The High Mountain Institute (HMI) is an independent semester school and gap semester provider that focuses on experiential education and wilderness expeditions. With an eye toward building on HMI’s core successes over its first 25 years, the High Mountain Institute welcomes nominations and applications for an innovative, thoughtful, and inspiring leader to serve as its next Head of School beginning July 1, 2023.

ABOUT THE HIGH MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE

The High Mountain Institute was founded in 1995 by Christopher and Molly Barnes. Experienced in classroom and outdoor education, Christopher and Molly realized that no opportunity existed to combine the two pedagogies during the academic year. The two set out to create HMI, the place “where nature and minds meet.” The school opened its doors in the fall of 1998 with a cohort of 21 students forming the inaugural HMI Semester. Enrollment grew steadily in the following years, and the HMI Semester program now welcomes approximately 50 students per semester. HMI’s programs now also include a Summer Term for high school students and a Gap Semester program for recent high school graduates. The HMI campus has also grown, doubling in size from 40 to 80 acres in 2011, and increasing the number of academic and residential buildings that make up its campus in Leadville, Colorado. After co-leading the school together for nearly twenty years, Molly and Christopher Barnes departed HMI in 2013.

Under the leadership of current Head of School Danny O’Brien, who has led the school since 2013, HMI began offering gap year programming and has experienced record enrollment and application numbers for the HMI Semester and Summer Term. Also under Danny’s tenure, HMI has significantly expanded its endowment and completed an ambitious capital campaign to revitalize and expand its campus, with the completion of a campus master plan that includes on-campus faculty and staff housing and new academic facilities. Today, there are over 2,000 HMI alumni across the globe and HMI is recognized nationally as a leader in experiential education.

MISSION & CORE VALUES

Mission: The High Mountain Institute engages students with the natural world. Our school boldly unites rigorous intellectual inquiry, experiential learning, wilderness expeditions, and shared responsibility in a strong community. Our students realize their potential—as leaders, independent thinkers, and thoughtful citizens.
HMI upholds these core values in living out its mission:

- Mentorship in and out of the classroom
- Transference of what students learn beyond HMI
- Place- and community-based education
- Process-based learning that teaches students how to think, not what to think and conveys a passion for learning
- Integration of the natural world, academics, and residential life

PROGRAMS & AFFORDABILITY

Students come to HMI for life-changing experiences during a high school semester or summer term, or in the years immediately following high school for a gap semester. The Apprentice Program, a teaching fellowship program, works with college graduates beginning a career in education, and the Educators’ Expedition offers summer professional development for teachers and school administrators. From HMI’s campus high in the Rocky Mountains to the wilds of Patagonia, HMI students are given the tools to challenge themselves and think in new ways, creating the foundation for rigorous intellectual experiences.

Place-based and experiential learning are hallmarks of the HMI curriculum. Ecology courses come to life on the banks of the nearby Arkansas River; history lessons on western water rights are made explicit on trips through the Colorado backcountry; students immerse themselves in discussions of how indigenous peoples and later settlers interacted with the natural world as they travel into the desert of Southeastern Utah. Intentional community is at the center of HMI’s residential life curriculum, where students and adults alike take part in creating a community of shared responsibility on campus and beyond. From chopping the wood that heats their cabins to participating in daily chores, students help clean and maintain HMI’s scenic campus nestled at the base of Colorado’s Sawatch mountains.

HMI believes all qualified students should have access to the unique educational opportunities at HMI. The school seeks to meet the full demonstrated need of every student accepted. If a student is accepted and they qualify for financial aid, HMI will strive to offer a financial aid package that makes it affordable for a student’s family. HMI distributes over $1 million in aid annually. The average award is 72 percent of tuition, and 31 percent of students receive financial aid to attend HMI. In addition to tuition assistance, HMI comprehensive financial aid awards may also include free gear rental, technology assistance, and flights to and from Colorado.
**HMI Semester Program**
The **HMI Semester** is akin to a college study abroad program, but for high school students. HMI’s students, primarily high school juniors from public and private schools across the country, spend a full academic semester at HMI and return to their home schools invigorated about education, experienced in leadership, and more aware of the natural world around them. Students who attend the HMI Semester live on HMI’s campus surrounded by curious and ambitious peers in sustainable, off-the-grid cabins. Unique to HMI, students spend five weeks of the semester on extended backpacking and skiing expeditions in the mountains of Colorado and the canyons of Utah with their teachers and classmates. These wilderness expeditions—where students are challenged to push themselves, support their peers, and strive to reach their full potential—are the core of the HMI Semester experience. Over the course of the semester, students also complete a full course load of honors and AP-level classes that allow them to reintegrate smoothly into their home academic environments. In their remaining years of high school and beyond, alumni consider their semester at HMI one of the most important and formative periods of their lives. **HMI serves approximately 100 Semester students each year.**

**HMI Gap Semester Program**
Geared toward recent high school graduates, HMI’s **Gap Semesters** unite outdoor adventure, environmental service, and leadership development on an uninterrupted journey to some of the world’s most awe-inspiring places. HMI’s three Gap programs are conducted entirely in the field; each course goes into great depth to advance students’ skill in either rock climbing or wilderness travel. Through experiential and field-based activities, students also explore complex cultural, environmental, and ecological issues in the areas that they visit. These experiences are grounded in an intentional community, with activities such as evening “Circle,” weekly community meetings, and group discussions forming the foundation of a strong sense of community. Students return from HMI Gap transformed, carrying with them the confidence, passion, and readiness to excel in college, graduate school, and beyond. **HMI serves 50-60 Gap students each year.**

**HMI Summer Term Program**
During the **HMI Summer Term**, rising 10th, 11th, and 12th graders discover their best selves over two backpacking trips in the Rocky Mountains, exploring the reaches of their potential and how to lead others. Through a series of writing workshops, students find their voices and gain experience with college-level writing, ultimately producing a polished essay that can be used for college applications or as a compelling personal statement. Leadership and communication theory are central to the mission of HMI; in addition to wilderness skills, students practice leadership skills and learn how to collaborate and communicate with people from diverse backgrounds. They leave the Summer Term with the tools to thrive in high school classes, on sports teams, and as leaders in extracurricular activities. **HMI serves 30-40 Summer Term students each year.**
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

HMI’s work on diversity, equity, and inclusion is guided by the school’s Diversity & Inclusion Statement, which was developed in consultation with students, faculty, trustees, and alumni:

The High Mountain Institute believes that both diversity and inclusion are essential to growth and learning. 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.

At HMI, inclusiveness starts with an intentional and affirming community. Creating such a community is our priority. We connect deeply to each other through classes, wilderness expeditions, and shared responsibilities. We prioritize open communication and honest conflict resolution. These efforts inspire us to build trust, to value diverging perspectives, and to build communities greater than ourselves.

Historically, outdoor programs like HMI have attracted largely white and privileged populations. At times, this has made it challenging for all at our school to feel fully part of our community. We seek to address these challenges at HMI by increasing the diversity of our students, faculty, staff, trustees, and advisers; by creating classes and activities that explore and reflect students’ identities; by expanding the cultural competence of faculty and staff; and by continually challenging the assumptions we hold.

We engage with this challenging work because we are committed to building an exceptional learning environment rooted in community—not just for some, but for all who seek to be inspired by the natural world.

To learn more about HMI’s diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and initiatives, please visit the Diversity & Inclusion page on HMI’s website.

LOCATION

The High Mountain Institute is located in Leadville, CO. Sitting at the edge of the White River National Forest, HMI’s campus offers an inspirational setting for students to interact with the natural world and engage with their peers and teachers. At 9,600 feet above sea level, HMI is one of the highest-elevation schools in North America, with breathtaking views of Mt. Massive and Mt. Elbert, Colorado’s highest peak. HMI’s campus lies just 10 minutes from downtown Leadville, a national historic district with buildings dating back to the 1880s. Students have the chance to explore “America’s Highest Incorporated City” on the weekends, taking in its stores, coffee shops, and historic character. No visit to town is complete without a stop at Melanzana, Leadville’s hometown outdoor apparel company, and City on a Hill, a local coffee shop and art gallery.

As a place to call home, the town of Leadville—and the greater Lake County area of 8,000 residents—offer an enormous array of outdoor activities and other recreational opportunities. Leadville is surrounded by almost unlimited public lands for hiking, biking, walking, trail running, and skiing, and the region boasts the highest concentration of 14,000-foot peaks in the nation. The town is located at the headwaters of the Arkansas River, a popular whitewater rafting river. Inside city limits, Leadville’s picturesque, walkable downtown includes shops, restaurants, and other businesses. Leadville is also home to the residential campus of Colorado Mountain College. World-class skiing can be found in every direction, with Vail, Breckenridge, and Copper Mountain all within an hour’s drive. Leadville is just 90 minutes from the cultural hub of Denver and 2 hours from the Denver International Airport, which offers non-stop flights to destinations across the country.
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP & STRATEGIC PLANNING

HMI is governed by a talented Board of Trustees composed of current and past parents, alumni, and others who bring a wide array of skills and experiences. The Board is responsible for ensuring that HMI’s mission is relevant and vital to the students HMI serves, and for monitoring the success in fulfilling that mission. To this aim, the Board takes the lead in strategic planning efforts and in stewarding HMI’s financial resources.

Working with Head of School Danny O’Brien, HMI’s Board of Trustees unveiled a new five-year strategic plan for HMI in 2019. This bold plan for HMI’s future is organized around five overarching strategic goals: (1) Advance Efforts in Diversity, Access, Equity, and Inclusion; (2) Sustain and Communicate Our Success; (3) Support Our People; (4) Enhance and Expand Our Facilities; (5) Explore Programmatic Expansion. To learn more about these goals and HMI’s progress in realizing them, please refer to HMI’s annual impact reports, which also include financial information and other institutional statistics.

THE ROLE OF HEAD OF SCHOOL

HMI’s Head of School serves as chief executive officer overseeing all aspects of HMI’s programs and operational functions. The Head of School is appointed by and reports to the Board of Trustees. The Head of School lives on HMI’s residential campus, in community with students, faculty, and staff. The Head of School leads a senior administrative leadership team of eight: Director of Finance & Operations, Director of Wilderness Programs & Risk Management, Director of Admissions, Director of Communication & Engagement, Director of DEI, Director of HMI Semester, Dean of Apprentice Program, and Director of HMI Gap.

Compensation and benefits are competitive for this role, which are detailed below:
- Annual salary of $160,000–$220,000 (dependent on experience)
- Health, dental, and vision benefits
- 4-9 percent retirement benefits match after one year of service
- Six weeks of vacation per year
- On-campus housing in Head of School house (condition of employment)

STRENGTHS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES

HMI is in an excellent position to build on its existing strengths. As HMI’s alumni and alumni families attest, HMI offers programs that truly change students’ lives. HMI’s faculty and staff are incredibly passionate about the work they do and proud of the outcomes their students achieve. The HMI Semester—the backbone of the school’s programmatic offerings—is consistently fully enrolled, typically with a strong waitlist of students from across the country. With strong philanthropic support from alumni and families, HMI’s endowment has grown fivefold over the past decade. And with the recent completion of the campus master plan, HMI’s physical facilities are beautifully constructed, fully updated, and well maintained; the facilities are powered by an on-campus solar array, and the newest buildings include a fully funded maintenance endowment.
In addition to providing engaged and strategic leadership to sustain this success, the next Head of School will embrace the following opportunities and challenges:

- **Leading HMI to become a more diverse, inclusive, and supportive community:** The Head of School will prioritize active listening, open communication, and collaboration among all HMI community members, including students, parents, faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni, and work to cultivate a diverse, inclusive, and supportive community where all students are known and valued in both their strengths and challenges. The Head will build strong relationships within the community in a kind and supportive manner so that all feel a genuine sense of belonging and trust in school leadership. They will champion initiatives that promote diversity among students and families, faculty, and staff, and help connect the ongoing DEI work across all areas of the school. The Head must be a conversant learner and demonstrated leader in diversity, equity, and inclusion along multiple axes, including race, class, gender and gender identity, ability, religion, and sexual orientation.

- **Fostering academic excellence and faculty well-being and growth:** The Head of School will partner with a talented faculty committed to academic excellence, and work to nurture an atmosphere of professional growth and unwavering support within a diverse, vibrant community. They will ensure HMI attracts, develops, and retains an outstanding and diverse faculty and staff to support HMI’s programs and students. The Head will be an advocate for innovation, creativity, and best pedagogical practices in academics and experiential learning and build upon HMI’s commitment to its core values, all while ensuring faculty have access to the resources necessary to achieve excellence across programmatic offerings.

- **Maintaining and expanding engagement with HMI alumni:** HMI is a unique community in which new cohorts of students arrive and depart each semester. While students may only be on campus for a relatively short period of time, HMI has an immeasurable impact on students’ lives. HMI’s alumni serve as some of the most effective ambassadors in telling HMI’s story. In partnership with the Director of Communication & Engagement, the next Head of School will work to increase engagement with HMI’s alumni across all programs (Semester, Summer Term, Gap, and Apprentice) to ensure that their connection to HMI continues long after departing Leadville.

- **Strengthening HMI’s financial future:** The Head of School will develop and sustain relationships with individual donors and other funding sources, and will work to continue bolstering enrollment, including continuing to enhance the school’s ability to attract and support a diverse student body in partnership with the Director of Admissions. They will maintain and strengthen close relationships with sending schools, partner organizations, and the surrounding community to elevate HMI’s brand awareness. The Head will engage in strategic fiscal management, particularly working with the Board and the Director of Finance & Operations on developing creative solutions to help the school provide competitive compensation packages while balancing tuition increases. They will further enhance the HMI’s financial standing by engaging alumni, friends, and other key supporters to grow and diversify the school’s resource base and programmatic offerings toward continuing to ensure long-term sustainability.
• Being a visible and engaging presence on and off campus to strengthen HMI’s inclusive, positive, and supportive culture. The successful Head of School will build upon a strong sense of support and camaraderie within the HMI community of students, faculty, and staff. The HMI community is a family, and the next Head will have the opportunity to strengthen that bond by prioritizing communication and collaboration among all community members. Equally, the Head will engage with the surrounding community of Leadville as an energetic ambassador for the school and its values. The Head will serve as a model for the community, embracing and valuing new contributions and perspectives while maintaining HMI’s core values.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The ideal candidate for HMI’s next Head of School will be a highly engaged and collaborative leader with a deep understanding and appreciation for independent school education and experiential learning opportunities, particularly those with an emphasis on outdoor education and wilderness expeditions. This position requires a leader with a high level of emotional intelligence; a person who is confident and competent, with strong skills in management and leadership; one who understands the subtleties of motivating and directing a diverse group of individuals. The next Head of School will be committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts that foster an environment that equally welcomes, respects, and values all members of the community. Additionally, they will display the highest level of integrity, confidence, courage, and conviction in leading HMI. A successful candidate should possess many of the following qualities and characteristics:

- Commitment to HMI’s mission, core values, and strategic goals
- Powerful and inspirational communication skills and a collaborative, yet decisive, leadership style
- A high level of cultural competence and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, both in their approach to the work and in building relationships with students, faculty, and other community members
- A spirit of innovation to develop and deepen programmatic offerings that align with HMI’s core principles
- Passion for outdoor experiential learning and the wilderness
- Demonstrated commitment to supporting faculty in the areas of compensation, professional development, and overall well-being
- Proactive, hands-on leadership, strong problem-solving skills, and initiative
- Ability to work with a broad array of constituencies, both in terms of identities and roles – donors, alumni, students, parents, faculty, staff, board members, and community members – to drive support for HMI’s priorities
- High emotional intelligence, along with warmth, energy, and enthusiasm
- Genuine passion for working with adolescents, coupled with a sense of humor and inspirational character
- Demonstrated success in organizational leadership and fiscal and risk management, especially in an educational or nonprofit setting
- Entrepreneurialism in building and sustaining philanthropic relationships to support both short-term priorities and long-range strategic goals
- A successful track record with enrollment management, including recruitment and retention
- Previous experience working in independent school or nonprofit leadership with a track record of innovation and increasing responsibilities
- 5-10 years of experience as a teacher and administrator
- Master’s degree or equivalent
APPLICATION PROCESS

The search committee for HMI’s next Head of School will begin accepting nominations and reviewing applications immediately. Requested application materials at this stage include a letter of interest and current resume. For best consideration, application materials should be received no later than July 31, 2022. Candidate materials should be sent to the following email address: HMIHOS@storbecksearch.com.

The High Mountain Institute is being assisted in this search by Storbeck Search. For additional information, please contact:

Nishant Mehta, Managing Director
Sherry Coleman, Managing Director
Christopher Bernard, Search Associate
Storbeck Search
HMIHOS@storbecksearch.com

For more information about the High Mountain Institute, please visit hminet.org.

The High Mountain Institute is an equal opportunity employer that strives for diversity by honoring the differences of each member of the community. We seek to build a community (of trustees, faculty, staff, and students) that represents ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity and that brings a diversity of experience, background, talent, and perspective.