

## Secret Schools

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Developing the work of Jeffrey J. Kripal (Rice University), via Stan Lee (1922-2018), Michael Murphy (b. 1930), Jacques Vallée (b. 1939) and others, “secret schools” or “invisible colleges” are affinity groups and intentional communities, often with their own alternative meeting-places, that consider “taboo” subjects. The latter include the anomalous and “paranormal” as a story of human potential, perhaps even a (re)new(ed) mythology. As providing space to explore “super-stories” and “X-factors,” in the sense of extraordinary, hidden and unknown (forgotten?) abilities, secret schools offer more radical and perhaps enlivening models of inquiry, relationality, and fulfillment.

The present list is, of course, partial. How could it be otherwise when dealing with schools that are secret. Each example represents degrees of “secrecy” and “invisibility.” Many are only obliquely familiar to the masses, while being “hidden in plain sight.” Others are almost completely unknown. Still others have disappeared and/or have been seemingly erased from mainstream society and consensus consciousness/reality. This is not to mention those that only exist in latency and potentiality, that have yet to become manifested.

Considered as a whole, they provide glimpses into both innovative educational approaches and the possibility of a more complete form of being (trans)human. They inspire and encourage attentiveness to aliveness, flourishing, meaning, and purpose.

**The Actor’s Studio** (TAS) (est. 1947; Manhattan, New York). Founded by Cheryl Crawford (1902-1986), Elia Kazan (1909-2003), and Robert Lewis (1909-1997), with the later assistance of Lee Strasberg (1901-1982). The Actor’s Studio is a membership organization for professional actors, theatre directors, and playwrights. Best known for its work refining and teaching method acting, an approach originally developed by the Group Theatre (1931-1941) based on the innovations of Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938).

**Berklee College of Music** (BCM) (est. 1945; Boston, Massachusetts). Originally known as the Schillinger House and then the Berklee School of Music. Founded by Lawrence Berk (1908-1995). Originally specialized in the Schillinger System of harmony and composition developed by Joseph Schillinger (1895-1943). Today BCM is a private music college and the largest independent college of contemporary music in the world. It is especially known for the study of jazz and modern American music.

**Black Mountain College** (BMC) (1933-1957; Black Mountain, North Carolina). Founded by John Andrew Rice, Jr. (1888-1968), Theodore Dreier (1902-1997), and several others. BMC was an experimental college organized around John Dewey’s principles of education, emphasizing holistic learning and the study of art as central to a liberal arts education.

**Brautigan Library** (BL) (1990-2005; Burlington, Vermont; 2010-present; Vancouver, Washington). Founded by Todd Lockwood (d.u.). Collection inspired by the Library for Unpublished Works envisioned by Richard Brautigan (1935-1984) in his novel *The Abortion*. Includes more than 300 manuscripts outside the interests of corporate publishing. The works are categorized according to The

Mayonnaise System: (1) Adventure (ADV); (2) All the Rest (ALL); (3) Family (FAM); (4) Future (FUT); (5) Humor (HUM); (6) Love (LOV); (7) Meaning of Life (MEA); (8) Natural World (NAT); (9) Poetry (POE); (10) Social/Political/Cultural (SOC); (11) Spirituality (SPI); (12) Street Life (STR); and (13) War and Peace (WAR).



**Brockwood Park School (BPS)** (est. 1969; Hampshire, England). Founded by J. Krishnamurti (1895-1986) and inspired by his teachings, including his emphasis on personal inquiry and dialogue, BPS is an international co-educational boarding school. It offers personalized, holistic education and encourages academic excellence, self-understanding, creativity and integrity in a non-competitive environment. Beyond mere academic concerns, it inspires students to explore “the art of living” by bringing together aspects of learning, sensitivity, open-mindedness, and self-reflection. Truth is a pathless land, and freedom is *revolutionary*, not evolutionary.

**California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS)** (est. 1968; San Francisco, California). Private, non-profit university, which grew out of the earlier American Academy of Asian Studies (AAAS; 1951-1968) and with some connection to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950). Originally founded by Louis Gainsborough (d.u.), with the later assistance of Alan Watts (1915-1973) and Haridas Chaudhuri (1913-1975). Emphasizing “integral education,” CIIS offers an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural program in psychology, counseling, philosophy, religion, cultural anthropology, transformative studies and leadership, integrative health, women’s spirituality, and community mental health. Many courses combine a mainstream academic curriculum with a spiritual orientation, including influences from a broad spectrum of mystical or esoteric traditions. CIIS consists of four schools: Consciousness and Transformation, Professional Psychology & Health, Undergraduate Studies, and the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine (ACTCM). There also is an interest in entheogens (“God-spawning substances”).

**Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CMind; CCMS)** (est. 1991; Northampton, Massachusetts). Co-founded by Mirabai Bush (b. 1939). 501(c)(3) non-profit organization working to transform higher education by supporting and encouraging the use of contemplative/introspective practices and perspectives to create active learning and research environments that look deeply into experience and meaning for all in service of a more just and compassionate society. It includes the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE).

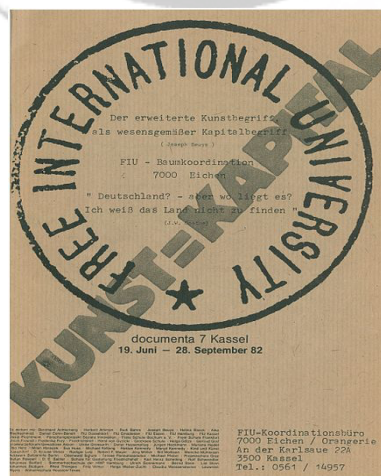
**Community of a New Monastic Way (CNMW)** (2008-2010; Santa Fe, New Mexico; 2010-2017; San Diego, California; 2017-present; Santa Rosa, California). Founded by Beverly Lanzetta (b. 1947). An intentional contemplative community following a “new monastic” way of life that aspires to live each day honoring the sacred, recognizing the holiness of existence, striving to be love on earth, and opening one’s heart to the sorrow and the glory that is the world. According to CNMW, this is a life vowed to uphold in thought, word, and deed the precious gift of life created in the divine image, and to honor and to take responsibility for the dignity of the earth, cosmos, and all sentient beings.

**Deep Springs College (DSC)** (est. 1917; Deep Springs, California). Founded by L.L. Nunn (1853-1925). Small, private liberal arts junior college founded on three principles, commonly called the “three pillars”: academics, labor, and self-governance. In addition to studies, students work a minimum of 20 hours a week either on the ranch and farm attached to the college or in positions related to the college and community.

**Eranos** (est. 1933; Ascona, Switzerland). Founded by Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn (1881-1962). The name derives from ancient Greek meaning “a banquet to which the guests bring contributions of food, a no-host dinner.” Intellectual discussion group dedicated to humanistic and religious studies as well as to the natural sciences that has met annually in Moscia (Lago Maggiore), the Collegio Papiro, and on the Monte Verità in Ascona. Key members have included Joseph Campbell (1904-1987; comparative mythology), Henry Corbin (1903-1978; Islamic mysticism), Mircea Eliade (1907-1986; history of religions), Carl Jung (1875-1961; analytical psychology), and Gershom Scholem (1897-1982; Jewish mysticism).

**Esalen Institute (EI)** (est. 1962; Big Sur, California). The name alludes to the Esselen, a Native American people whose homeland once encompassed about 750 square miles of the Ventana Wilderness, including the land where Esalen now sits. Co-founded by Michael Murphy (b. 1930) and Dick Price (1930-1985). 501(c)(3) retreat center and intentional community focusing on humanistic alternative education. Partially inspired by Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) and Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), Esalen played a key role in the Human Potential Movement (HPM) beginning in the 1960s. Often utilizes encounter groups with emphasis on mind-body connection and experimentation in personal awareness. Also includes the Center for Theory & Research (CTR). The number of influential members and teachers is too numerous to document in a short entry.

**Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research.** More commonly referred to as the **Free International University (FIU)** (est. 1973; Düsseldorf, Germany). Co-founded by Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) and his associates to support Beuys’ art. Based on principles laid down in a manifesto written by Beuys and Heinrich Böll (1917-1985), FIU was established as an organizational place of research, work, and communication to ponder the future of society.



**Garrison Institute (GI)** (est. 2003; Garrison, New York). Non-profit, non-sectarian organization committed to harnessing the power of contemplative wisdom and practice—from many traditions, and in many different contexts—to build a more compassionate and resilient future for all. Working

collaboratively with practitioners in diverse fields, GI develops and hosts retreats and symposia, produces research and publications, and provides a hub for ongoing learning networks. The number of influential members and teachers is too numerous to document in a short entry.

**Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS)** (est. 1973; Petaluma, California). The name refers to noetics, a branch of metaphysical philosophy concerned with the study of mind, including intellect. Founded by Edgar Mitchell (1930-2016), Paul Temple (1923-2016), and others. Non-profit parapsychological research center and “direct-experience lab” focusing on purported paranormal phenomena in order to encourage and conduct research on noetic theory and human potential. Includes systematic investigation on topics related to the “frontiers of consciousness.”

**International Necronautical Society (INS)** (est. 1999; London, England). Founded by Tom McCarthy (b. 1969) and Simon Critchley (b. 1960). In its founding manifesto (1999), the First Committee of the INS declared (1) that death is a space, which INS intends to explore and inhabit; (2) that there is no beauty without death; (3) that the task of INS is to bring death out into the world; and (4) that the chief aim is to construct a means of conveying us into death. It comprises an amorphous and often occluded network of writers, artists, philosophers, and others. Surfacing through publications, media interventions, artworks, and live events, the INS constantly reiterates (or reenacts) its First Manifesto commitment to “map, enter, colonise and, eventually, inhabit” spaces that open up around the sign of death. The founding manifesto as well as a number of other documents can be found in *The Mattering of Matter: Documents from the Archive of the International Necronautical Society* (2013).

**The Invisible Academy (TIA)**. Yet to appear.

**Lindisfarne Association (LA)** (1972-2012; Southampton, New York [1972-1979]; Crestone, Colorado [1979-2012]). The name alludes to the Lindisfarne Priory, a monastery founded on the British island of Lindisfarne in the seventh century and known for the Lindisfarne Gospels. Established by William Irwin Thompson (b. 1938). A non-profit foundation and diverse group of intellectuals for the study and realization of a new planetary culture.” It was inspired by Alfred North Whitehead’s (1861-1947) idea of an integral philosophy of organism and Teilhard de Chardin’s (1881-1955) idea of planetization. Some influential members included David Abram (b. 1947), Richard Baker (b. 1936), Gregory Bateson (1904-1980), Wendell Berry (b. 1934), Joan Halifax (b. 1942), James Lovelock (b. 1919), Michael Murphy (b. 1930), Elaine Pagels (b. 1943), Gary Snyder (b. 1930), David Steindl-Rast (b. 1926), Evan Thompson (b. 1962), Francisco Varela (1946-2001), and Arthur Zajonc (b. 1949).

**Naropa University (NU)** (est. 1974; Boulder, Colorado). The name refers to Nāropā (d. ca. 1040 CE?), an Indian Buddhist Mahāsiddha (“great adept”). Founded by Chogyam Trungpa (1939-1987) and his supporters. Private, non-profit Buddhist-inspired liberal arts university. Especially known for its emphasis on and employment of contemplative education. Combines conventional academics, experiential learning, and contemplative practice to inspire critical thinking, the acquisition of new skills, and the development of self-awareness. Includes the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics.

**New Canaan Academy (NCA)** (1958/1975-ca. 2001; Lyme, New Hampshire). The name refers to Canaan, a Semitic-speaking region in the Ancient Near East during the late second millennium BCE. Founded by Deneal Amos (1928-2001). Educational arm of the spiritual community known as “The School for the Art of Moral and Ethical Conduct,” or SameCon. NCA was an educational community aspiring to prepare people to reach their full potential, both as individuals and in community, through



the training of mind, body, and spirit. This training was accomplished with meditation, work, play, personal programs of study and group discussion, all conducted within the context of a community living project.

**The New School (TNS)** (est. 1919; Manhattan, New York). Also known as The New School for Social Research (NSSR). Founded by Charles Beard (1874-1948), John Dewey (1859-1952), Alvin Johnson (1874-1971), Horace Kallen (1882-1974), James Harvey Robinson (1863-1936), and Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), some of whom were former professors at Columbia University who refused to take the loyalty oath to the United States in 1919. Added the University in Exile and École libre des hautes études in 1933. Its original mission centered on academic freedom and intellectual inquiry and on providing a home for progressive thinkers. A private, non-profit research university, the New School aims to be a modern, progressive, free school where adult students can seek an unbiased understanding of the existing order, its genesis, growth, and present working. Currently includes five divisions: College of Performing Arts, Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts, New School for Social Research, Parsons School of Design, and Schools of Public Engagement.

**Oakland Community School (OCS)** (1973-1982; Oakland, California). Founded by the Black Panther Party (BPP), a black-empowerment movement established in 1966 by Huey Newton (1942-1989) and Boddy Seale (b. 1936) based on their Ten-Point Program (TPP). As part of the larger network of Black Panther-run liberation schools and revolutionary education projects, OCS maintained a Free Breakfast for Children program and offered martial arts self-defense classes, specifically in Karate. The school operated on liberation and empowerment principles with a curriculum that included both education in practical skills and consciousness raising/community building. It also had a Youth Committee that allowed students to have a “horizontal relationship” with teachers. Power to the People!

**Ojai Foundation (OF)** (est. 1975; Ojai, California). Founded by Lucio (“Luke”) E. Gatto, Jr. (1944-2019) and others. The Ojai Foundation began in 1975 as Human Dimensions Institute/West, a non-profit organization for exploring the interface between science and spirituality. The original parcel was part of 450 acres purchased in 1927 by Annie Besant (1847-1933). OF aims to foster practices that awaken connection with self, others, and the natural world. “Council,” the practice of listening and speaking from the heart, is at the core of their various undertakings. Many of the early gatherings became known informally as the “Wizards’ Camp.” Some influential facilitators have included Robert Bly (b. 1926), Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), Joan Halifax (b. 1942), R.D. Laing (1927-1989), Vilayat Inayat Khan (1916-2004), Joanna Macy (b. 1929), Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926), and Andrew Weil (b. 1942).



**Omega Institute** (OI) (est. 1977; Rhinebeck, New York). Also known as the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies (OIHS). The name Omega corresponds to the twenty-fourth and last letter of the Greek alphabet, with the connotation of culmination or completion. Co-founded by Elizabeth Lesser (d.u.) and Stephan Rechtschaffen (d.u.). Inspired by Vilayat Inayat Khan (1916-2004) and his ecumenical spirituality, OI aims to provide hope and healing for individuals and society through innovation educational experiences that awaken human spirit. Their workshops, conferences, and retreats create dialogues on the integration of modern medicine and natural healing; connect science, spirituality, and creativity; and build the groundwork for new traditions and lifestyles. Some influential teachers have included Maya Angelou (1928-2014), Deepak Chopra (b. 1946), Pema Chödrön (b. 1936), Ram Dass (b. 1931), Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997), Gloria Steinem (b. 1934), Philip Glass (b. 1937), Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926), and Eckhart Tolle (b. 1948).

**Pacifica Graduate Institute** (PGI) (est. 1976; Santa Barbara, California). Originally known as the Human Relations Institute. Private, employee-owned and for-profit graduate school with two campuses near Santa Barbara. Offers masters and doctoral degrees in the fields of clinical psychology, counseling, mythological studies, depth psychology, and the humanities. PGI aims to foster creative learning and research in the fields of psychology and mythological studies, framed in the traditions of depth psychology, with specific attention to the mission of *animae mundi colendae gratia* “for the sake of tending soul in and of the world”).

**Rothko Chapel** (RC) (est. 1971; Houston, Texas). Founded by John de M n il (1904-1973) and Dominique de M n il (1908-1997). Ecumenical chapel intended as a sacred space open to all, every day, to inspire people to action through art and contemplation, to nurture reverence for the highest aspirations of humanity, and to provide a forum for global concerns. Houses fourteen black, but color-hued paintings by Mark Rothko (1903-1970), who also helped design the building itself.



**Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies** (SBICS). Also referred to as the **Santa Barbara Institute** (SBI) (est. 2003; Santa Barbara, California). Founded by B. Alan Wallace (b. 1950). Private, for-profit organization dedicated to furthering interdisciplinary and cross-cultural investigation of the nature and potentials of consciousness and extending its benefits to the general public. Includes The Shamatha Project (TSP), a meditation research project overseen by Wallace and Clifford Saron (b. ca. 1950?) investigating the psychological and physiological processes underlying mental and physical health benefits of (Buddhist) meditation. TSP focused on the effects of meditation on 60 healthy individuals over three months of intensive practice.

**Society for Psychical Research (SPR)** (est. 1882; London, England). Established by William Barrett (1844-1925), Frederic W.H. Myers (1843-1901), Edmund Rogers (1823-1910), Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900), and others. Non-profit organization aiming to understand events and abilities described as psychic and/or paranormal, and thus associated with “parapsychology.” Pioneering society organized to conduct systematic scholarly research into human experiences that challenge conventional and received scientific models.

**Stillpoint Foundation (SF)** (1968-1972; Los Gatos, California; 1972-1985, Manitou Springs, Colorado). The name is an allusion to T.S. Eliot’s (1888-1965) *Four Quartets*. Founded by Gia-fu Feng (1919-1985), who also was involved early on with the American Academy of Asian Studies (California Institute of Integral Studies) and Esalen Institute. Quasi-commune and intentional community that taught Beat/Hippie Taoism and something akin to Western Yoga to Tao seekers. Included Tao Camps, where Feng trained various students in eclectic, hybrid spiritual practices often identified as “Taoist.”

**The Underground University (TUU)** (2020-; Unknown). Established by Louis Komjathy (b. 1971), Ph.D., an outsider-scholar, contemplative subversive, and thought-libérateur, following his departure from mainstream academia and corporate “higher” education in 2019. Still in its formative moments, TUU is a collective, egalitarian, decentralized, grassroots, non-institutional community initiative rooted in radical free and open inquiry. It is an *underground* “university” (universe-city), a secret school *of and for the underground*. It becomes gathered whenever and wherever individuals meet to consider and discuss their deeper aspirations, concerns, interests, values, and so forth. TUU aims to explore the frontiers of being and consciousness, especially with respect to higher psychospiritual states, forms of creative expression, as well as liberational potentiality and transformative actualization. This includes what may be understood as our divine center and ground of existence.

**Whidbey Institute (WI)** (est. 1993; Whidbey Island, Washington). Originally named the Chinook Learning Community (CLC) (est. 1972; Whidbey Island, Washington). Co-founded by Fritz Hull (d.u.) and Vivienne Hull (d.u.). 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to nurturing the conditions for transformational learning, with the purpose of growing the human capacity to respond generatively to the challenges of the present historical moment in service to a future in which people and planet thrive together. WI partners with a network of program leaders working in the areas of generative leadership, ecosystem vitality, community resilience, and more to offer one-day and multi-day workshops, conferences, and retreats.