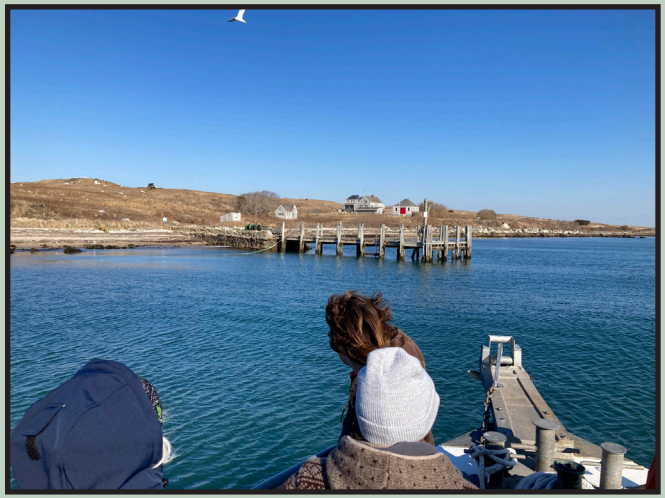
Gull Island Institute
Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts

The Institute runs a free, month-long "open-application" program in May through June for a cohort of advanced undergraduates (rising juniors, seniors, and recent graduates) on islands in Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts. Learn more at gullisland.org.



The Gull Island Institute was founded in 2022 to reimagine liberal arts education for an era of climate change. The Institute's approach to the "Nunnian Pillars" reflects distinctive features of its location as well as mission.

Seminar is the focus of the Open Application program: meeting daily in textual study as well as the history and ecology of the islands, students and faculty from the humanities, social natural sciences, local community and Tribal leaders grapple with a central question: "What makes this place habitable, and what does it mean to inhabit it well?" Labor involves management of wildlife sanctuaries and work on a sustainable oyster farm on Cuttyhunk Island. Through self-governance, students set conditions of their collective life and develop their own academic assignments; alumni serve organizational roles within the Institute and as members of an Application Committee that selects the next year's cohort.

Beyond Buzzards Bay, the Institute seeds Nunnian-inspired education at a range of public and private universities, guided by a conviction that three-pillared place-based learning provides vital resources for all liberal arts educators seeking to advance students' understanding of humanity's place within the Earth's life-sustaining systems and capacities to act on that knowledge.

Outer Coast
Sitka, Alaska

Since 2015, Outer Coast has been methodically laying the foundation to launch a two-year liberal arts college in Sitka, Alaska, which they plan to open in the fall of 2024. Outer Coast runs a two-semester postsecondary program from August to May for high school graduates and a summer seminar program for high school students in July and August. You can learn more at outercoast.org.

Outer Coast was founded in 2015 on Lingít Aaní, the land of the Tlingit people, with the mission to teach and inspire young people to create virtuous change in the world and in their own lives by offering a liberal arts education grounded in Western and Indigenous ways of learning, knowing, and being. Outer Coast serves a student body that is national and international in breadth and diverse in many ways, including across racial, ethnic, cultural, and gender identities, and socioeconomic status. Outer Coast emphasizes reaching students from across Alaska, particularly Alaska Natives and rural Alaskans, as well as other high-potential students from backgrounds underrepresented and underserved in American higher education.

Outer Coast creates pathways for students historically to unlock the promise of higher education: empowering young people whose talents could go unrealized, bridging the gap between high school and four-year institutions that match students' potential, serving as a launchpad for their educational and career aspirations, and giving them the tools and purpose to transform their own lives, their communities, and the broader world. Inspired in part by Deep Springs, Outer Coast is founded on the pillars of Academics, Service & Labor, and Self-Governance, through which students gain the necessary skills, tools, and mindsets to not only pursue meaningful lives for themselves but to effect virtuous change.

The League of Nunnian Schools

Deep Springs College
Deep Springs Valley, California

In 1911, electricity tycoon Lucien Lucius (L.L.) Nunn founded the Telluride Association, consisting of a self-governing household on the Cornell campus run by alumni of Nunn's engineering projects. The students served on the board of trustees and were expected to govern their own affairs. Over the next few years, Nunn further developed the educational philosophy of the Telluride model, and, in 1917, founded Deep Springs College on an isolated ranch in the White Mountains.

Students at Deep Springs have a hand in every aspect of the program, from administrating the college to working on the ranch. Students meet twice a week to discuss the functioning of the college and student body. They are expected to labor for around twenty hours a week, on top of their usual courseload. Classes, typically in the seminar format, range from 5-10 students.

In the last decade, four other schools have been built on these three pillars of Self-Governance, Labor, and Academics, each with its own spin on the Nunnian model. Located across the county, from Massachusetts to Alaska, these schools are at the forefront of holistic education, developing their students' character along with their minds.

Telluride Association
Cornell University & University of Michigan

The Telluride Association Summer Seminar (TASS) is a free 6-week residential summer program for high school sophomores and juniors. Participants take college-level courses in Critical Black Studies and Anti-Oppressive Studies while building a self-governing community. TASS currently includes programs at Cornell University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Maryland.

The Cornell Branch of Telluride Association (CBTA) admits undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty guests from Cornell to live together in the Telluride House on the Cornell University campus. The Cornell Branch provides free room and board to all members. The Michigan Branch of Telluride Association (MBTA) admits undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty guests from the University of Michigan to live together near the U of M campus. As part of their self-governance, Michigan Branch members plan and carry out an annual service project. The Michigan Branch provides free room and board to all members.

Telluride Association also offers awards and scholarships, including the Yarrow Award for adventurous education, the Reese Miller award for first-generation college students, the Mansfield-Wefald senior thesis prize, and the TASS Alumni Development and Support scholarship.

Telluride Association (TA) is an educational nonprofit founded in 1911 by L.L. Nunn. Its mission is to create free educational programs that challenge young people to build community, learn together, and make democratic decisions in order to think critically about the world and create a more just society. It is overseen by a board of 60+ members, primarily early-career alumni from Telluridian and Nunnian programs. You can learn more at tellurideassociation.org.

Thoreau College
Viroqua, Wisconsin

Thoreau College offers a variety of different programs incorporating academics, labor, community, art, and nature. These programs include fall gap semester programs, yearlong guided internships, and a variety of short programs focused on homesteading skills and sustainable agriculture, theater arts, folk arts and crafts, and wilderness expeditions. Learn more at thoreaucollege.org.

Singing and movement arts, shared meals and celebrations, seminar-style discussions of works of literature, ecology, religion, and philosophy, and deep immersions into the natural world through group and solo hiking, canoeing, and foraging experiences are all important parts of being a student at Thoreau College. In addition, students participate in running a small farm raising sheep, pigs, chickens, grapes, apples, and vegetables.

Program participants are integrated into the cultural and community life of Viroqua, Wisconsin, a vibrant rural town of 4,500 people, noted for its arts, alternative education and medicine, and high quality food. The surrounding unglaciated "Driftless Region" is one of the major hotbeds of organic, regenerative, and biodynamic agriculture in the United States, a fact which has a major influence on the curriculum and activities of the college. Thoreau College was founded by Deep Springs alumnus Jacob Hundt and also draws inspiration from the Waldorf school movement, from the Danish folk school tradition, and the writings of American transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau. To learn more, visit www.thoreaucollege.org and check out the Thoreau College podcast, called "Microcollege," for interviews about Thoreau College, Deep Springs, and many other humanly scaled experiments in higher education.

Tidelines Institute
Gustavus & Inian Islands, Alaska

Students ages 18-23 are invited to apply to the Glacier Bay Semester, an 18-week program based out of Tidelines' twin campuses along Alaska's Inside Passage. Students may enroll in the program as a "study away" semester or as part of a gap year experience. A full semester's worth of college credit is available, as is financial aid. Learn more at tidelinesinstitute.org

Robert Heinlein once wrote that "specialization is for insects." We agree. In a world facing unprecedented crises – of democracy and justice, climate and environment, meaning and purpose – we need leaders who can think and act beyond the silos into which higher education so quickly shuts us. At Tidelines Institute, you'll learn how to deliver a speech and splint an ankle, paddle a kayak and run a meeting, build a shed and parse a text, catch a wild salmon, test a hypothesis, and build community. But beyond these skills, you will learn to think deeply, creatively, and empathetically about some of the greatest challenges that face our society in the years to come.

These varied modes of human thought and action you will experience through the three pillars of our Glacier Bay Semester, modeled off of Deep Springs College: rigorous intellectual work across the liberal arts and sciences, the labor of a working Alaskan homestead, and student democratic self-governance.

Don't be satisfied with an education that prepares you for life of cubicles and creature comforts. The world needs to change, and changing the world is hard work. If that's your calling, the Glacier Bay Semester is for you.