

OLIVERIAN

A school as unique as its students.

Explore Oliverian

Admissions Oliosophy: A Question of Readiness

When asked what kind of students Oliverian works with, I usually have to pause and smile before answering. I pause to mentally scroll through all of the Oli students I've known. I smile because they are such a delightful, quirky, and eclectic bunch of adolescents. They are all different. There is not a singular, simple "elevator" description of the Oli kid.



Will Laughlin, Head of School/CEO

In fact, the very first time I met a group of Oliverians, that's exactly what they told me. "We're all different," said Ben, the 17 year old spokesman for the group of students selected to interview me, "but that's why we get along so well. We all know we're here for reasons that are bigger than our differences." The other students nodded energetically.

In adolescent shorthand, we have had "gamers," "preps," "geeks," "goths," "hipsters," "outsiders," "emos," "jocks," and a host of other teen categories that likely don't have names. Our students have come from elite traditional boarding schools, public schools, and therapeutic programs. They come to us having succeeded, and struggled, in widely varying ways. But for all their differences, students who thrive at Oliverian have some important things in common. They are bright and college-capable. Many are quirky, out-of-the-box thinkers (we love quirky!). Most have had difficulty finding their place in more traditional settings. They are sensitive, relationally motivated, and open to adult guidance and support.

Most importantly, though, successful Oliverians are at a point their journey where they are ready for an experiential approach to college preparation and personal growth. We entrust our students with relatively high degree of freedom, personal choice, and autonomy. That's because Oliverian's mission "to help young people find their place in the world" is only achievable when our school is a part of that world. So we provide an open campus and encourage a high level of community engagement in the form of frequent outings, internships, and community service. We tend to favor support over structure and influence over control when working with our students. In this way, we

create enough space for them to make independent choices - good ones and poor ones - while providing the support they need to learn from both. When a student is ready for it, this "supportive-experiential" approach is the best way to truly prepare for the imminent realities of college life and young-adult independence.

Some students, of course, are not yet ready for the Oliverian approach. This has less to do with the specific nature of their struggle, though, than with the current status of that struggle-i.e. where they are in their personal journey. Students who are currently at a high risk level for violence, relapse, self-harm, or other serious behaviors, for instance, generally need a highly structured therapeutic intervention rather than the supportive experiential approach that Oliverian provides. But if and when they do get the help they need, even these students will eventually benefit from experiential preparation for the academic, social, and practical realities of college and young adulthood.

Oliverian does phenomenal work with students who have struggled, but who are now ready to learn from both their successes and mistakes. Like all who ultimately succeed, true Oliverians possess the courage to fail...forward.

Will Laughlin, Head of School/CEO



Oliverians Return "Home"

We were quite fortunate to have these three talented people enrich our summer! Kat Yeoham '13 (pictured left) nestled right back in to the Oliverian art studio while she interned under the tutelage of Bessa Axelrod teaching art of ecology. Nick de Stefanis '14 (pictured right) did not live in the music studio as many of his fellow graduates might have assumed. Instead, Nick interned [read more...](#)



Summer Shout-out

As summer wanes to make way for fresh school beginnings, we take a moment to appreciate the students and faculty for making Oliverian Summer Session 2015 such an incredible experience. Faculty provided exceptional challenge, support, encouragement, new ways of learning, and new experiences to explore, such as successfully [read more...](#)

Message from Barclay Mackinnon, Director of Admissions/Head Emeritus

It's hard for me to believe, but I've been working with Oliverian for going on fifteen years! We've grown from serving six students, to now comfortably serving fifty. We've



added art, music, ceramics, riding, theatre, and more. We're appropriately challenging our kids in the humanities, science, mathematics, and foreign languages, while supporting them and helping them to find their place in the world. We've added a number of new buildings, improved others, and have plans to do even more. We have served well over five hundred students, and they are some of the coolest, most interesting, creative, and challenging kids I've ever met in my forty-plus years as an educator. It's been an amazing decade and a half and I'm proud of where we've come in that time. But as a mentor of mine once said, "If you're not looking inside and challenging the status quo, you're not improving."

A little over one year ago, Oliverian asked Will Laughlin to be our new head of school. I can honestly say, our journey has certainly picked up pace. In a little over a year, he's challenged our clinical team to be more effective, while also hiring a new director of student life who has hit the ground running - creating exciting new programming for our kids while structuring dorm life so students and faculty are more accountable. He's asked Abby Hood, our academic director, to further challenge our students, all the time ensuring they are well supported in their efforts. And, he's asked me to clearly identify those students who we can best serve, and introduce them to Oliverian in a way where their transition is seamless.

There's no question we're picking up the pace, but there couldn't be a more exciting time to be at Oliverian! So let's all of us, students, faculty, and families alike hang on and enjoy the ride. It's the "Oliverian Way!"

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