

New School

WORLD CLASS ACADEMY OFFERS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ACADEMIC CLASSES WHILE TRAVELING THE WORLD PURSUING THEIR SPORT

Story by Lindsay McClure • Photos by Michael Peterson & courtesy of World Class Academy



Main photo by Michael Peterson. Photos by (above clockwise) Lindsay McClure, Blaine Baker, Lindsay McClure, Lindsay McClure and Lindsay McClure



Lindsay McClure, World Class Academy program director, and Blaine Baker, head coach, on the White Salmon Sandbar, *above*. *Opposite*, World Class students in various locales around the world, including the Gorge's Lyle Sandbar, Costa Rica and Spain.



Blaine Baker

IMAGINE an academic setting where students count the days until the start of the school year — instead of counting the days until school is over. At World Class Academy, the only back-to-school blues are the shades of crystal blue water where students train each afternoon. As World Class Kiteboard Academy program director, I've heard comments from the students as spring break approaches each year about changes we should make to the academic calendar. They think it would be great if they didn't have to go home for spring break. They want to stay at school, but take a little break from academics. Everyone involved with World Class Academy understands that school doesn't have to be a burden. It doesn't have to be something to get through. Imagine a school where students don't want to leave!

NOT ONLY ARE STUDENTS AT WORLD CLASS GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE THE WORLD, BUT STUDENTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD BECOME CLASSMATES AND CLOSE FRIENDS.



Devin Kuhl



Elijah Chilton

World Class Academy is a world-traveling college preparatory high school based in White Salmon, Wash. World Class combines rigorous academics with an athletic training program — kayaking, kiteboarding or climbing — that allows top young athletes to come up through the ranks in their respective sport.

To achieve this, each program travels the globe with teachers, coaches and books in tow, moving from training spot to training spot. We spend from a few days to a month in each location before moving somewhere new. The kiteboarding program will start the 2017/18 school year in the Gorge, while North America still has enticing wind and weather for kiteboarding. From here, we will head out on a California road trip, then travel to Brazil, South Africa, Morocco and Italy before finishing the school year with graduation in Spain.

World Class Academy was created in 2001 in Missoula, Mont., as a private, accredited high school for the world's top junior whitewater kayakers in grades 9-12. The school moved its base to White Salmon in 2010. In January 2014, the school started its kiteboarding academy, and a program for climbing was born in the fall of 2016. The formula of mixing students' passions with their education has proven to work well regardless of the sport, helping to create an en-



Elijah Chilton



Lindsay McClure

vironment where students are not only reaching their full athletic potential but their academic potential, as well.

My involvement in World Class began in 2013 as we prepared to launch the kiteboarding program, which opened its doors with a pilot semester that took students through Costa Rica, Panama, the Dominican Republic and southern Texas. Starting from that first semester, the growth of the kiteboarding program was steady as we went from two students to three, to six, to 11 and then to our enrollment cap of 16.

As the literature teacher for World Class Academy, I find that the following sentiment by Mark Twain reflects the value of our experience: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

Not only are students at World Class given the opportunity to see the world, but students from around the world become classmates and close friends. The kiteboarding school has enrolled students from the United States, Canada, Turks and Caicos Islands, Mexico, Germany, Austria, France, Jamaica, Australia, New Zealand, Poland, Lithuania, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

World Class Kiteboard Academy alumnus Rutger Bogard of Hood River discovered the academy after taking local kiteboarding lessons. "I learned how to kiteboard at Cascade Kiteboarding in Hood River," Bogard said. "My instructor was WCA head coach Blaine Baker, and he told me about WCA. I attended Hood River Valley High School for another year before enrolling in World Class my senior year."

Touring the globe with World Class is a formative experience that leaves students and staff forever changed, often more open-minded, kind-hearted and curious about the world.

Students Tom Seager and Sean Karam have an after-school session in Cabo de la Vela, Columbia, *opposite top*. *Opposite inset*, students study at Yosemite, in Northern California. *Opposite bottom*, Blaine Baker teaches a calculus class in Columbia. *Above left*, students help a local farmer vaccinate cows in Ecuador. *Above right*, a morning strength workout in Palomino, Columbia.

No matter where in the world we are located, one of the biggest challenges at World Class is figuring out how to fit a maximum amount of action into each day. We start each day early, with a morning workout that is designed to complement our afternoon athletic training. After the workout, we transition to a family-style breakfast and then we hit the books. Literature, math, science, foreign language, social studies and media classes meet as they would at a traditional school, with lectures, projects, homework, essays — and, yes, exams.

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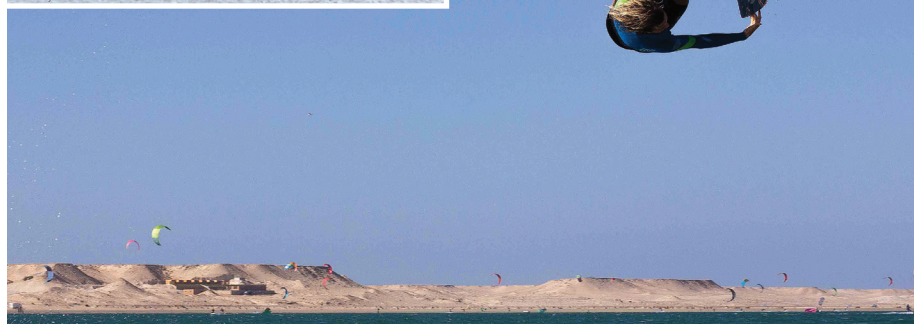
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Devin Kuh

World Class graduate Kit Griffiths catches air at the Speed Spot in Dakhla, Morocco, *below*. *Inset*, a World Class Academy session in the Gorge, where the school year begins. As the weather changes, the globetrotting, mobile school will pick up and head south — first to California, then to Brazil, South Africa, Morocco and Italy before finishing the school year with graduation in Spain.



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After lunch and another round of classes, we take a quick break as students transform into athletes and teachers put on their coaching hats. Next, we gather for the kite meeting. At this time, the head coach goes over the training plan for the day, explaining the wind forecast and where we will be practicing. Then, we hustle to the beach and launch our kites. Each athlete has his or her own goals, and they routinely meet with the coaches to review the steps they need to follow to achieve their goals.

Kiteboarding is a unique sport with many distinct disciplines. At World Class, a majority of students practice freestyle riding, but we also have athletes that practice park riding, old-school, big air, strapless freestyle, wave riding, foil racing and twin tip racing. Some of the World Class athletes are solely focused on one discipline, whereas others embrace a variety of riding styles. With all of this going on, we often break into smaller groups based on riding style and ability. Each group splits off with a coach and will spend the rest of the afternoon in a circuit, practicing.

Tom Barss, a World Class alumnus from Wilmet, N.H., has answered a lot of questions from his friends and family members about attending the academy. “The hardest thing for people to understand is that I actually learned a lot,” Barss said. “Some people find it hard to believe that you can get a great education while traveling around the world and kiteboarding every day.”

The World Class experience is often enriched when academics, cultural immersion and athletics combine to leave an indelible imprint on the minds of students. Participation in the restoration of the riparian zone below the former site of the Condit Dam on the White Salmon River has been one of these experiences. In environmental science and biology classes, students learn about the ecology of a healthy stream and the impact that dams have on our waterways. Students also learn about how the removal of the Condit Dam caused sediment to deposit at the mouth of the White Salmon River where it meets the Columbia River.

This sandbar is a popular kiteboarding launch for World Class Academy and a beach that didn't exist before the removal of the dam. World Class has been playing a hands-on role in the riparian zone restoration project as part of the service-learning component of the school year. These experiences open the door to conversations about the pros and cons of hydroelectric power and the impact of the dams on the Columbia River and its tributaries.



Michael Peterson

Stewardship of the world's waterways is a tenet of the World Class mission statement. However, so is the commitment to competitive athletics, and the Columbia River wouldn't be an appealing place to practice kiteboarding if it weren't for the dams that slow down the flow and raise the level of the river. In many cases, competitive athletics and care for the natural world go hand-in-hand, but sometimes the two are at odds with each other. Last fall, students were given the opportunity to ponder this complex relationship and then articulate and discuss their opinions on the issue. World Class will continue to work on the riparian zone restoration project this year.

This fall, when you see a train of vans full of young kiteboarders show up at your local kite beach, chances are it will be the World Class Academy. Come say hello and share a session with us on the river.

For more information, go to worldclasskiteboardacademy.com

Lindsay McClure is a writer and digital media producer who grew up in Hood River. Working at World Class Kiteboard Academy has given her the opportunity to share her love of literature, photography, travel and kiteboarding with motivated student-athletes.



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