

HIGH MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE

when nature & minds meet

— SPRING 2023 —



LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD





This spring, we are turning our attention to celebrating our 25th anniversary as a school! In 1998, Semester 1 began with 21 courageous students. Since then, we've grown to serve over 150 students annually with thriving Semester, Summer Term, and Gap programs. This year also marks a big year of transition, as we welcome new Head of School Sam Critchlow to campus in July. What hasn't changed in 25 years is the feeling of nervous anticipation that students have upon arrival to campus, and the amazing wealth of experiences and feeling of community that they leave HMI with. In addition to sharing information about our 25th Anniversary Reunion weekend in June, we are excited to offer a glimpse of what it's like to live in on-campus housing, share exciting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work happening throughout our programs, and highlight several employees who help make HMI such a fabulous place. Thanks to each of you for being such an integral part of the HMI community, and happy reading!

THROUGH OUR LENS



- 04** LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD
- 06** 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
- 09** DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION AT HMI
- 10** EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT
- 12** AFFINITY SPACES AT HMI
- 14** LIFE ON GREY JAY WAY



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

LOOKING BACK. MOVING FORWARD.

Our purpose—to engage students with the natural world and help them realize their leadership potential—is what defines our programs, what unites our employees, and what makes our school special and important.



This spring's newsletter focuses on the theme of "looking back, moving forward," as we prepare this summer to celebrate HMI's 25th anniversary. This is a major milestone for our beloved school, and one worthy of much celebration.

HMI has certainly transformed in the past 25 years to meet the needs of our students and our community members; our physical campus includes more cabins, up-to-date academic spaces, and an expanded kitchen and dining facility. Our second driveway, aptly named Grey Jay Way, leads to an on-campus residential community of employees, partners, and family members (human and canine). Our programs have also expanded to include Gap and Summer Term sessions, professional development expeditions for educators across the country, and custom trips for schools. We are expanding our school's outreach in the nonprofit sector and developing strong partnerships with local, state, and national organizations working to build a more inclusive outdoors.

Despite these changes, HMI's core remains the same and our mission remains strong and relevant. Our purpose—to engage students with the natural world and help them realize their leadership potential—is what defines our programs, what unites our employees, and what makes our school special and important. One of my favorite parts of my job is visiting with families and alumni across the country and hearing how they have taken the life lessons learned at our school—in the backcountry, in classrooms, in cabins—and used them to affect positive change in communities beyond HMI. That is our mission in action and these stories show how HMI's mission thrives, far beyond graduation.

I am deeply proud of our school's roots and our more recent branches, and I'm excited to see what the next 25 years have in store for HMI. On a more personal note, I will be watching these changes from afar, as this summer my family will be moving to southern California to start a new chapter. It has been a great honor to serve the school in the interim Head role this year. While that final drive down Grey Jay Way this summer will be a sad one, I will bring with me countless memories, great excitement for incoming Head of School Sam Critchlow, and, most importantly, fondness and deep respect for the employees who make this school so special.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Roberts". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Amy Roberts,
Interim Head of School



In 1994, Molly and Christopher Barnes, alongside Peter Neill, hatched the idea for the High Mountain Institute.

In 1998, Semester 1 began with 21 courageous students and since then our program has grown to serve over 150 students annually through our Semester, Summer Term, and Gap programs. Now, in 2023, we have over 1,500 alumni across the country (and world), and we are a leader in the semester school and experiential education worlds. We have much to be proud of as we look back on 25 years of successful programming, and look forward to many more.



We asked alumni why they are excited about returning to HMI for the reunion this summer, here's what they had to say:

“I can’t wait to be back in Leadville to catch up with friends and hike some of my favorite mountains! I met so many fun new folks at the last reunion, and I love that these events allow my HMI community to grow!”

— Caroline Santinelli, Alumni Council Member, Semester 37 Apprentice

“I’m excited to visit the place I call home and meet others who have experienced the HMI magic!”

— Cheney Ramos, Semester 40 Student

“I can’t wait to see the people who helped me become my best self.”

— Lenny Lorenz, Semester 43 Student

“Reuniting with friends, faculty, and apprentices I haven’t seen for years.”

— Jane Lovett, Semester 44 & Summer Term 2019 Student

“The sense of community at HMI and in Leadville.”

— Katie Overstrum, Summer Term 2015 Student

“To find my home away from home again with the coolest people.”

— Josie Herr, Semester 48 Student

This June 9th-11th, we hope you’ll join us in celebrating 25 years of HMI by returning to campus for a weekend of adventure, community, and connection.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

THURSDAY, JUNE 8

- Alumni of Color Retreat Begins

FRIDAY, JUNE 9

- Campus Tours
- Welcome Reception at Head of School House
- Dinner in Leadville (Reservations Recommended)
- Bonfire and S'mores on Campus

SATURDAY, JUNE 10

- Fun Run
- Activities (Turquoise Lake Hike & Picnic, Affinity Space Meetings, Coffee House, networking hour, time to explore Leadville, and more!)
- BBQ dinner, auction, and live music
- Dance Party with surprise DJ!

SUNDAY, JUNE 11

- Breakfast
- Walk on 5A to the Beaver Ponds
- Say goodbyes



ALUMNI OF COLOR RETREAT

JUNE 8TH-9TH

GOING BACK TO OUR ROOTS...
REUNITED TO ELEVATE OUR VOICES

This June, we are excited to host our second Alumni of Color Retreat. The theme of this year's retreat is "Returning to our roots and elevating our voices". We look forward to reconnecting and sharing stories as students and alums.

A lot has changed since the last Alumni of Color retreat—we now have an established affinity space, Hikers of Hue, and increased initiatives surrounding inclusion at HMI. There is more student diversity in our programs, and thanks to the efforts of HMI employees, we regularly have conversations about race and identity.

The stories that HMI alumni of color share are not a monolith—they are each person's personal story. Through these stories, we help build a more inclusive school and a strong sense of community belonging.

We are proud of the alumni of color who came before and helped define what diversity and belonging mean at HMI. During the retreat we will share stories about grief, pain, successes, and excitement. We will return to our roots to elevate our voices and be proud of who we are.

The retreat will begin midday on Thursday June 8th, 2023, and will roll into the 25-Year Reunion on June 9th. We will have speakers throughout the retreat and plan to spend time outside hiking with the potential for some alpine plunges!

Our hope for this retreat is to process, heal, and reconnect. This is our opportunity to be together and share stories. See you on June 8th!



2018 Alumni of Color Retreat

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON JOINING THE RETREAT,
EMAIL LUPE AT [LBOBADILLA@HMINET.ORG](mailto:lBobadilla@hminet.org)

REGISTRATION/TICKETING

Register online at hminet.org/25-year-reunion

- Regular Ticket Price = \$75
- Kids ages 5-15 = \$25
- Kids under 5 = Free!
- **If the cost of attending the reunion is prohibitive to you, please email Barrett (bdonovan@hminet.org)—we want everyone to be able to attend and will work with you to make it happen.*

LODGING

- Cabins = \$50
- Borrow an HMI tarp and camp on campus = \$15
- Bring your own tent and camp on campus = Free!

TRANSPORTATION

- Shuttles from Denver International Airport to and from HMI will be available. Pricing and details can be found online.

THE FUTURE OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION AT HMI

By Lupe Bobadilla, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Admissions Officer



This year has been an exciting year of growth for DEI initiatives at HMI. We are expanding the school's outreach into the nonprofit world, piloting a Student Diversity Council to bolster student voice and choice in inclusion efforts in the semester program, and we are transitioning from a part-time to a full-time Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). After working for the past two years in this role, the need for this growth is clear.

Over the years, there has been an increased need for support for students and employees across our programs and this shift will allow us to focus on the needs of the full HMI community. Our employees are engaging in more conversations about equity, inclusion, and belonging, and this shift will allow us to provide more in-house equity professional development opportunities. In addition to the Student Diversity Council, we have defined student affinity spaces on campus (learn more on pages 12-13). This change will also allow for more interaction with alumni, continued work with the Alumni Council DEI Subcommittee, and outreach beyond the HMI community.



This shift from a part-time to a full-time role is necessary to address the needs of students and educators. It represents a cultural change at HMI and helps hold the institution accountable. Every DEI practitioner that comes to HMI will bring passion and personal stories—the full-time role allows for creativity and implementing programs for the betterment of the community as we strive to cultivate a culture of belonging, inclusion, and clear and open communication. HMI represents a different culture now than it did in its first 20 years, and to address the diversity of our community, this change became imperative.

We must acknowledge the work and effort it took to cement this role. This role is in its early years; however, I have been humbled to serve as the first director and am excited for the next successor. I am saddened to say this will be my last semester at HMI, and I will move on in the summer's end. Working in this community has been a privilege and fun, and I look forward to applying my skill sets elsewhere. The work is never-ending, and this role is essential as we continue to grow our diversity and inclusion efforts. ■

HMI EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

On Expedition, we often play a game called “Spotlight” where each night of the trip, someone takes a turn telling the group about themselves, and answering questions that range anywhere from “Is a pizza a pie?” to “Where do you find meaning in life?” As we approach our 25th anniversary, we want to celebrate our fabulous faculty and staff by putting the spotlight on one of our longest serving employees, Ray McGaughey and one of our newest employees, Yanitsa Rodriguez.

HMI 2.0

By Ray McGaughey,
Director of Admissions
& Financial Aid, Semester 15 Alum

Did I know what I was getting myself into when I applied to HMI nearly twenty years ago? Did I realize that the trajectory of my life was about to change so dramatically? Absolutely not! In the years following my HMI Semester, I returned to this place again and again. HMI is so powerful, positive, and fun; I couldn’t stay away. I was first drawn back as a Summer Intern, then an Alumni Council volunteer, and finally, eight years ago, I joined the HMI staff as Director of Admissions.

Returning to work at HMI full-time was like experiencing the program all over again, but with a twist. I call it “HMI 2.0.” Just like how HMI is a whole new world for our students, moving to the small rural town of Leadville was quite a shock for me! Feedback remains as central as ever in HMI 2.0, although now I am the one teaching and modeling the practice. Instead of being mentored, I am now



the mentor. But just like HMI 1.0, I am still surrounded by passionate, brilliant, goofy outdoorspeople. Like HMI 1.0, a part of me wants the experience to never end.

I am so proud of the work my admissions colleagues and I have accomplished during my HMI 2.0. We enrolled 793 Semester students and 240 Summer Term students. We allocated over \$6 million in financial aid in order to make HMI possible for a broad spectrum of families. We helped rebrand the HMI Summer Term. We built reliable new admissions pipelines that attract high-achieving, low-income

students to our school. In fact, in this last area, some might say we have done “too good of a job.” HMI now experiences far more demand for our financial aid than our budget allows.

This summer I will be moving into a new role as HMI’s Director of Development. I am so excited for this next chapter (HMI 3.0?!) and the opportunity to connect with alumni and families in a new capacity. HMI has nurtured me personally, professionally, and spiritually. How fortunate am I to have found this wonderful school all those years ago? ■

MAKING THE MOVE TO HMI

By Yanitsa Rodriguez, Gap Admissions Associate & Digital Marketing Manager

My name is Yanitsa Rodriguez and I am from the very hot and humid Houston, TX. My move to Leadville has definitely been such a new and awe-inspiring experience—most especially experiencing my first true winter! I graduated college from Texas A&M University in 2021. While there, I spent the second half of college conducting sociological research on the mental and emotional health experiences of legal, health, education, and social service providers for asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors. I was moved most especially by the educators I interviewed during my research, and how many of them were working in high-need communities across the public school system. The time I dedicated to observing these systems informed my post grad plans to get involved in education and promote equitable education.

After graduation, I joined Teach for America as a corps member and was placed to teach high school Spanish in Birmingham, AL. There I grew strong relationships with some extremely incredible students by teaching Spanish and coaching girls varsity soccer. The area and community I taught in experienced gang and gun violence that ranked atop the nation’s statistics, and this was very difficult at times in the role of an educator. Many of my students experienced very difficult and tragic events as a result of systemic violence. During this time, I began to find healing in yoga, most especially outdoor yoga, and began to first realize how the outdoors felt like a venue of relief at that time. I even began teaching some of my class periods outside and conducted class out on the turf of the football field. I saw power in the way the natural world had a strong positive



influence on how my students learned and even observed such positive shifts in their mood, just throughout the time in a class period. I would like to believe this inkling was what led me to explore outdoor education and eventually led to my now dreamy reality at HMI.

I am so happy and feel very appreciative of the supportive HMI community, as I grow in my relationship with the outdoors and natural world. I also find my background very unique and believe it can contribute greatly to diversifying outdoor education and making the outdoors an inclusive place for all to explore.

I now work in the HMI Gap Program, as the Admissions Associate and Digital Marketing Manager. I get to work with newly graduated high school students and even college students looking to take gap time! I feel so jealous sometimes of HMI students because I just WISH I knew about HMI when I was younger and in school still. However, it has been so transformative and magical getting to experience it through the lens of an adult and employee. I am so happy and feel very appreciative of the supportive HMI community, as I grow in my relationship with the outdoors and natural world. I also find my background very unique and believe it can contribute greatly to diversifying outdoor education and making the outdoors an inclusive place for all to explore. I look forward to going on my first expedition this summer and have already enjoyed learning to rock climb and ski for the very first time! Living in Leadville still feels unreal to me with how beautiful it is to be hanging out up here with the mountains. Making the move to Leadville has felt more like an entire experience, rather than just moving for a job. ■

AFFINITY SPACES AT HMI

An Affinity Space is a place and time for people who share a common identity to come together to share experiences, connection, and conversation. At HMI, we hold weekly Affinity Spaces for students of color, and for students who identify as queer or questioning in regards to their gender identity and/or sexuality. Each Affinity Space has a faculty mentor and is open to any student who wants to opt in based on their self-identification. Affinity Spaces are different than clubs or interest groups (which can be started by students at any time throughout the semester) because they are centered around shared identities that have been traditionally marginalized. Students who do not share an identity associated with an established Affinity Space on campus are encouraged to be allies for those students who do.



Semester 49 Hikers of Hue Affinity Expedition

HIKERS OF HUE AFFINITY SPACE

By Lupe Bobadilla, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Admissions Officer

space for semester students on a weekly basis. After a year of facilitating the affinity space, Semester 45 students wanted a unique and fitting name—that is when the name “Hikers of Hue” came to fruition.

Hikers of Hue represents a space of grief, a moment of healing, and a time to celebrate. Through this space, we have the opportunity to feel our authentic selves and not have the pressure to prove anything to anyone. Often we are the representation; we experience imposter syndrome. But in Hikers of Hue, we feel we belong.

We know we have different racial and cultural experiences; therefore, Hikers of Hue is a beautiful space where we celebrate our identities. Through this space, we get to share stories and not explain the trauma behind said stories. We get to just be.

I am glad to be part of a space where we get to process and make HMI feel like home. ■

“There is an affinity group at [HMI]... and that has been really crucial to my experience of feeling a sense of belonging.”

—Semester 49 Student

Q² AFFINITY SPACE

By Jessi Friedman, Math Faculty, Semester 46 Apprentice, Semester 34 Student



As an apprentice in Semester 46, Q² was the first affinity space I had ever attended. It was impactful for me to find queer community amongst students and fellow adults. I felt safe, understood, and free to let go of the burden of labels to be my most authentic, whole self.

As a space that feels special to my journey and my experience supporting students, I am honored to lead Q² at HMI this year. Q² stands for Queer and Questioning and is an affinity space open to students who identify as LGBTQIA+ and/or are questioning any part of their gender identity or sexual orientation. The space was initially designed by students in Semester 40, and HMI now holds space for Q² every semester.

Though many schools have affinity spaces for the LGBTQIA+ community, HMI offers a unique opportunity for students to explore their identities. With our “clean slate” community norm and a new space away from sending schools and familiar faces, students can explore and celebrate their identities with more confidentiality and fewer preconceived ideas of who they are or should be.

Q² offers a powerful space to explore our own identity. Sometimes, labeling our identities can feel like a meaningful way to communicate who we are to other people (often those outside of the LGBTQ+ community). In Q², we show up as ourselves without any pressure to name who we are—it only matters that we gather in Stuen each week together to share laughter, Oreos, and thoughtful conversation.

This allows us not only to explore ourselves more deeply beyond the limitations of labels but also can lead us to find or try on new labels and identities that feel more affirming and true to who we are.

As a student from semester 49 said, “I am forever grateful for Q² as it gave me a safe community of people to love, laugh and talk with. Q² allowed me to feel secure within myself and my identity for the first time in my life.” Q² is a space where we celebrate our identities and learn from each other. It is a space that transforms students’ lives—and our whole community—each semester. ■

“With our “clean slate” community norm and a new space away from sending schools and familiar faces, students can explore and celebrate their identities with more confidentiality and fewer preconceived ideas of who they are or should be.”

LIFE ON GREY JAY WAY

By Barrett Donovan,
Director of Development & Community Engagement



-  **7 NEW HOMES** & **3 more** on the way!
-  **17 RESIDENTS**
-  **3 DOGS**
-  **19 CHICKENS**

HMI is intrinsically place-based, and living on campus reminds me daily of why we do this work. My morning commute is a five minute walk (when I take it slow enough) watching light play across one of the most beautiful alpine massifs in the world.

—Nathan Vish, Director of the HMI Semester

Drive down County Road 5A and you'll see a new driveway just before the turn on to main campus—Grey Jay Way. Drive down Grey Jay Way and you'll find seven new homes, 17 residents, three dogs, and 19 chickens. With the addition of on-campus housing to HMI, employees are able to live in reliable housing, an increasing challenge in Lake County. This spring, we will break ground on three additional homes with the goal of providing housing for even more employees. To get a glimpse into on-campus life, we interviewed several residents about their time on Grey Jay Way so far—here's what they had to say.



Q: WHAT'S ONE FAVORITE MEMORY FROM LIVING ON CAMPUS?

I love hosting advisory dinners at my house; inviting students to share a meal in my home always feels like an important ritual at the beginning and end of a semester. One (ambitious) semester, we rolled sushi all together on my patio. I made shrimp tempura for the first time and we had a blast making and sharing food. We kept trying to one-up each other, building larger and more elaborate rolls as the meal went on.

—Jesse Remeis, Math Faculty



Q: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SPACE IN YOUR ON CAMPUS RESIDENCE?

My favorite spot in my apartment is the couch in the middle of the downstairs space. It's where I get most of my writing and reading done in the mornings. I also can look out the sliding door to see what the birds are up to at the feeder—we get a lot of Magpies and Steller's Jays.

—Jacob Sheetz-Willard, English Faculty



Q: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SPACE IN YOUR ON CAMPUS RESIDENCE?

The kitchen! My roommate Jessi and I love to cook together, and dinner is a time where we reunite at the end of the long day to relax and hang out. We also love having folks over to cook, and enjoy getting to share the kitchen space with our friends. I have learned so much about my coworkers when we get to chat while chopping vegetables and sharing a dish we made together.

—Louisa McBride, Advancement Associate



Q: WHAT'S ONE FAVORITE MEMORY FROM LIVING ON CAMPUS?

Living on campus, we often join the students for dinner in Who's Hall. Daniel, our eldest, is thrilled each semester to meet his "new friends" when they arrive. I'll never forget the first time he insinuated himself into cook crew: he had asked if he could talk to a student he knew in the kitchen, and the next thing I knew, he was dressed in a ball cap and apron, helping make the salad. Kids respond to the level of responsibility they're offered, and that is even more true when it's other kids offering the responsibility.

—Nathan Vish, Director of the HMI Semester



Q: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT LIVING ON CAMPUS?

My favorite part about living on campus is the access to the nordic trails and being able to walk to work! The best space in the house is either the kitchen or the tv room for watching good reality TV with friends.

—Emily Shannon, Rations Manager

HIGH MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE

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