yoga survey in Australia that we are aware of. As such, it is probably the largest yoga survey ever undertaken so it is logistically (and financially) impossible to manually code data from paper and pen surveys. Australia also has one of the highest rates of household internet connections in the world, which means that most people can get to a computer if they want to. Having said that, we are looking at taking manual submissions from special groups, like those in rural and remote locations, and groups of practitioners of certain styles of yoga who simply don't use the internet. Let us know if you want to act as a facilitator for such a group of people to complete the survey manually.

AYL: How are you going to report the results?

Stephen: There will be different reports for different purposes. We will be reporting back to the yoga teacher associations and lineage-based groups with specifically requested information, as well as to the public and the media with general interest information. If you participate in the survey, you will also receive a special report directly to your email address free of charge. That's technology for you - and a good reason to complete the survey. Although this is a scientific study, we are sensitive to the cause of yoga as a whole and the reporting will reflect that.

AYL: How will you protect the privacy of the people who participate in the survey?

Stephen: The survey has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at RMIT University. That means an independent group concerned with protecting the general public from harm (and the university from liability) considered the questions, the methodology and the privacy considerations of the survey. Most importantly, your personal information is 'de-identified' and only pooled results will be reported, so anonymity is assured.

HOW TO BE PART OF
AUSTRALIA'S FIRST
NATIONAL YOGA SURVEY!

AYL readers are invited to visit the survey website at www.yogainaustralia.com to participate in the survey. You can contact the researchers by email to info@yogainaustralia.com