

INSIDE 'SCIENTOLOGY HIGH'

Alumni tell secrets of \$42K-a-year hilltop school and its unorthodox teaching methods

By Benjamin Carlson Tuesday, September 27, 2011

Welcome to “Scientology High,” where students imagine they’re in a Harry Potter book, make lots of clay models, look up “the” in the dictionary and learn the ethical principles of L. Ron Hubbard — all while paying more than \$42,000 a year in tuition and fees.

The administration of the secretive and secluded Delphian boarding school recruits students with the suggestion that it is a real-world Hogwarts — an enchanted place for teens, deep in the bucolic mountains of western Oregon.

“The school in itself, it’s different,” says one smiling teen in an official marketing video for Delphian School. “You know, it’s on a hill, and I’m a big Harry Potter fan ... You’ve got the Forbidden Forest out there, it’s like, awesome.” A fresh-faced female student describes it as “kinda magical.” In the video, a swooping shot from a helicopter shows ethereal rays of sunlight illuminating the school’s centerpiece building, an old Jesuit monastery surrounded by towering pines.

But there may be reason to question whether all is magic and wonder on that 800-acre Oregon campus. The institution, which counts Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman’s daughter among its former students, charges more in tuition and fees than Phillips Exeter Academy. Yet it lacks academic accreditation, and relies on Hubbard-inspired teaching methods rejected by mainstream education experts.

Founded in the 1970s by Scientologists, Delphian has remained largely a mystery for decades. But with the unraveling of the church’s public face, alumni of the school have begun to speak out.

For this exclusive two-part series, The Daily extensively interviewed numerous former students, obtaining a more detailed behind-the-scenes picture of life at the school than has ever before been reported.

The former students said their education at Delphian included a dizzying array of jargon, unorthodox notions of academic learning and an intensive and complex disciplinary system based partly on peer monitoring. Some spoke of feeling lost after leaving Delphian and attempting to adjust to the world outside of Scientology. The Daily also found that a steady stream of Delphian grads have gone on to join the Sea Org, a Church of Scientology religious order that some former participants have equated with human slavery.

From a distance, Delphian seems like any other pricey boarding school. It’s small, with roughly 250 students, and runs from the equivalent of kindergarten to the senior year of high school (known at Delphian as Form 8). The campus is gorgeous, encompassing an idyllic hilltop about 90 minutes

southwest of Portland. There are stables, tennis courts and a track. The Delphian Dragons play sports against other independent schools.

Delphian rejected The Daily's request to visit the campus, and the school headmistress and assistant headmaster declined to comment for this story.

[\(CLICK HERE TO VIEW CAMPUS MAP\)](#)

Although the word "Scientology" appears nowhere on the Delphian website, and the school is technically independent, its connections to the group are intimate and pervasive. "A good majority, if not all the staff, are Scientologists," said Elaine Ke, 18, who graduated from the school this year. Other alums back that estimate. Both the headmistress and the assistant headmaster are listed as having completed various levels of Scientology programs in the group's publications.

According to several alumni who spoke with The Daily, half or more of the students — roughly three-quarters of graduates, according to Ke — are Scientologists. And the structure of the school, its ethical code and its language all reflect the influence and precepts of Scientology.

One of the religion's most controversial institutions is the Sea Org, the poorly paid labor corps that staffs Scientology's affiliated companies. The path from the boarding school to the Sea Org seems to be well-worn.

"A lot of people who go to Delphian wind up in the Sea Org," Jenna Miscavige Hill, the niece of current church leader David Miscavige, told The Daily. A former Sea Org member herself, she has since left Scientology.

As of February, the FBI was investigating Sea Org for activities related to human trafficking and slavery, according to The New Yorker. The accounts from defectors are chilling: Enlistees sign contracts of up to a billion years, work grueling hours, are paid next to nothing and surrender many basic personal freedoms. "It was like living in George Orwell's '1984,'" one former Sea Org member told the magazine.

Miscavige Hill grew up in the Sea Org from the time she was a child. She worked 15-hour days, seven days a week, and saw her parents twice between ages 12 and 18, she told The Daily. Chuck Beatty, another former Sea Org member, said he gave 27 years of his life to the group, and spent seven years in a "Rehabilitative Project Force" group, which defectors have described to The New Yorker as "punitive re-education camps."

On top of all that, Sea Org members reportedly promise not to raise children.

One Delphian graduate, who will be called David here, arrived at the boarding school as a non-Scientologist — or a "wog," in Scientology lingo. But he found that outside the "bubble" of the school, he suffered from "culture shock" and soon dropped out of college and joined Sea Org.

“If you’re a Delphi Oregon grad, you’re always going to know someone in the Sea Org,” he told The Daily. “There’s sort of an air of mystique around it when you hear about it at Delphi. They always seem serious and they walk very fast.”

Before he knew it, he was promoted to the teams that would intercept defecting Scientologists in airports and pressure them to stay in the church’s fold.

“I got put there because I was a Delphi graduate,” he said.

He was never paid more than \$17 a week for his work and lived in a room so bare it lacked a doorknob, he said. When he decided to quit, a team of 11 Scientologists attempted to intercept him, he said, but he succeeded in making a hasty departure.

Many others never leave.

David Miscavige “has turned it into a modern-day political prison,” said David. “It’s an absolute disregard for life and liberty.”

Still, he estimated that roughly a third of his class at Delphian ended up in the Sea Org. Determining the overall rate of Sea Org enlistment among Delphian graduates is difficult, but students across a wide span of years told The Daily they knew multiple schoolmates who joined.

“I have friends who joined the Sea Org,” said Elaine Ke. She is not a Scientologist, which put her in the minority at school. (She was introduced to Delphian by a relative who is part of the church.) Just as Sea Org was an invention of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, so is the “study technology” — known as Study Tech — that shapes the Delphian curriculum.

The methods are based on Hubbard’s writings, though stripped of any spiritual language. Chuck Beatty told The Daily that Study Tech was “a watered-down version of the mainline scriptures” used in Scientology.

Study Tech revolves around three basic ideas: All educational problems arise from misunderstood words (including words as basic as “the” or “it”); abstract ideas need to be shown in pictures or clay to be grasped; and students should not progress in a subject until they master every single step.

It sounds commonsensical enough, but education experts don’t think much of it. Grover Whitehurst, former director of the Institute of Education Sciences in the U.S. Department of Education, evaluated the research supposedly supporting Study Tech, and told The Daily, “They had no credible evidence on the effect of their approach. As I looked into it, it seemed to me what seemed to be cultish practices extended to a legitimate area, which is reading difficulties.”

By the time a student leaves, the language of the outside world — that is, the “wog” world — can seem almost foreign. David, who graduated in the early 1990s, felt almost alien after he left.

“I came out of that place barely speaking English. I’d be at home, and I felt so different from everyone in the wog world,” he said. “It’s similar to Harry Potter calling the non-wizard people ‘muggles.’”

Paul Csige, who attended Delphian in the late 1990s, said the program could be narrowing. “Once you’ve been in the system for a couple years, most people find any other system a little odd,” he told The Daily.

When Mac Stevens left Delphian in 1989 to attend college, he said, he felt adrift.

“Almost immediately, I fell behind in my classwork,” he wrote of his freshman year at Harvey Mudd College. “I wasn’t used to studying with a group. I wasn’t used to the total freedom.”

Stevens flunked out after a year. He still speaks highly of Delphian, however.

Despite their unorthodox education, many Delphian students have done well in the real world. Sky Dayton, founder of Earthlink and Boingo, graduated from the school. Other graduates have gone on to become computer programmers, designers and filmmakers.

Ke came away from her alma mater with warm feelings. Now a freshman at Johns Hopkins University, she intends to study biomedical engineering.

The people of nearby Sheridan, Ore., seem to be generally puzzled by the place, though.

Kathy McIntyre, 51, who works at Lee’s Green Frog restaurant in town, seemed mystified by Delphian. “They’re pretty secretive, actually ... We’ve all heard of John L. Hubbard or whoever it is. We leave them alone, they leave us alone.”

She visited the school only once and found it frightening.

“When I was in high school, we went on a field trip up there. It was really strange and orderly and real quiet and kinda scary, actually.”

PART 2: SO WHAT'S IT ACTUALLY LIKE TO INSIDE DELPHIAN?

For more than three decades, the Scientology-affiliated Delphian School has operated without academic accreditation — but that could change soon.

The 250-student boarding academy is in the final stages of becoming a full, accredited member of the Pacific Northwest Association of Independent Schools, Meade Thayer, the executive director of the

association, told The Daily.

The association is a voluntary group with 108 members, including Bill Gates' alma mater, the Lakeside School. Currently a "candidate member" in the group, Delphian has worked for seven years to gain full standing in the association, Thayer said.

"From our standpoint, they've been doing a lot of good work on making their school a stronger school," he said. "We hope they will eventually gain that full accredited member status."

When and if that happens, this secretive and secluded Scientology boarding school would take one big step closer to the mainstream. As the flagship school of Delphi Schools Inc. — which operates seven private schools under the same educational philosophy, including day academies in Los Angeles and Boston — the Delphian School in Oregon is arguably the most prestigious Scientology-affiliated school in the world.

Think of it as the Eton or Andover of the "Dianetics" set.

But the accounts given to The Daily by former students paint a picture very different than that of your average elite boarding school. From rules and discipline, to academics theory and practice, Delphian is a place apart.

Inside and outside of class, students are subject to a sprawling and intricate set of regulations derived from L. Ron Hubbard's precepts. At Delphian, not only are sex and drugs verboten, so are casual Fridays, public kissing and facial hair. Elaine Ke, a 2011 graduate who is not a Scientologist, explained that "one of the most commonly broken rules is that you're not allowed to show any PDA except holding hands. They're pretty strict about that."

Kids at Delphian tend to get caught misbehaving in one of three ways, alumni say: Student watchdogs called "rovers" catch them, schoolmates turn them in or students voluntarily report themselves.

"It was a very fear-oriented student life," said Paul Csige, who attended Delphian in the late 1990s. Csige is not a Scientologist. "Students were encouraged to tell on other students."

On the school's "ethics and integrity" website, administrators quote one anonymous student praising this system: "My first year here was the total opposite of what I'd seen before, where the cool kids were breaking the rules, stealing, etc. Here the cool people are the ones who call you on doing that."

Csige said this includes quizzing students who yawn or have blank looks on their faces — both giveaways, according to L. Ron Hubbard's notions, of a dreaded "misunderstood word."

The consequences of a "misunderstood" can be grueling, Csige said. Students suspected of not fully grasping every word that they've spoken, read or heard can be subjected to a "method 3" questioning,

he said. When this happens, “you have to read aloud, and if you pause and hesitate, you have to look [the word] up. And if you pause or hesitate again, you have to look up every word in the definition. It once took me three days to go through two and a half pages. They ask you the definition of ‘the,’ and I didn’t know what the precise definition of ‘the’ was.”

If caught for a more serious breach, like making out in the woods or a broom closet, students can be sent to the ethics officer. Someone who misbehaves — a condition called “out ethics,” in Delphian’s lingo — might need to make “amends” by doing chores for whomever he wronged.

Rule-breakers’ names and violations are also listed on a sheet called the “Golden Rod” that hangs on the ethics officer’s door, alumni said.

[\(CLICK FOR MORE DELPHIAN PHOTOS\)](#)

“If you were a real joker kind of person, you probably would have had a tough time,” said Mac Stevens, who graduated in 1989 and went to 16 straight Delphian alumni weekends until 2009, when he was told he was a “bigot” and was no longer welcome. He said he suspects this is because he had repudiated Scientology in an open letter.

“I considered the staff there my family,” he said. “It was very, very difficult for me, and it’s still kind of tough.”

The account is consistent with stories of former Scientologists being cut off from friendships, marriages and family relationships after leaving the church.

Apart from individualized courses and strict rules, alumni said that daily manual labor and hands-on learning exercises — in particular, clay modeling — are an integral part of the Delphian experience. Csige said that, as a high schooler, he was asked to sculpt the numbers one through 10 in clay. He began smashing the clay into the shape “3”, but was told this didn’t have enough “mass.” To show the number three, he had to roll up three balls of clay.

The students also do drills called “TRs” — “training routines.” One such drill conducted at Delphian requires students to sit still for two hours staring into another student’s face. If you flinch or slump, you fail, and have to start over.

The most exciting drill is TR-3, or “bull baiting,” Ke said. This assignment requires students to sit without twitching or laughing while other students tease them, make faces or say lewd things.

“It’s the funniest thing in the world when you watch people do it,” she said. “We’re 17, 16 at this time. A lot of what people say at this time has to do with sex and boyfriends, things like that ... It’s like one of the best things to witness at Delphi.”

A more advanced drill called “TR-7: High School Indoc.” is designed to teach students how to make people do what they are told, by physical force if necessary.

Ke explained, “You learn to control your body, and to control other people’s — so you don’t feel shy about pushing someone, or getting someone to do what you need them to do. It starts simple. You tell him to look at the wall. If he doesn’t, you try to make him look at the wall, physically.”

It may sound like fun and games in a high-school setting, but defectors say church “training routine” drills are a core part of Scientology practice. In her book, “Inside Scientology,” Janet Reitman refers to some of the church’s “training routines” as “part of early Scientology indoctrination.”

Beyond “training routines,” students at Delphian also study conventional subjects. As they progress through Forms 6 and 7, the equivalent of high school, students select a major — for instance, arts, business, humanities or science and technology.

Students typically do one course at a time, often of their own choosing, and study independently with little or no classroom discussion. To pass, students must cross off every step on “check sheets,” which list requirements of each course such as writing a song, making a clay model, undertaking a practical project or writing an essay.

“The check sheets are very similar to what you see in the Church of Scientology as far as the kinds of things you do,” said Stevens, who spent over 30 years in the church.

“That’s something I think is kind of unique about the school, and something other people could learn from,” Stevens said. “How non-stressful this exam is. If you don’t get it right you’ll just redo it. There’s no grades. When they have to make a report card, a transcript for college, they give you a 4.0.”

For extremely self-driven students, this solitary curriculum can work quite well. During his high school years, Stevens built a 20-foot tall windmill with sheet-metal blades, welded a sign and hacked a printer to print out flash cards. Another student built a laser.

For others, it’s more of a challenge. The school is teeming with international students from Russia, Switzerland, Taiwan and China, according to Kylor Melton, who graduated in 2011. Alumni said this is because Delphian recruits overseas, portraying itself as a powerhouse in English as a second language. More than 40 percent of the students are from abroad, Ke estimated, with most of these from Asia. “Most of them don’t complete, but some of them do,” she said.

But paying students are paying students. In the 2011-2012 school year, the cost of tuition, room and board comes to more than \$42,000. In addition, Stevens said that during his time at Delphian, students known to be Scientologists would go to off-campus events where they were encouraged to make more donations.

Stevens, who was a Scientologist when he attended Delphian, said he gave roughly \$20,000 to the school on top of his tuition. And that's not counting the nearly \$250,000 he said he spent on Scientology itself during his 30-plus years as a member.

Most non-Scientologist students say there's little pressure to join the dominant religion on campus, even if they are surrounded by it. In fact, even alumni who are now critics of the Church of Scientology speak highly of their alma mater. Stevens said it's "only the good parts of Scientology" that come through at Delphian.

Others credit the school with advancing their academic careers. Ke told The Daily that Delphian made her a better student and allowed her to gain admission into Johns Hopkins University, when her plan had been to attend community college. "They changed my life for the better," she said.

Gal Ezra, who graduated in 2010, said he had no plans to extend his formal education beyond middle school — until he visited Delphian. "At first, I was the kind of student who said, 'Oh, high school? I can easily succeed without that,' " he told The Daily.

But despite the conventional success stories and the Hogwarts image projected by the school administration, there are those students who elect to enroll in the Sea Org — a path that many defectors would describe as seriously lacking in magic.

Alumni from the last two classes told The Daily that Delphian students have continued to join the Sea Org.

David, one alumnus who enlisted in the Sea Org after graduation, remarked when he heard that others were following his path: "It's just heart-wrenching."

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Photos from Article:

As any casual reader of Scientology texts can tell you, L. Ron Hubbard uses words in a way that can sound almost foreign. To navigate this unusual – even perplexing – vocabulary, here is a brief layman's glossary.

STUDY TECH

An educational system used by nearly 50 Scientology schools around the country, in which students as young as 6 are quizzed on the meaning of words and asked to make clay models if they show symptoms of being "bent," "spinnny" or "sort of dead," in the words of L. Ron Hubbard.

SEA ORG

The "elite" work force of Scientology, Sea Org rank and file work long days to keep the organization humming. The name is a holdover from the group's origin on Hubbard's massive ship Apollo, where they sweated to please "the Commodore" while he toured the world.

"MISUNDERSTOOD WORD"

In Hubbard's world, confusion on the part of a student is blamed on a failure to grasp the definition and etymology of words they read. Critics say obsessing over these "M/Us" – or "misunderstoods" – can hamper student progress.

WOG

Hubbard's term for those who don't practice Scientology; in his words, a "common, everyday garden-variety humanoid." Despite these limitations, some wogs are allowed to spend \$42,000 to attend Delphian. — B.C.





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Religious Technology Center

Religious Technology Center (RTC) is the primary manager of Scientology intellectual property. It is headed by David Miscavige[1] (<http://www.scientologytoday.org/bio/index.htm>) .

- *Advance!* (magazine)
- *Applied Philosophy*
- *ARC Straightwire* (*ARC* stands for *affinity-reality-communication*)
 - *ARC Fil Direct*
- *Audited NOTs* (*NOT* stands for *NED* [*New Era Dianetics*] *Operating Thetan*)
- *The Auditor*
- *Book 1* (nickname for the book *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*)
- *Book One*
- *The Bridge*
 - *El Puente*
 - *Le Pont*
 - [*The Bridge* in Hebrew]

Bridge Publications, Inc.

Bridge Publications, Inc. is the U.S. publisher of L. Ron Hubbard's nonfiction works. From 1983 to 2002, Bridge also published Hubbard's fiction works.

- *Bridge Publications, Inc.*

Citizens Commission on Human Rights

The Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) is a psychiatry watchdog organization.

- *CCHR*
- *Citizens Commission on Human Rights*
- the CCHR logo

Delphi Schools, Inc.

Delphi Schools, Inc. operates private schools that use study methods devised by L. Ron Hubbard.

- *Delphi Academy*
- *Delphi Schools, Inc.*
- *The Delphian School*

Hubbard College of Administration

Hubbard College of Administration is a business college which teaches methods devised by L. Ron Hubbard.

- the tiger symbol

International Foundation for Human Rights and Tolerance

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