

**A<sup>m</sup> SAT**  
American Society for the **Alexander Technique**

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Thank you for contacting the American Society for the Alexander Technique (AmSAT). Enclosed please find a kit of materials that describe the Alexander Technique. You will also find answers to frequently asked questions and some copies of articles about the Alexander Technique.

We will be happy to assist you in your coverage of the Alexander Technique. Please contact AmSAT Media Spokesperson at:

[amsatmedia@amsat.ws](mailto:amsatmedia@amsat.ws)

Thank you again for contacting AmSAT.

Sincerely yours,

Dee Boyle-Clapp  
AmSAT Executive Director

Enclosures

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# What is the Alexander Technique?

**A proven approach to self care, the Alexander Technique is a method that people of all ages and abilities can learn to relieve the pain and stress caused by everyday misuse of the body.**

**With the Alexander Technique, you learn** how to strip away the movement habits and tension patterns at the root of your discomfort. You learn how to balance your own body and take charge of your own health. You learn how to sit, stand and move — with safety, efficiency and ease.

**The Alexander Technique practitioner**, a professional trained in the art of observation and expert guidance, leads you through a one-on-one learning process tailored to your needs. Over a course of sessions, your teacher helps you release muscular tension and restore your body's original poise. As you address your entire body — not just segments — you learn to improve your overall functioning.

**Noted actors, musicians and athletes have used it for over 100 years** to enhance performance and stage presence. Among them are Sir Colin Davis, William Hurt, Jeremy Irons, James Earl Jones, Kevin Kline, Paul McCartney, Kelly McGillis, Paul Newman, Lynn Redgrave, Maggie Smith, Mary Steenbergen, Sting, Robin Williams, Joanne Woodward and members of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

*When someone has a profession with particular physical demands or needs to make changes in habitual movement patterns, I suggest the Alexander Technique. I have found it very helpful for patients with low body awareness or those who have trouble relaxing.*

Gail King, PT, MS  
Backtec Orthopedic & Sports Physical Therapy  
New York, NY

# Frequently Asked Questions

by Joan Arnold (joanarn@aol.com) & Hope Gillerman  
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Certified Teachers of the Alexander Technique  
with Terry Zimmerer

## Why do I need the Alexander Technique?

You may be mystified by your back pain, excess tension or lack of coordination. You might have a chronic physical problem you'd like to solve. Perhaps you see your problem as hereditary, structural, unchangeable. You may be unaware that how you move could be creating or compounding your problem. You may not realize that how you go through your daily activities needlessly strains your joints and muscles.

## How can the Alexander Technique help me?

The Technique offers you a way to streamline what you do, making your activities less stressful and more pleasurable. You come to understand how your body can move most efficiently. As you learn to move more easily, you make surprising improvements in how you look and feel. As you learn to apply Alexander's principles, you practice an effective, lasting method of self care.

## What is the Alexander Technique?

The Alexander Technique is an intelligent way to solve the common movement problems that cause chronic pain and stress. It is a way to notice your movement habits, release compression and move with ease and expansion. A proven self care method, it is a set of skills that you learn to relieve pain, prevent injury and enhance performance.

## How is the Alexander Technique different from other approaches?

- **It is not a treatment**, such as chiropractic or massage. Any treatment has its own unique benefits. The Alexander Technique's unique contribution is a mode of self-management

that gives you independence in maintaining your health. Rather than being solely a recipient, you learn to soothe your own nervous system, release your own muscles and balance your own structure. Alexander skills also make you a more informed, receptive patient when you do need any kind of treatment.

- **It is not a set of exercises** such as those you might learn in yoga, physical therapy, Feldenkrais, Pilates or the gym. Because the Alexander Technique is a way to heighten awareness of how you move and to better coordinate your body during activity, it helps you do specific postures, procedures or exercises with less strain and more comfort. Since it is a tool to improve your overall coordination, you become a more intelligent exerciser who can focus effort during a strenuous challenge. You learn more about the body, and bring that refined understanding to a class or set of stretches.

### **What are the Alexander Technique's benefits?**

People who learn the Alexander Technique can better handle daily stress and develop a long-term solution to chronic pain and muscular tension. They acquire an enduring way to perceive tensions as they arise and to restore their own balance.

- **Self care** - As the premier form of self care, the Alexander Technique helps people prevent injury and recover from chronic back, hip and neck disorders, traumatic or repetitive strain injuries, balance and coordination disorders, arthritis and muscle spasms. It can also be helpful for people with asthma and stress-related disorders, such as migraine headaches, sleep disorders and panic attacks.
- **Skill enhancement** - Athletes use the Technique to help them improve strength, endurance, flexibility and responsiveness. Performing artists use it to lessen performance anxiety while improving concentration and stage presence. Public speakers use it to improve vocal projection and voice quality. Those in business find it enhances presentation skills and increases confidence.
- **Mental health** - As your posture and movement style improve, you look and feel better. As your breathing capacity expands, you have a greater resource of energy. Physicians recommend

the Alexander Technique to lessen the depression and anxiety associated with chronic conditions. Psychotherapists also refer their patients to Alexander Technique teachers. While you unravel muscular tensions, you may perceive an emotional link to your physical symptom. Study of the Alexander Technique can help release emotion, can provoke deeper understanding of the self, and can complement psychotherapy.

### **Who studies the Alexander Technique?**

People of all types are Alexander students. They might come to recuperate from an injury or for relief from chronic pain. They may hear of the Technique from friends, physicians or other health professionals. Here are some examples of the many who have used the Alexander Technique to improve their comfort level, professional achievement and their lives:

**performing artists**

**parents**

**executives**

**computer users**

**the wheelchair bound**

### **What problems and conditions can the Alexander Technique help me with?**

- **Stress in daily life** - Because the Alexander Technique helps you change your response to stress, it can help you relieve or eliminate stress-related conditions. The body's reaction to threat — a fear reflex marked by a tight neck and contracted body — is a natural, adaptive response. But if the body does not unwind from this contraction and stays in a constant state of emergency, we pay a physical price. You can learn to re-stabilize and recuperate from stress with the Alexander Technique: a set of body/mind skills that helps you release contracted muscles, calm the nervous system and handle stressors more easily.
- **Chronic pain** - Chronic pain can be the result of injury, disease, structural abnormality or muscular tension. Though the Technique is not a miracle cure for medical conditions, by reducing the stress response it can often provide a surprising degree of relief. For conditions that cannot be changed — such

as rheumatoid arthritis — it can still help the individual release the muscular tension and fear response that accompany injury or disease.

- **Back problems** - One of the most effective approaches to chronic back problems, the Technique can address the underlying cause and often relieve the condition completely. When there are unchangeable factors of disease or structure, the Alexander teacher's soothing hands and helpful guidance enables you — whatever your limitation — to reach your full potential for function.
- **Arthritis** - Studying the Alexander Technique will help you relieve pain, retain mobility and increase range of motion. The Alexander Technique teacher helps you see what in your movement style causes joint compression and might exacerbate your condition. As you re-educate your overall coordination, the torso muscles support rather than compress the spine. Reduced compression allows your body to expand during daily activities and can help reduce pain.
- **Postural problems** - Many people develop unhealthy posture and movement habits that become deep-seated patterns of strain. These habits are typically expressed by tight back and neck muscles and collapsed stature. With the hands-on guidance of a trained Alexander Technique teacher, you learn to elicit the primary control — an easy, dynamic relationship between the head and spine. You gain access to the body's elegant power steering. You learn that finding poise can help to ease discomfort and streamline movement. With greater fluidity and stability, you gain confidence and a more positive self-image.
- **Asthma and other breathing disorders** - Asthma is the body's respiratory reflex gone awry. Neck muscles tighten, shoulders yank up to the ears, and the abdominal muscles contract. Sufferers say the greatest problem is rising panic at an attack's onset — the fear that they won't win the fight for the next breath. These responses are elements of the startle pattern. With the Alexander Technique, asthmatics can halt the startle pattern and calm the nervous system, inviting an easier balance

in body and mind. They can control or conquer their symptoms. Expanded space in the torso and information about how to breathe can help anyone who wants to improve breathing capacity and, with it, overall vitality.

- **Repetitive strain injury & carpal tunnel syndrome** - The Alexander Technique addresses the cause of these widespread injuries: lack of postural support and excess joint compression while working. With the Alexander Technique, you learn to eliminate strain and perform repetitive movements with ease and comfort. Much of our current epidemic of repetitive strain injury and carpal tunnel syndrome could be alleviated if more people learned how to:
  - sit upright easily
  - do repeated motions with less muscular tension in the shoulders, arms and wrists
  - tap the keyboard and mouse lightly
  - attune to their bodies' signals

### **How do I learn the Alexander Technique?**

You learn the Technique from a highly trained professional in a series of one-on-one sessions. Some teachers offer group classes, but the Technique is most commonly offered privately. The teacher gives you expert coaching tailored to your specific needs.

### **What happens in an Alexander Technique session?**

In an Alexander Technique session, your teacher instructs you — with words and touch — to approach movement differently. Using a mirror, s/he helps you recognize your ingrained patterns and highlights how your movement style relates to your symptoms. Your teacher uses a specialized hands-on method to help you release areas of tension and elicit your body's capacity for dynamic expansion. With this expert guidance, you learn the skills to replicate that ease and expansion on your own. Over a course of sessions, you strip away the movement habits at the root of your discomfort. You acquire a way to guide yourself through daily activities that stays with you for the rest of your life.

### What do I wear?

You come to your Alexander lesson wearing loose, comfortable clothing.

### What is an Alexander studio like?

The Alexander teacher's studio is a low-tech environment with a chair, bodywork table and a mirror.

### How long are sessions?

Usually 45-60 minutes, the Alexander lesson is instruction tailored to your needs.

### What's the point of a lesson?

An Alexander Technique session is an opportunity for you to unwind and observe how your mind and body work. Your teacher gives you focused, supportive coaching on how to use your increased awareness to calm your system and raise your level of functioning.

### What will we do?

Your Alexander teacher observes you doing simple actions, such as sitting, standing or walking. Using a mirror, s/he helps you see and sense how your movement style relates to your problem. There are two aspects to an Alexander lesson:

- **Table work** - While you lie clothed on a bodywork table and settle into restful state, the teacher gently moves your head and limbs, encouraging expansion. S/he guides you with a unique, informative touch that does not intrude or manipulate, but suggests soothing release and an enlivened kinesthetic sense.
- **Guidance during activity** - While you perform ordinary movements, the teacher gives you verbal, visual and conceptual cues to help you sit, stand, walk or reach more comfortably. You consider activities you would like to enhance, such as public speaking, lifting and carrying, computer work, practicing yoga or a martial art, playing your favorite sport or even sleeping comfortably. Performers can choose to work on a monologue, an aria or a dance movement. If you would like to refine a **specialized activity** - such as how you swing a tennis racket, lift a child or play an instrument - the teacher can

help you reduce compression and increase overall physical support as you do it.

### **How can an Alexander Technique teacher help me?**

Your Alexander Technique teacher offers personally tailored instruction with a unique hands-on approach, helping you see what in your individual movement style contributes to your recurring problem. As he or she helps you to release muscular tension and restore your body's original poise, you learn to sit, stand and move with safety, balance and ease. Your teacher can point out the source of your problem. With anatomical pictures s/he helps you to better understand the body's functioning. S/he considers your entire body — not just segments — and looks at you as the dynamic creature you are.

### **Who can benefit from learning the Alexander Technique?**

- **Computer users** - In the current epidemic of repetitive strain injury, carpal tunnel syndrome, chronic back pain, headaches and stress related disorders, many computer users suffer. While ergonomic design can improve the work station — chair design, monitor and keyboard placement — the Alexander Technique enables you to use your own body's design, even when the work station is not ideal. By understanding the Technique's basic alphabet of movement, you can avoid injury and often relieve the agonizing symptoms associated with computer use.

Your Alexander Technique teacher guides you to:

- **sit upright without strain**
- **prevent spinal compression** and muscular tension in the neck, shoulders and upper back.
- **encourage freer range of motion** in the joints and muscles
- tap the keyboard and mouse lightly to **reduce stress on the wrist and carpal tunnel**

- **attune to your body's signals**, heed early warning stress signs and ward off pain before it escalates
  - **breathe properly** to prevent fatigue and soothe the nervous system
  - **restore balance in your back** - during and after work - each day
- **Singers, dancers, actors and musicians** - Performing artists study the Technique to reduce performance anxiety, lessen the likelihood of injury and enhance stage presence. The Alexander Technique gives them sharp focus, a highly refined sensory awareness, efficient use of their energy, excellent balance and coordination and an inner sense of calm.

Some of the renowned actors and musicians who have been using the Alexander Technique since the beginning of this century are: Julie Andrews, William Hurt, Jeremy Irons, James Earl Jones, Paul McCartney, Kelley McGillis, Patti Lupone, Paul Newman, Sting, Maggie Smith, Mary Steenbergen, Robin Williams, Joanne Woodward, and members of the New York Philharmonic.

- **Athletes & fitness enthusiasts** - Though the Technique is a wonderful stress-reducer, you can also use it during vigorous activities. If you work out, proper form and degree of muscular tension are just as important as how strenuously or how often you exercise. By demonstrating principles of efficient movement, the Alexander teacher offers the fitness enthusiast a way to prevent injury and gain better results.

Studying the Technique gives you the skills to prevent pain while you improve breathing, balance and posture. Together, you and your Alexander teacher can explore how to solve movement problems and optimize your performance, adding to your achievement and enjoyment. You can apply the Technique to any activity — tennis, golf, skiing, baseball, horseback riding, basketball, etc.

- **Pregnant women** - The Alexander Technique has much to offer women before, during and after childbirth.
  - **Before pregnancy**, you can use the Technique to unlearn harmful postural habits while improving balance and coordination. This enables you to manage your body during the changes pregnancy brings.
  - **During pregnancy**, the Alexander teacher can help eliminate lower back pain caused by increased weight in front of the body. The baby's growth limits the mother's internal space and her organs become compressed. This can result in digestive problems and shortness of breath. Use of the Alexander Technique will allow more internal space for both mother and baby. With more breath and mobility, the mother can stay active. To help the mother prepare for labor and delivery, Alexander Technique lessons coordinate breathing and strengthen pelvic muscles.
  - **During childbirth**, the Alexander Technique can help the mother manage the physical challenges.
  - **After childbirth**, a mother can continue to use the Technique to help focus on her own self care while nourishing and caring for her child. Both parents can learn how to manage the constant lifting and carrying that come with parenthood.

### **How did the Alexander Technique begin?**

The Alexander Technique was developed by F.M. Alexander (1869-1955). As a young Australian actor, he suffered from a vocal problem that interrupted his burgeoning career as a Shakespearean actor. Frustrated by this limitation, he studied his own movement for the cause of his problem. Through a long process of self-observation and experiment, he evolved a way to restore full use of his voice. In exploring how to help himself and others, he discovered the crucial importance of the relationship between the head, neck and spine. He named this relationship **the primary control** because he perceived it as primary in controlling posture, breath and movement. He

developed a way to teach people how to elicit **the primary control** in their daily lives.

### **What are the Alexander Technique's basic ideas?**

Though your body is much more elaborate and subtle than any machine, you can understand the Alexander Technique's basic ideas by comparing it to driving a car. You use the mirrors (awareness), the brake (inhibition) and the gas (direction). As you develop each of these skills and learn to use them all together, you gain access to your body's power steering — the primary control. Just as you don't have to focus on every detail of a car's operation, you learn about your body's capacity to respond and coordinate each of its systems to work together, as an integrated whole.

- **Primary control** - The primary control is the relationship between the head, neck and spine. The quality of that relationship — compressed or free — determines the quality of our overall movement and functioning. When the neck is not overworking, the head balances lightly atop the spine, the torso expands and breath comes more easily. We restore the efficacy of the postural reflex — a natural, dynamic force that counters gravity and easily guides the torso upward. You elicit your body's primary control by developing three interlocking skills:
- **Awareness** - Many people don't realize the source of their limitation, aches or chronic pain. You acquire a powerful tool when you refine awareness of your habitual tendencies, observe how you operate moment to moment and understand how your body works best.
- **Inhibition** - Though we often tend to think we're not doing enough, Alexander found that our habits of tension and compression interfere with our body's ingenious design. By catching ourselves as we move with compression and reducing excess muscular effort, we can inhibit (or stop) compressive habits and stress responses. We can actually accomplish more by doing less.
- **Direction** - Each of us has the capacity to visualize movement and mentally guide the flow of force through the body. Rather than gunning the motor and muscling our way through an activity, we can use the mind to direct — or envision —

dynamic expansion while moving. By doing so, the body's reflexive coordination seems to handle the action by itself, gracefully and effortlessly.

### **How long will it be before I see results?**

Each lesson will bring new insights that you can apply immediately, and you will probably feel the effects of your Alexander Technique work within the first 6-10 lessons. As you continue and your understanding grows, you will be able to apply what you've learned to a wider range of activities. Instead of a quick fix with a fleeting effect, you will experience a gradual change and long-term results.

### **How long should I take lessons to get the full benefit?**

Like any skill, it takes practice. A series of 30 lessons, once or twice a week for three to six months, is the best way for you to learn the Technique.

### **Does everyone need the same number of lessons?**

The number of lessons you need depends upon your goals, interests and physical condition. Some students study for 3-5 months, others continue taking lessons after reaching their initial goals and continue for years. Duration of study is up to you.

### **Do the Alexander Technique's benefits wear off when I stop taking lessons?**

Not if you continue to use what you have learned! While taking lessons, you reclaim your body's natural sense of ease and increase your understanding of how you function. This practice enables you to take the mind/body process wherever you go and apply it to anything you do, such as riding a bike, sitting through a long meeting, playing an instrument, swinging a racket or carrying luggage. You can continue to build your skills on your own after you stop taking lessons.

### **Since F.M. Alexander was not a physician, why should the medical field take the Alexander Technique seriously?**

Because it works! The Alexander Technique is a proven, safe, self care method to stop pain, muscle tension and stress cause by everyday misuse of the body.

- **Endorsed by physicians and health care professionals -**  
The Alexander Technique is offered in wellness centers and

health education programs. Medical professionals of every kind recommend the Alexander Technique for chronic back pain, migraines, repetitive stress injuries, balance and coordination problems and for the depression and anxiety that often accompanies chronic pain and stress.

- **Endorsed by scientists** - Alexander's findings are supported by behavioral scientists and physiologists including Nobel laureate Sir Charles Sherrington, Dr. Rudolph Magnus, G.E. Coghill, Frank Pierce Jones and Nikolaus Tinbergen, who noted Alexander's discoveries in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech.
- **An established record of success** - Clinical studies have shown that the Technique modifies stress responses while improving breathing capacity and posture. In a 1988 study of chronic pain sufferers, the Alexander Technique was chosen as patients' preferred method of reducing pain.

### **Is the Alexander Technique just another health fad?**

Now over 100 years old, the Alexander Technique has a long track record of helping people with back problems, chronic pain and tension, posture and movement disorders, asthma, migraines and whiplash. As its wide applications are understood and its successes continue to multiply, the reputation of the Technique is growing. Today there are about 2500 teachers worldwide, with about 700 in the United States.

### **What are Alexander Technique teachers like?**

Many have come from the performing arts, such as dance, theater or music. Some are physical therapists, massage therapists or teachers in another field.

### **What training is required to be an Alexander Technique teacher?**

AmSAT-certified Alexander Technique teachers must complete 1,600 hours of training over a minimum of three years in an AmSAT-approved training program. To assure quality instruction, each Alexander Teaching Training Program maintains a five-to-one student/teacher ratio.

Alexander teachers must practice what they teach: the ability to integrate and streamline their own movement while guiding their clients toward improved functioning. They acquire this ability from

expert mentors through long hours of intense, focused hands-on training.

Alexander practitioners are trained in careful visual observation to spot the source of movement problems. They are schooled in teaching skills that encourage learning in a non-judgmental, supportive atmosphere. And they are trained in the unique Alexander touch, a complex combination of kinesthetic receptivity and the subtle suggestion of expansion and lightness in movement. Additional studies include anatomy, study of F.M. Alexander's theoretical writings, literature and research by Alexander scholars and those in related fields.

### **What is AmSAT?**

The American Society of the Alexander Technique is the largest professional association of board-certified Alexander Technique teachers in the United States. Its mission is to maintain the integrity of the Alexander Technique as developed by F.M. Alexander (1869-1955). AmSAT maintains the nation's highest standards for teacher training, certification and membership and maintains affiliations with similar credentialing bodies worldwide. Since its formation in 1987, over 600 teachers have completed a rigorous training process to earn AmSAT certification.

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## Learning the Alexander Technique

### What happens in a session?

In an Alexander Technique session, your teacher observes how you move and helps you understand how your movement style relates to your symptom. S/he instructs you — with words and touch — to approach movement differently. Using a unique hands-on method to elicit your primary control, s/he gives you an experience of dynamic expansion. With this expert guidance, you learn how to replicate that expansion on your own. This powerful shift gives your body a highly responsive coordination.

### Can I learn the Technique on my own?

Habits are, by their nature, unconscious. Though you may try to effect changes by yourself, it takes the trained eyes and hands of a teacher to help you perceive and change your ingrained patterns. With a gentle, supportive touch, your teacher helps you notice areas of tension and experience your body in a new way.

### How long does it take? What does it cost?

Duration of study depends on your initial condition and personal goals. For substantive change, an average course of 30 private lessons is recommended. Lessons average 30-45 minutes. Rates vary depending on geographic area and amount of time per lesson.

***As my Alexander teacher taught me how to sit in a state of lumbosacral poise, I gradually eliminated my chronic low back pain. The Technique is true education. When compared with the physical and financial cost of back surgery, a course of instruction is very inexpensive.***

John H. M. Austin, MD  
Professor of Radiology  
Chief, Division of Radiology  
Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center  
New York, NY

## Origin of the Alexander Technique



**F.M. Alexander (1869-1955)** As a young man, Alexander was a Shakespearean actor touring in Australia and Tasmania. Chronic hoarseness interrupted his burgeoning career, and he lost his voice while performing. When no medical treatment helped him, he looked at his own movement for the source of his vocal trouble. Through nine years of rigorous self-observation and experiment, he solved his problem, developed a full, rich voice and discovered what he named the ***primary control***.

### The Core of Movement

Alexander observed that the relationship between the head, neck and torso is primary in controlling posture, movement and function. Compressive movement habits interfere with the function of the body's ingenious design. Eliciting the primary control restores the innate postural reflex — a natural, dynamic force that counters gravity and easily guides the torso upward.

### Research

Leaders in the field of mind/body medicine and behavioral science throughout this century have supported Alexander's innovative research. Clinical studies have shown that the Technique improves breathing capacity and posture, modifies stress responses and is, for those who suffer from chronic pain, the preferred method for long-term pain relief.

*Mr. Alexander has demonstrated a new scientific principle regarding the control of human behavior as important as any ever discovered in the domain of external nature.*

John Dewey  
Educator & philosopher

# What is AmSAT?

**The American Society of the Alexander Technique** is the largest professional association of board-certified Alexander Technique teachers in the United States. The Alexander Technique is a proven, effective way to promote wellness and optimize functioning by eliminating body misuse in everyday activities. AmSAT's mission is to define, maintain, and promote the Alexander Technique at its highest standard of professional practice and conduct.

**AmSAT maintains the nation's highest standards for teacher training,** certification and membership and maintains affiliation with similar credentialing bodies worldwide. Since its formation in 1987, over 600 teachers have completed a rigorous training process to earn AmSAT certification.

**In addition to providing educational support services for its members,** AmSAT provides information and assistance to the public in locating qualified teachers:

Toll-free teacher  
referral service:

**800.473.0620**

Mail order service:

**[AmSAT BOOKS](#) 800.473.0620**

## **WHAT DOES AmSAT BOARD-CERTIFIED MEAN?**

**Alexander Technique Teachers**—The requirements for teacher certification include the completion or equivalent of 1,600 hours of training over a minimum of three years at an AmSAT approved [Teacher Training Course](#). A board-certified Alexander Technique teacher is a professional whose training exceeds the duration and total hours of most mind/body trainings. An AmSAT board-certified teacher has met the requirements of the organization's peer review panel, the Training Approval Committee (TAC). To be eligible for TAC review, candidates must be recommended by their Teacher Training Course Directors.

**Teacher Training Courses**—To earn board approval, an AmSAT [Teacher Training Course](#) must meet the requirements of the Training Approval Committee. To assure quality instruction, AmSAT Teacher Training Courses maintain a five-to-one student/teacher ratio. The TAC regularly reevaluates each of AmSAT's 18 teacher training programs and their directors.

**Professional Conduct Committee**—This committee upholds AmSAT's standards of professional conduct for teachers, trainees, training instructors and Teacher Training Course Directors.