

# HIGH *when nature & minds meet* MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE

FALL 2021





Summer 2021 was a successful one here at HMI. We ran our full-length Summer Term where 33 students explored wildflower-blanketed mountains of Leadville, honed their writing skills, and spent time together on campus and on expedition. Now, Semester 47 and our fall Gap courses are well underway with over 75 students adventuring in Colorado, Utah, and Arizona.

Our success this summer and fall is due to the immense amount of work our faculty and staff poured into adapting our programming in response to the pandemic, and to our community of supporters far and wide who help make HMI a reality. In the following pages, we are eager to share with you just some of the ways we are continuing to evolve and strengthen as a school. Thank you for being with us on this journey!

## THROUGH OUR LENS THIS SUMMER & FALL:



TO FOLLOW MORE OF HMI'S ADVENTURES, FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

# ENHANCING THE HMI EXPERIENCE

FOLLOWING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN THROUGH UNPRECEDENTED CHANGE

By: Danny O'Brien, Head of School



“Our charge is to enhance what we do without fundamentally changing the ethos that makes the HMI experience so profound.”

Two years ago, HMI’s Board of Trustees approved a five-year strategic plan for HMI. I remember an eerily prescient remark that day. A trustee reminded us that the world would change a lot in five years, and that “the plan was simply a plan.” On that October day, no one could have predicted a global pandemic and an overdue racial reckoning would buffet our country, the independent school community, and our school. The events of 2020 and 2021 shocked school communities in ways not experienced in generations—and in ways that will manifest themselves for years to come.

Within this context, HMI’s trustees revisited the assumptions that led us to develop the goals found in the strategic plan. We began the conversation by reading articles by the writers Michael Horn and Sam Chaltain, who are beginning to think about how the life-altering events of 2020-21 will change education. Trustees then reviewed the progress we have made toward improving HMI by prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion practices; fostering employee retention;

completing our campus master plan; communicating about our successes; and exploring programmatic expansion. The good news is that much of the work we set out to do remains relevant today and the events of the last year will help frame future discussions about what comes next for HMI.

I am proud of the progress HMI has already made towards our strategic plan goals despite the overwhelming demands of reinventing a school and operating programs in the midst of a pandemic. In area after area, the goals of our strategic plan are coming alive. Our charge is to enhance what we do without fundamentally changing the ethos that makes the HMI experience so profound. I’m excited to share with you some of this work. In the following pages, you can read pieces about changes to HMI’s campus and programming.

## I hope you will appreciate the steps HMI is taking, among them:

- Challenging stereotypes of outdoor access and recreation through our Inclusive Outdoors speaker series
- Adding new positions to support mental health needs and diversity, equity, and inclusion work
- Conducting listening sessions and gathering data to better qualitatively and quantitatively understand the experiences of students of color at HMI
- Increasing our commitment to financial assistance
- Constructing a new campus classroom building and renovating the Barnes and East Buildings
- Providing all students with Chromebooks to better align with our technology goals
- Transforming the apprentice program to offer stipends to apprentices

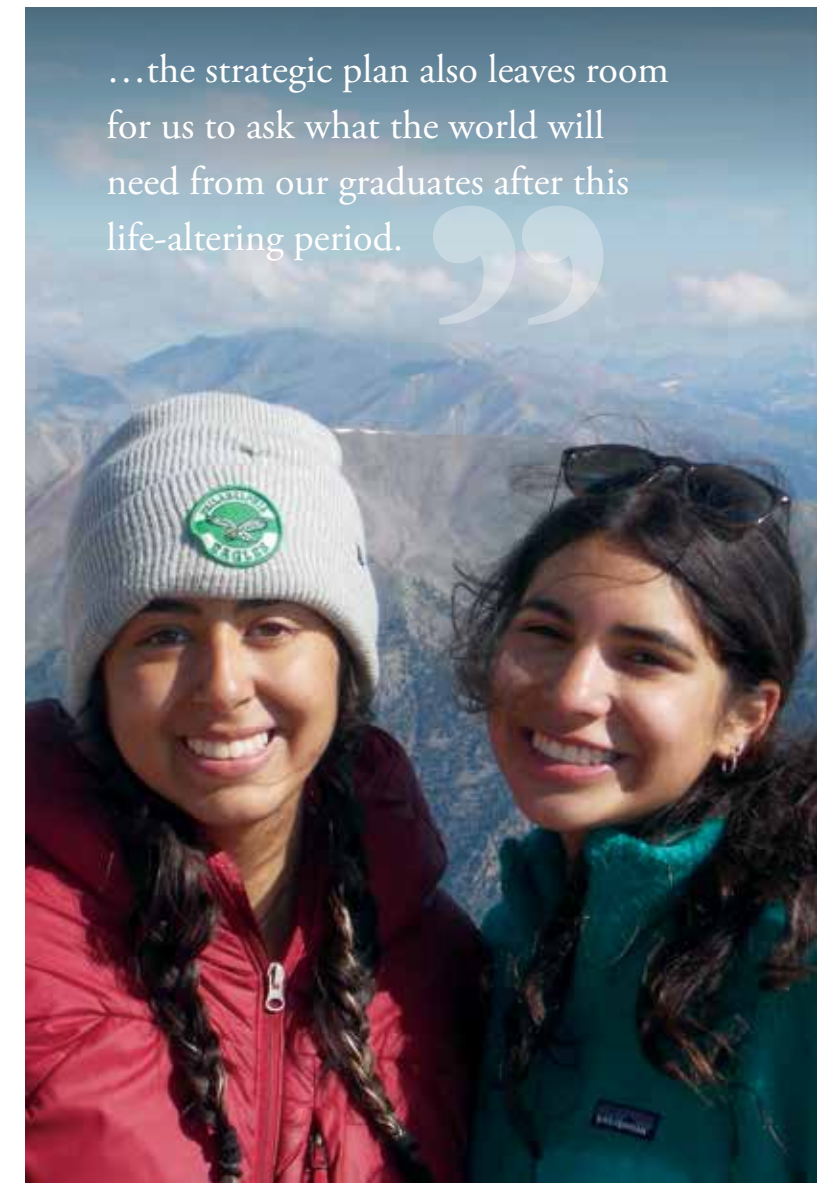
These are some of the new people, places, and things you will see when you next visit campus. Behind the scenes, there is just as much work happening. Our Board of Trustees has diversified its membership. We recently completed compensation and workforce studies to better understand how our salaries and staffing at HMI compare to other similar schools. Professional development, job responsibilities, and orientation programs look different for employees, focusing especially on improving our cultural competency and equity practices. The HMI Semester has a new academic philosophy statement to guide our curricula choices. We have also audited our hiring practices to eliminate barriers that might

have discouraged people from historically-marginalized identities from applying to positions here.

In future years, we are excited to share more about our efforts to better integrate marketing across our programs, have HMI increasingly contribute to national conversations about teaching leadership and engaging students with the natural world, and imaging what the next chapter for HMI looks like as we approach our 25th anniversary.

The world has evolved significantly since we approved our strategic plan. I believe, however, that the changes we committed to making at HMI before the events of the last year are more relevant now than ever before. They will help us achieve our mission in more ways and for more students. As we complete these efforts, the strategic plan also leaves room for us to ask what the world will need from our graduates after this life-altering period. Ensuring that our mission of engaging students with the natural world remains the bedrock of what we do while also evolving to meet the needs of a changing world is both nuanced and essential. We look forward to sharing with you the many ways we intend to do it. ■

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# HIGHLIGHTING DIVERSE VOICES **INCLUSIVE** **OUTDOOR SERIES**

By Amy Roberts, Acting Head of School & Semester Program Director

At HMI, we believe that nature is for everyone, and everyone should feel comfortable and safe to celebrate all aspects of their identity outdoors.



Peruse any popular outdoor clothing or gear catalogue, and you will likely be overwhelmed by images of whiteness, hypermasculinity, privilege, and able bodiedness. Think shirtless rock climbers showing off chiseled abs, hikers in matching puffy vests posing around a roaring fire, designer-clad skiers rocketing down snow-capped mountains at a fancy resort. You get the very exclusive and inaccurate picture.

While the outdoors industry is making significant strides to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in advertising, marketing, and other areas, these images and messages unfortunately still dominate, distorting the narrative of what it means to be outdoorsy.

At HMI, we believe that nature is for everyone, and everyone should feel comfortable and safe to celebrate all aspects of their identity outdoors. As we write in our diversity statement, “We all achieve our potential when each person in the community feels a true sense of belonging, and has the confidence to express their full self.” HMI is a school that has strong ties to outdoor culture and the outdoors industry. That’s why it is important to disrupt harmful and exclusive narratives about what outdoor recreation is and who can recreate in nature. Our goal? To create a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable community, both on campus and in the backcountry.

Last fall HMI launched *Inclusive Outdoors*, a speaker series designed to highlight diverse voices, experiences, and ability levels in the outdoors. We reached out to people with ties to HMI and to the lands on which HMI students recreate; we found inspirational speakers by researching the work that nonprofit organizations are doing to improve diversity in outdoor spaces; and we combed through newspapers, magazines, and social media posts for stories of amazing adventurers. Over the course of each semester, usually on expedition prep or deissue days, students meet with guest speakers (via Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions), and spend the evening in conversation, learning more about their relationship with the natural world, their experiences in nature, and their thoughts, feelings, and ideas about how to promote a more inclusive outdoors.

Coree Woltering (pictured top left), a professional ultramarathoner, and a North Face-sponsored athlete, spoke to Semester 45 and 46 students about being a top competitor in ultra marathons across the country, including our very own Leadville 50. Coree made national headlines in the summer of 2020 when he set the fastest known time for the Ice Age Trail, a 1,200 mile trail in Wisconsin. Coree overcame injuries and finished the run in 21 days, 13 hours, and 35 minutes, averaging over 55 miles a day. As a person



Coree Woltering  
@coreewoltering



Andrew Bernstein  
@bernitweets

of color and a gay man, Coree is a tireless advocate for inclusion and representation in the outdoors and ultrarunning industries. Semester students loved hearing about his adventures on the trail as well as his penchant for running in brightly-colored Speedos!

Patricia Cameron, the founder of Colorado Backpackers, a nonprofit organization that works to promote economic equity in outdoor recreation, spoke to spring semester students this past February. Backpackers provides gear, sponsors outdoor expeditions and education for participants, and connects individuals with internships, jobs, and volunteer opportunities in the outdoors industry. Patricia spoke about her passion for activism and influence in the outdoors industry, and she also detailed her summer 2020 hike of the Colorado Trail, which was featured in Backpacker Magazine.

This September, our Semester 47 speaker series kicked off with a lively and heartfelt conversation with Andrew “Bernie” Bernstein (pictured top right), an HMI Semester 8 alum (spring ‘02) and HMI Alumni Council member. Andrew was an elite-level bike racer who was severely injured by a hit-and-run driver in July 2019 while on a training ride outside of Boulder. Near death, Andrew underwent 10 surgeries to repair his body and was left with a spinal cord injury that caused him to be paraplegic. In his conversation with students, Andrew spoke about his identity as a person with a physical disability and how he engages with the outdoors in a whole new way.

Later this year, students will hear from HMI Board of Trustee members Luis Benitez and Misha Charles, both avid and experienced hikers, as well as Sophia Tang, an Aurora, CO resident who spent three weeks during the summer of 2020 hiking the Colorado Trail unsupported, which means that she carried all of her supplies, equipment, and food with her and didn’t resupply along the trail.

**We are very excited to grow the Inclusive Outdoors speaker series, and we hope to invite guests to campus soon so they can spend even more time with HMI students. ■**



# CREATING A SAFE, WELCOMING, AND PRODUCTIVE COMMUNITY

## A CONVERSATION WITH LUPE BOBADILLA

DIRECTOR OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION & ADMISSIONS OFFICER



**Q:** TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF. WHERE ARE YOU FROM AND HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED AT HMI?

**A:** I am originally from Los Angeles, CA, and completed my undergraduate and graduate studies in Southern California. My original plan was to work as an administrator in higher education. However, I enjoy the outdoors and I was looking for an opportunity that allowed me to get outside of an office. I found out about HMI through my local climbing gym in spring 2019—a member of the HMI Gap marketing team had put up a poster on the community board. I was intrigued! I applied for an open admissions job and...the rest is history!

**Q:** DESCRIBE YOUR PROFESSIONAL ROLE IN YOUR FIRST TWO YEARS AT HMI. WHAT DID YOU FIND MOST FULFILLING?

**A:** In my first two years, I worked solely in admissions. My first year was a challenge since I had to learn the nuances of HMI and go out on the road recruiting at our partner schools. I found the connections with former and prospective families and students the most fulfilling, and I relished sharing my personal story with them. It is OK not to have any previous outdoor experience!

In my second year we were not able to travel due to the pandemic. However, this did not stop me from making meaningful connections virtually. I took on new responsibilities as the “Diversity Recruitment Coordinator.” In this role, I worked with non-profit organizations and

public schools to recruit a more diverse student body. It was very rewarding work, and we ended up admitting a record number of students of color.

**Q:** AS OF THIS FALL, YOU ARE STEPPING INTO A NEW ROLE AS HMI’S FIRST DIRECTOR OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION. WHAT HAS THAT TRANSITION BEEN LIKE?

**A:** It has not been an easy transition since this job didn’t exist before I stepped into it! There are many projects I am excited about, but I am still learning what is realistic and possible to implement at HMI. I have been networking with various DEI professionals from independent schools across the country. I spend a lot of time thinking about what initiatives are appropriate for us to take on given our limited time—a single semester—with students. This is daunting but exciting and rewarding work.

**Q:** WHAT SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE DO YOU BRING TO THIS POSITION?

**A:** My identity is something important I bring to this position. I am a person of color operating in a predominantly white and privileged institution. As I help oversee the student POC affinity group and build relationships with students, I think this is a huge asset. I grew up in Inglewood, and I am proud to come from “the hood.” I am a first-generation college student and can proudly say that I now have my master’s degree. Education has not always been easily accessible to me, but I can say that I have overcome challenges with *orgullo y ganas* (pride and grit). My educational background has helped me support students and adults at HMI who are new to the private school world.

**Q:** WE RECENTLY PARTNERED WITH A PHD CANDIDATE TO SURVEY RECENT ALUMNI OF COLOR ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES AT HMI. FINDINGS OF THIS SURVEY WERE SHARED WITH THE BOARD AND EMPLOYEES AND CONTINUE TO BE THE TOPIC OF DISCUSSION AND WORKSHOPS. WHAT WERE SOME OF THE TAKEAWAYS FROM THE SURVEY AND DISCUSSIONS?

**A:** Before the start of semester 47, our faculty and staff participated in a two day all-staff training. It was an opportunity for healing and growth. In one of our training sessions, we had a conversation about the Alumni of Color Report. The report was insightful and provided anecdotes of the experiences of our students of color. The results demonstrated that we, as an institution, are cultivating a welcoming environment. However, changes must be made to progress as an institution and establish a more welcoming and proactive school. We are a community rooted in feedback, and we appreciate our students of color who volunteered their time to share their experiences. It is helping us reframe our discussions around race, leadership, and identity.

We are aware our institution has been historically white; hence, our framework sometimes does not include voices from systemically marginalized communities. We are committed to achieving our diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. Through our conversations during all-staff day, we developed personal goals and determined how the feedback we received from the report fits into our institutional goals. This work is an ongoing process, and I recognize there will be challenges along the way. However, I will embrace these challenges, and we will grow because of the process. HMI is committed to our students and families.

**Q:** IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU’D LIKE THE ALUMNI COMMUNITY TO KNOW ABOUT YOU?

**A:** I am excited to be in this role. I now have the creativity to establish programs around our DEI goals, and as a school administrator, effecting change is now my official capacity. I enjoy connecting with folks, and I invite you to reach out with questions or concerns by emailing me at [lbobadilla@hminet.org](mailto:lbobadilla@hminet.org). ■

“Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar.”

—Antonio Machado

“Walker, there is no road, you make the road as you go.”

—Antonio Machado



**Q:** WHAT IS YOUR POSITION AT HMI?

**A:** I am HMI's new School Counselor, a position that was created this year to better support the mental health of students in the Summer Term, Semester, and Gap programs as well as the staff, faculty, and apprentices. In creating this position, HMI is acknowledging how important our mental health is and wanting to be more supportive both during and after a student's time at HMI.

## SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH AT HMI

A CONVERSATION WITH EMILY WHEELER, SCHOOL COUNSELOR

**Q:** TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF, WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO HMI?

**A:** I grew up in the northeast corner of Vermont where my love of wild places began. Since that time, I have been working in experiential education with adolescents for over fifteen years in a variety of contexts including wilderness, environmental education, farming, and even another semester school based in California. When I graduated from my counseling psychology masters program in 2020, I decided that I was ready to get back on skis and be in the mountains, which prompted a move to Colorado. I connected with the HMI community this past spring and began working with HMI over the summer.

**Q:** WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR NEW JOB?

**A:** I love a lot of things about my new job—that I am getting to experience life at 10,000 feet, that I am surrounded by other people who are excited about this work, and that I get to continue working with teens! I also feel both grateful and proud of HMI as an institution for making a commitment to the emotional wellbeing of its community members.

**Q:** WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO BRING TO THE HMI COMMUNITY THROUGH THIS NEW POSITION?

**A:** I hope to bring an integrated perspective of how mental health is impacted by our past and present experiences and the importance of how we frame and process those experiences. The saying “what doesn't kill you makes you stronger” was something I grew up hearing and can be prevalent in athletic and outdoor programs—but I could not disagree with it more. Research and experience has shown that both acute and ongoing stress can lead to very unhappy and unhealthy situations. The idea that the mind can be stronger than the body (the mind/body distinction) is actually false, afterall, they are part of one system! I appreciate that HMI's programs are more holistic, with a focus on healthy relationships, mindfulness, ongoing reflection on how our experiences and our identities shape us, and critical analysis of how individuals in our community might be impacted differently by our programs. There is already a strong foundation in place to support the emotional wellbeing of our community members and I look forward to bringing new ideas to the table. ■

## STAYING TRUE TO OUR ROOTS

By Barrett Donovan, Director of Communication & Engagement

**H**MI began first as an idea, then as a single building nestled on the edge of the White River National Forest in Leadville, Colorado. When the first semester arrived in the fall of 1998, legend goes that there was no front door, only a swinging piece of plywood. Over the years, both HMI's physical campus and program offerings have grown. We now have three main buildings, seven cabins, and a new building under construction to help better serve our Semester, Gap, Summer Term, and Apprentice programs.

Thanks to our generous donors who helped us soar past our Campaign for Community goal, we are in the midst of constructing our new Faculty & Student Center on campus. The Faculty & Student Center will address current space limitations to ensure that our facilities match the ambition of our programs and will better enable HMI to deliver on the promise of teaching and learning in the twenty-first century.

The design of the Faculty & Student Center remains aligned with HMI's value of “simple in means, rich in ends.” It will match our current campus buildings with natural wood, big windows, and neutral colors—not to mention sweeping views of Mount Elbert and Mount Massive. It will be fully solar powered, along with the rest of campus.

Although our campus is undergoing some big physical changes, HMI is still the same transformative school that welcomed its first students through that plywood front door. ■

**If you have questions about HMI's Campaign for Community or any of our campus improvements, please reach out to Barrett by emailing [bdonovan@hminet.org](mailto:bdonovan@hminet.org).**



THE NEW FACULTY & STUDENT CENTER WILL PROVIDE MUCH NEEDED SPACE FOR:

- Three new classrooms
- A fully equipped natural science lab
- Dynamic work spaces for students
- Productive work spaces for faculty
- Gender neutral bathroom facilities that will help every community member feel at home



ONCE THE FACULTY & STUDENT CENTER IS COMPLETE, WE WILL REPURPOSE OTHER SPACES ON CAMPUS:

- The East Building will return to its roots as the hub of our wilderness programs, with the Rations and Gear Rooms (downstairs) getting additional space, along with more administrative office space (upstairs)
- The Hope library will become a full-time classroom
- The Classroom will be repurposed into office and kitchen space





# DEVELOPING THOUGHTFUL CITIZENS

By Jacob Sheetz-Willard, English Faculty

Our mission at HMI has never been about producing luddites; rather, we remain committed to developing “thoughtful citizens” who engage mindfully with the world around them—a world that is today, more than ever, mediated by digital technologies.”



## “SIMPLE IN MEANS, RICH IN ENDS” HAS BEEN A GUIDING ETHOS FOR MORE THAN TWO DECADES AT HMI.

**W**hile that principle remains a constant for us, the pace of technological change has required that we consider the specific ways in which we seek to live out that motto in the 21st century.

When the students of Semester 1 first made their way to Leadville, Larry Page and Sergey Brin were still Ph.D. students at Stanford and Google had yet to become a verb; now there are approximately 1.2 trillion Google searches per year, or 40,000 every second. 95% of American teens have access to a smartphone, and nearly half that percentage describe using the internet “almost constantly.” The question isn’t if students will engage with social media, smartphones, laptops, and other digital technologies, but how frequently, to what purpose, and at what expense.

Several years ago, HMI created a technology committee led by former faculty members Dylan Kane, Timbah Bell, and Coco Loehr to address these questions. The committee sought to bridge the gap between philosophy and practice regarding student technology use during the HMI semester.

Students in Semester 47 were the first beneficiaries of one of the committee’s major initiatives. We asked these students to leave their personal laptops at home and instead issued them laptops from our new fleet of HMI Chromebooks. A primary rationale for the shift had to do with our goals around equity and inclusion. Just as we outfit each student with the requisite gear for expeditions, we wanted each student to have reliable tools to complete their academic work on campus. Reducing technological inequities between students and removing the tether to a personal laptop also helps us emphasize the real core of HMI’s work: building community.

Our mission at HMI has never been about producing luddites; rather, we remain committed to developing “thoughtful citizens” who engage mindfully with the world around them—a world that is today, more than ever, mediated by digital technologies. Instead of a blanket rejection of technology, we offer our students periods of intentional separation. The experience speaks for itself. Four months spent sleeping in wood-fired cabins, walking through canyons and aspen groves, and pitching your tarp under the stars has a way of making the world that’s locked up inside a screen seem a little less real than what happens outside of it. ■

# MANAGING COVID-19 RISK AT HMI

By Justin Talbot, Director of Wilderness Programs & Risk Management



**W**e continue to count ourselves lucky to have only had to move our programming online for the second half of Semester 44 from March through May of 2020. We were able to resume in-person programming with an abbreviated summer program in July of 2020 and ran full programs in both the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021. While we had to make many COVID-19 program adjustments last year, including masking on campus, students still enjoyed expeditions, classes, and cabin life in much the same way as they always have.

As of late September 2021, we are monitoring the national surge in COVID-19 cases, specifically the Delta variant. While COVID-19 vaccines continue to be highly effective in the prevention of serious disease, the Delta variant is still spreading rapidly and, according to the CDC, can be transmitted by vaccinated people.

Based upon the recommendation of our physician advisor, we now require all students and staff to be vaccinated against COVID-19 and to provide proof of such vaccination, with limited documented exceptions (applicable law allows for medical and religious exemptions to this requirement). We believe that COVID-19 vaccinations are essential for supporting the well-being and health of our community and for allowing our programs to function at their highest quality.

**In addition to requiring proof of COVID-19 vaccination, we will continue to implement the following mitigation strategies:**

- **All students must submit proof of a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours prior to arriving for programs.** Students and staff are also tested on arrival day and the HMI Semester community members are tested weekly.
- **We will isolate any individuals that contract COVID-19** and implement masks and daily testing for all community members.
- **We have revised our on-campus visitor policy to restrict all non-essential campus visitors.** We are hopeful that this will be a temporary change and we look forward to welcoming visitors back on campus as soon as safely possible.

It's important to recognize that these steps do not guarantee that we will not have a COVID-19 exposure on campus. That is still a possibility, one that we are very prepared to handle. At HMI we have always strived to mindfully manage risk by balancing risks and reward and in many ways this engrained risk management philosophy will continue to serve us well during this pandemic and beyond. ■

While we had to make many COVID-19 program adjustments last year, students still enjoyed expeditions, classes, and cabin life in much the same way as they always have.



The change in the apprentice program to a paid position was really exciting—it made it more accessible, and let me go into the semester with more confidence about the future.

—Anna Ginsburg, Semester 47 Apprentice & Summer Term 2015 Alum

## THE APPRENTICE PROGRAM: A REFLECTIVE AND GUIDED WELCOME

By Avery Kernan, Dean of Apprentice Program

**T**he HMI Apprentice Program has always been a staple of the HMI Semester, dating back to Semester 1. Apprentices play an integral role in the overall function of each semester and contribute to the zest and uniqueness of each semester group. When I began overseeing the Apprentice Program in the fall of 2019, my biggest qualm was that we were asking recent college graduates to pay to work at HMI. The idea to change the financial structure of the Apprentice Program came alongside one of our strategic goals: to increase the diversity of our faculty, staff, and apprentices by increasing the accessibility of HMI.

Last fall, HMI Director of Admissions Ray McGaughey and I connected with other semester schools as well as several of our sending schools to learn about different models for successful teaching fellow programs. HMI is currently the only semester school with a one-semester apprenticeship model and we have the largest apprentice cohort at seven per semester. I think both of these things are huge strengths for HMI. We are able to welcome 14 new adults into our community each year through the Apprentice Program and apprentices get a five month test period in classroom education, residential life, and outdoor education. It's an excellent way to gain experience in different types of education and see what fits and what doesn't. Apprentices also always revel in the cohort aspect of the Apprentice Program. With a group of seven they're able to have their own community—they live in the West Building on campus and spend over a week together



on a backcountry training trip where they learn wilderness skills and connect with one another before students arrive.

When we looked to change the model of the Apprentice Program there was a lot of potential for modification—size, length of the program, day to day duties, etc. After speaking with other programs, receiving feedback from current and past apprentices, and considering the outcomes of both our semester students and apprentices, we decided to leave the program largely unchanged other than providing a stipend.

The first stipended apprentice cohort started this fall with Semester 47, and while we're just two and half months into the semester, it feels like a tangible change. Even though we made the change mid-application cycle, in early February 2021, our application numbers doubled and the racial, socioeconomic, and cultural diversity of the applicant pool drastically increased.

My hope is that the Apprentice Program serves a pathway for people who aren't previously experienced in one or all aspects of HMI—wilderness, teaching, and residential life—to get a reflective and guided welcome to all three of those things. ■

**IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS INTERESTED IN THE PROGRAM PLEASE REACH OUT BY EMAILING**

**AKERNAN@HMINET.ORG.**



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see campus, and share HMI  
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IN LEADVILLE!**

**June 9 – 11, 2023**

**25-YEAR  
REUNION**