

MASSAGE SCHOOL RESEARCH CHECKLIST

This checklist is a tool to assist you in selecting which massage therapy school to attend. You are about to make a major commitment of time, money and energy, and have a number of factors to consider in deciding what is in your best interest. Often it seems that the school which is closest geographically, or has the cheapest tuition, is the obvious choice. On the other hand, it can make for an expensive mistake (we receive a number of applications from dissatisfied students wanting to transfer to our school each year).

Doing Your Research

Under the three headings in this Checklist are good questions to ask of each school you approach. No school deserving of your investment will have any difficulty providing you with answers. You can click on each question to find Sutherland-Chan's responses.

1. The School's Reputation and Standing

How long has the school been in business?

It is true that an older school is not necessarily a better school, but it is a good idea to establish what the track records are of the ones you are considering. In Sutherland-Chan's case, our school was established in November 1978 by Grace Chan and Christine Sutherland, out of their strong desire to improve on massage therapy training as they had experienced it. Sutherland-Chan has therefore been operating for almost 40 years. We believe that our school's longevity, combined with our reputation and history of setting an excellent standard, indicates that we are stable, experienced, and good at what we do.

What is the school's record of success at the provincial certification exams?

The College of Massage Therapists of Ontario (CMTO) administers entry-to-practice certification exams that all massage therapists must successfully complete before becoming eligible to practice in Ontario. Graduates of all schools sit the same exams, and the results are a matter of public record. They can be viewed on the CMTO website. Sutherland-Chan has consistently been in the top ranking of schools.

The 2016 CMTO certification examination results show Sutherland-Chan's candidates achieved an overall 92% pass rate on the OSCE (practical) exam and 99% on the MCQ (written) exam. The results also show this is the highest pass of schools in the GTA that have sent more than 25 students to sit the exams.

For more information regarding certification examination results consult the CMTO website at <http://www.cmtto.com/assets/2016-Exam-Stats.pdf>

Does the school have program approval/accreditation from respected sources?

Sutherland-Chan's program is approved by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skill Development under the *Private Career Colleges Act of 2005*. This approval is necessary for a school's graduates to be eligible to sit the CMTO exams.

Program accreditation is rapidly becoming the gold standard method of evaluating education in health care fields. As yet, we do not have a massage therapy school program accreditation system in Canada, but it is coming in the next few years. Sutherland-Chan will welcome its arrival and be one of the first in line to participate.

Does the school have positive name recognition with employers? Will being a graduate of this school enhance your employability?

This is something you can check out by speaking to massage therapists and employers of massage therapists in the area where you plan to work. As competition increases in massage therapy, graduating from a school whose reputation will give you a boost is important.

Our alumni have a clear advantage in seeking employment. It is common knowledge that many employers prefer to hire Sutherland-Chan grads. Here are some quotes from graduates:

I received several job offers before I even graduated. There was one day in particular that I received three offers for jobs I hadn't even applied to! I work at a spa that hired me on the spot after a brief interview and a 15-minute massage. They told me I was their number one priority and they were impressed with the Sutherland-Chan graduates they already had on staff. Nicki Iskander '15

The best attribute to a Sutherland-Chan grad's employability is the specialty clinic program. Not only do you gain a lot of experience, you also have the opportunity to work in different settings and with different patient groups. Employers look at these placements like Toronto General or Sunnybrook Hospital and get a feel for how high the standards at S-C are. Andrea Stader '15

Having the name Sutherland-Chan on your resume opens a lot of doors. Employers are aware of the solid professional foundation a new grad has if he comes from S-C. I had my first job offer a week after getting my RMT license - not bad in such a competitive market. Mihai Coltatu '13

The first clinic I ever applied to had been around for 20 years and many of their RMTs had been practicing for more than ten. I didn't have high hopes of getting an interview, but sent my resume anyways. I was very surprised to get a call back that same day. During my interview the owner told me that she was shocked that I was a recent grad because I had so much experience listed on my resume. Needless to say I got the job right away. Ann Hoang '14

Are your tuition fees competitive?

Our fees are consistent with career colleges teaching massage therapy programs – at \$20,590 for tuition plus \$1900 for miscellaneous fees (books, supplies, etc.), we are neither the most nor the least expensive. When checking into the costs of the schools you are researching, make sure to learn about both the tuition rate and the added amount for supplies/services. Some schools have lower tuition and higher miscellaneous fees.

What is the school's OSAP default rate?

The Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) publishes its default rates by school each year. The OSAP default rate, being a record of how the school's former students repay their student loans, is considered another indicator of the employment success of a school's graduates. We're pleased to say that Sutherland-Chan's rate is consistently one of the lowest in the province. For the most recent information on default rates go to:

<https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/PlanYourEducation/ChooseaCareerSchoolProgram/PRDR016178.html>

Does the school participate actively in the massage therapy profession?

Sutherland-Chan has always demonstrated a commitment to the massage therapy profession above and beyond the private interests of our school. Massage therapy is our passion – it is the only thing we teach. It has been our philosophy since 1978 that what is best for the profession will be good for its schools and its practitioners – our alumni. Of course, Sutherland-Chan benefits as well, because active involvement in the activities and direction of the massage therapy profession helps ensure the relevance and connectedness of our educational processes.

Our two owners are massage therapists who have multiple years' experience in leadership positions on behalf of our profession. In addition to being a multidisciplinary practitioner and Sutherland-Chan founder, Grace Chan was the originating president of the Massage Therapy Foundation and a pioneer of sports massage in Canada, including founding the Canadian Sports Massage Therapists Association and helping achieve access to the Olympics. Debra Curties is a past president of the American Massage Therapy Association Council of Schools and trustee of the Massage Therapy Foundation, and has been a participant in numerous curriculum and accreditation projects to further massage therapy in Canada, as well as an author and founder of Curties-Overzet Publications, a massage therapy textbook publisher.

If you were to look at records of leaders and committee members of organizations in the massage therapy profession in North America, as well as who has been spearheading research activities, you would find that a surprisingly high percentage are Sutherland-Chan alumni.

2. The School's Educational Program

How many hours are spent in academic, practical, and clinical components of the program?

Our program is just under half academic and just over half practical – in other words, about 45% of our hours are academic classroom hours and 55% take place in the practical classroom or in clinical settings. With respect to clinical hours, the provincial norm is approximately 150 hours. Sutherland-Chan students average 250-280, depending on the specific clinics they select.

Does the clinical program provide diversity of involvement with many types of patients and health conditions?

Sutherland-Chan's clinical program consists of both Student Clinics (where the patients are members of the general public) and Specialty Clinics (where advanced term students work with individuals with more challenging backgrounds and health conditions). Weekly Student Clinic shifts begin halfway through second term. In Terms 3 and 4 a total of four Specialty Clinic rotations are completed. We place a high value on classroom-to-clinic integration.

Our clinical program is considered to be one of the best in North America because it offers students great depth and diversity of experience. In Student Clinic we have 10,000 patient files and 6,000 visits per year. Our Specialty Clinics are both onsite (e.g., Seniors Clinic, MS Clinic, CNS Clinic, Breast Clinic, Sports Clinic) and at offsite locations in the community, such as Toronto General Hospital (postsurgical), Sunnybrook Hospital (high-risk pregnancy), Princess Margaret Hospital (palliative care) and Lodge (cancer treatments), Lyndhurst (spinal cord injury rehabilitation), Stroke Club, Bellwoods (long-term care), seniors residences. You can find more details on our website at <https://sutherland-chan.com/teaching-clinic/specialty-clinics/>.

Do students have to find their own offsite clinical placements?

No they don't. Sutherland-Chan's clinical placements are always designed, organized and administered by the school.

Are all student clinical placements fully supervised by RMTs?

Yes, our clinical instructors are always present and engaged in hands-on mentoring in any Clinic they are supervising. This is a provincial requirement that we take very seriously for the safety of our students and patients. It is also a key aspect of our students' education.

What are the student/teacher ratios in the school's various educational experiences?

Our ratios are maximum allowable numbers – the actual numbers are often smaller:

- no more than 40:1 in academic classes
- no more than 19:1 in practical classes
- no more than 11:1 in Student Clinic
- no more than 10:1 in Specialty Clinic

Are there opportunities for students to pursue areas of personal interest?

Many people arrive at massage school with an area of interest in mind for their future practice, such as working with athletes, cancer patients, individuals with neurological conditions or pregnant women. At Sutherland-Chan we provide a number of avenues for pursuing these interests as an enhancement of the core program. In the Specialty Clinic program students can select their clinic preferences from a range of options. In their final term, they also choose elective courses designed to help pursue personal interests in small class settings. As well, there are offsite opportunities to participate in a variety of athletic events, trade shows and other school-organized activities (students must complete 15 such hours before they graduate) that can provide invaluable hands-on experience and help enhance skills and confidence.

If I were to experience difficulties, is there a tutoring program for students who need extra help?

Yes, we provide free access to practicum skills sessions (Practice Clinic) and regular academic subject tutoring drop-ins (Cirque de Science), both of which are available 2-3 times per week. The Student Services Coordinator also maintains a list of faculty and students interested in providing private tutoring, helping students match up with good tutors for them. The massage program is quite rigorous, as befits a health care profession, and some of our students have been away from schooling for a while, so we balance these factors with providing the kinds of help that foster success.

Are there student supports?

In acknowledgement of the personal challenges our students sometimes face (for example, dealing with abuse histories, or struggling with examination phobias), along with the daily life stresses that can occur for adult students, our school provides a confidential counselling service. We have an experienced part-time counsellor, Lois Kunkel, Ed.D., who has been with Sutherland-Chan since the inception of this service almost 25 years ago. Each year Lois selects and supervises three masters-level students who complete their counselling clinical practicums at our school. Students can utilize the counselling service without charge or worry that their personal issues will become public knowledge.

Students are also welcome to seek support and guidance from the Student Services Coordinator, the Education Services Coordinator, the Assistant Director of Education, and our teaching faculty, who are very accessible and open to offering assistance wherever possible to help ensure our students' wellbeing and success.

Do students have a representative voice in school affairs?

Yes, each class elects 2-3 class representatives who play an important role in maintaining good two-way communication between students and school staff as needs arise. There is a regular monthly meeting of class reps and school administrators where the agenda covers all issues raised for discussion. As well, our administrators' doors are also always open to hear the concerns of our students.

Does the school have teachers with strong reputations in the field?

Sutherland-Chan is well known for having one of the most talented teaching faculties in massage therapy education. Many of our instructors are acknowledged leaders in their subject areas, engaging in research, writing books and articles, and teaching continuing education seminars in addition to their undergraduate courses.

Have most teachers at the school been there for several years?

Sutherland-Chan is proud of the maturity and stability of our teaching staff. Seventy per cent of our teachers have been with us between 5 and 30 years.

Are there massage therapists on the faculty in all subject areas?

Yes! This has been an area of focus for us for many years. While some schools will tell you that it is better to have other professionals like doctors and chiropractors teaching the science subjects, we believe that when course instructors are massage therapists they integrate the priorities and points of view of massage therapists into the material they teach.

Are the school's academic policies clearly stated? Is it clear what standards students must meet and what the consequences of failure would be?

We have all of these policies laid out in our Evaluation & Standards Policy manual. A copy is provided to all accepted applicants before they sign their contracts. If you would like to receive a copy, please contact Rubena Borg at 416-924-1107 ext. 23 or email: admissions@sutherland-chan.com.

Are students given transcripts/progress reports during the program?

Students have the right to receive performance reports throughout their time in a school program. At Sutherland-Chan, students can request updates from their instructors at any time. Our students also receive transcripts at the end of each of the four terms.

What is the student success rate on school final exams?

Each year we graduate 90-100 students – 95% pass our final exams and evaluations on their first attempt. Overall, we have a very low attrition/drop-out rate.

Each year we graduate between 90-100 students, and over 90% pass our final exams and evaluations. Overall, we have a very high student retention rate from the beginning of the program to the end.

Does the school help its graduates find employment?

Because we know employers preferentially hire our grads, to help put them in touch we have maintained an online job registry for many years. Employers regularly provide new listings, and senior students and alumni make use of this service for job search purposes.

Grace Chan, one of our owners, has a number of professional clinics in the Toronto area, Belleville and Hong Kong. She and her staff make contact with our students while they are still

in school, and many of our graduates are employed to work in these clinics. In a similar vein, the school conducts job fairs and otherwise responds to requests from employers to help them present themselves to interested students.

There are many types of informal supports, which can be the most significant of all. Faculty, administrators and alumni are very generous with guidance, assistance, references and a supportive ear when senior students and recent grads need advice about how to move to the next stage professionally.

A number of our alumni prefer to become self employed in their own individual or group practices. In many cases they team up with classmates or Sutherland-Chan alumni in their communities, so the strength of the school community connection is often very strong in helping them to get established as well.

Does the school have a continuing education program for alumni?

Yes, we have a program called Sutherland-Chan Continuing Education that offers a variety of postgraduate courses for RMTs. Our graduates can also come back to the school to take electives they may have missed or in which they have subsequently developed an interest.

3. **Finally...Your Impression of the School**

The questions that follow will help you fill out your perception of which of the schools you are investigating will be a good match for you. Feel free to ask us about anything mentioned below – we are confident you will find our responses accommodating and helpful.

- Does the school provide documentation (hard copy and/or online) that clearly outlines its requirements, fees, and admissions policies?
- Do you have the opportunity to attend an orientation session at the school?
- Are there any scheduled Open House sessions where you could meet teachers, staff and the school owners?
- Are your questions answered promptly and effectively?
- Are you satisfied that the school sets a good standard for acceptance?
- How does the atmosphere of the school feel to you? Are the staff friendly and helpful?
- Have you been able to arrange to speak with current students and/or graduates of the school? Do you like what they have to say?
- What have you heard about the reputations of the schools you are considering? Have you asked RMTs in your community to give you comparison ratings?

- Does the school offer the opportunity to sit in on one or two classes?
- Have you taken any preadmission courses with the school? Was your impression favourable?
- Does the school make it possible for you to experience a complimentary massage in its Student Clinic?
- Does the school's size and location meet your needs?
- If you have a learning disability or some type of physical or health challenge, is the school open to accommodating your needs?