

## WHAT IS OMEGA INSTITUTE?

Omega Institute is the nation's leading center for holistic studies. As a nonprofit organization, Omega offers diverse and innovative educational experiences that inspire an integrated approach to personal and social change. Located on 250 acres in New York's beautiful Hudson Valley, and listed as one of 1,000 Places to See in the USA & Canada Before You Die, Omega is considered a premier travel destination for workshops, conferences, retreats and professional training. Omega's renowned faculty and presenters have included Maya Angelou, Thích Nhất Hạnh, Jane Goodall, Pema Chödrön, Bobby McFerrin, Eckhart Tolle, Gloria Steinem, Phil Jackson, and many other creative, talented teachers and thought leaders. Annually, more than 15,000 people attend Omega's 300+ programs in-person, and the organization reaches approximately 2 million people online.

## HOW DID OMEGA BEGIN? WHAT DOES "OMEGA" MEAN?

In 1977, Stephan Rechtschaffen, M.D. and Elizabeth Lesser were inspired by scholar and Eastern meditation teacher, Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan to found Omega. Together, they envisioned a dynamic "university of life." Omega took its name from the writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a 20th-century Jesuit priest who spoke of the "Omega Point," or the point of unity toward which all of life is evolving. This movement toward unity, balance, and wholeness—within an individual and in the culture at large—is also expressed by the word "holistic." And so, Omega Institute for Holistic Studies was born.

## WHAT WAS THE RHINEBECK CAMPUS BEFORE IT BECAME OMEGA?

In 1981, Omega expanded from rented facilities in New York and Vermont to its current Rhinebeck, New York home on the former grounds of Camp Boiberik, a popular Yiddish summer camp. Camp Boiberik operated from 1923 to 1979. Over the years, Omega has restored the campus while maintaining its simplicity as it has grown to more than 250 acres and more than 100 buildings, including the Sanctuary, the Ram Dass Library, the Omega Center for Sustainable Living (OCSL), and the Omega Wellness Center.

## WHAT ROLE HAS OMEGA PLAYED IN SOCIETY?

Since 1977 Omega has been guided by its mission to awaken the best in the human spirit and to provide hope and healing for individuals and society. Omega has consistently been at the forefront of human development: from nurturing early dialogues on the integration of modern medicine and natural healing; to designing programs that connect science, spirituality, and creativity; to laying the groundwork for new traditions and lifestyles – all of which are designed to uplift and expand our culture in a way that benefits us individually, and as a society. Omega has seen more than one million people come through its doors to grow, learn, and find a greater sense of purpose.

## WHAT DO PEOPLE DO AT OMEGA?

Most people come to take workshops and professional training in an array of subjects, with some of the nation's leading teachers. Others opt to take part in a Rest & Rejuvenation Retreat, allowing maximum flexibility to enjoy all the campus has to offer, including a wide range of services that benefit well-being at Omega's Wellness Center. Omega's campus grounds include a lakefront, woodland trails, tennis and pickleball courts, basketball courts, and gardens. Farm-to-table meals, use of amenities, and optional classes in yoga, tai chi, meditation, and arts are included in the stay.

## WHO WORKS AT OMEGA?

Omega employs approximately 65 year-round, salaried Core Staff to plan, design, market, and implement programs, while also managing the administrative and operational work that sustains the organization. Most Core Staff live locally in the Hudson Valley and commute to Omega's Rhinebeck campus. The campus is open to guests seasonally from late May through October, during which time Omega welcomes approximately 200 Seasonal Staff to support campus operations. Most Seasonal Staff are residential, living on campus for up to six months, and may participate in select events, programs, and classes outside of work hours.

## WHAT ARE OMEGA'S SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS?

Omega considers the environmental impact of its purchasing and operations as part of an ongoing commitment to stewardship. The campus supports conservation, recycling, and composting programs, and all takeout containers at the Omega Café are compostable. Omega's Food & Beverage team sources largely from regional growers, supporting sustainable agriculture and local businesses. By using its own purchasing power, educational capacity, and commitment to sustainability, Omega is demonstrating creative ways to meet environmental challenges. The Omega Center for Sustainable Living (OCSL) reflects this commitment, and serves as a leading example of Omega's environmental work.

## WHAT IS THE OMEGA CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVING (OCSL)?

The OCSL is an environmental education center that demonstrates and teaches what is possible through regenerative thinking and design. Operating since 2009, the OCSL integrates the campus's state-of-the-art Eco-Machine™ (natural water reclamation facility) with a robust environmental education program. The award-winning OCSL building was the first in the U.S. to achieve both LEED® Platinum and Living Building Challenge™ certification – the highest environmental performance standards available. It brings together wastewater recycling, clean energy, and other sustainability elements that can be replicated. More than a building, the OCSL is a regional hub for environmental organizations, activists, educators, and students to network and learn through a variety of programs such as: environmental conferences, workshops, and field trips (K-12, college, and post-graduate). Past presenters have included Wangari Maathai, Bill McKibben, Vandana Shiva, John Todd, Winona LaDuke, Jeremy Rifkin, Pete Seeger, and many more.

## WHAT IS THE OMEGA WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CENTER (OWLC)?

Founded in 2012, the Omega Women's Leadership Center (OWLC) offers an interdisciplinary curriculum to support women's personal and professional development throughout their lifespan. Educational opportunities serve aspiring women who want to hone leadership skills and deepen self-understanding, as well as established leaders who are looking to make a change, give back, and further impact the world. Building on Omega's acclaimed Women & Power series—featuring presenters such as Alice Walker, Natalie Merchant, Wangari Maathai, Sally Field, Anna Deavere Smith, Diana Nyad, Mae Jemison, Anita Hill, and many more—the OWLC offers a variety of workshops, residencies, and an annual leadership intensive.

## WHAT IS OMEGA'S MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM?

As a nonprofit, Omega relies on Member support to help realize its mission and meet growing operational costs. Membership starts at \$10 per month, and helps Omega expand and enrich its learning community through new scholarships, deeper program offerings, and becoming an even stronger force for good. Member benefits include exclusive content, special gatherings, and discounts on workshop tuition and purchases at the Omega Wellness Center, Bookstore, and Café.

## ABOUT OMEGA INSTITUTE (HOME OF THE OWLC)

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## WHY A WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CENTER AT OMEGA?

Omega was founded on the holistic worldview that the well-being of each individual is deeply connected to the well-being of all living things. To date more than 600,000 women have participated in Omega's holistic offerings and innovative opportunities for women's development. Omega recognizes the critical role women can play world-wide in transforming what it means to lead, and shifting the leadership paradigm from "power over" to "power with" others.

## WHAT IS THE OWLC?

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## HOW DID THE OWLC BEGIN?

In 2002, Omega created its acclaimed Women & Power series, where visionary speakers and change-agents from around the world explored how women can use their unique experiences and voices to redefine power. Women & Power featured notable presenters such as Alice Walker, Natalie Merchant, Wangari Maathai, Anna Deavere Smith, Diana Nyad, Mae Jemison, Anita Hill, Dolores Huerta, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Brené Brown, Ai-jen Poo, Carol Gilligan, Kerry Washington, and many more. Building on the energy and enthusiasm of Women & Power, Omega saw a growing demand for an ongoing women's leadership curriculum and community. Omega began a research and development effort in 2005, to learn from women about their leadership needs and interests, which culminated in the launch of the OWLC in 2012. Cofounded by Elizabeth Lesser, Carla Goldstein, and Sarah Peter, the OWLC convenes, trains, and inspires women to Do Power Differently®.

## WHAT DOES THE OWLC OFFER?

As a women's leadership hub, the OWLC offers a variety of workshops, residencies, scholarships, an annual leadership intensive, and an online resource library. Recent faculty have included: Rev. angel Kyodo Williams Rōshi, Riane Eisler, Mallika Dutt, Vivian Williams-Kurutz, Meggan Watterson, Robyn Moreno, Leslie Salmon Jones, Manisha Thakor, Sharon Salzberg, and more.

## WHO ATTENDS OWLC PROGRAMS?

OWLC programs are designed for all who identify as women to strengthen their leadership so that we can help create a world that works—for everybody.

## WHO IS ON THE OWLC ADVISORY COUNCIL?

The OWLC's esteemed Advisory Council includes: Isabel Allende, Jennifer Buffett, Majora Carter, Sister Joan Chittister, V (formerly Eve Ensler), Sally Field, Eileen Fisher, Jane Fonda, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Ubaka Hill, Pat Mitchell, Hibaaq Osman, Edit Schaffer, Gloria Steinem, Loung Ung, and Ann M. Veneman.

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As an environmental steward, Omega is dedicated to mitigating its environmental impact, and to teaching others how to adopt sustainable living practices. Since 1977, Omega has hosted scores of environmental conferences, and workshops focused on regenerative principles that restore and benefit the environment. Past presenters have included Wangari Maathai, Bill McKibben, Vandana Shiva, John Todd, Winona LaDuke, Jeremy Rifkin, Pete Seeger, and many more.

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## WHY DID OMEGA BUILD ITS ECO MACHINE™ AND THE OCSL?

In 2005 Omega's aging septic system needed to be replaced. Instead of simply installing a new septic system, Omega wanted to create a different kind of water treatment system—one that would handle water not as waste, but as a precious resource. After brainstorming with Omega teachers at the top of the environmental and sustainability fields, Omega chose to build an Eco Machine™, a natural "wastewater" treatment system that cleans water by mimicking the systems of the natural world.

Part of the Eco Machine™ needed to be housed by a building. Omega also wanted the building to include a classroom, and be designed in a way that would allow the public to learn about the water reclamation process, witness the latest developments in regenerative design, and take courses that highlight their connection to nature and inspire greater sustainability in their own lives and communities. To facilitate these educational goals, Omega decided the building should be built to meet the highest standards in sustainable architecture—LEED® Platinum and Living Building Challenge™. To meet one of the prerequisites for the Living Building Challenge, the OCSL was designed to generate and supply all the energy for both the Eco Machine™ and the building, with a zero carbon footprint.

## OCSL BUILDING

The award-winning OCSL building was the first in the U.S. to achieve both LEED® Platinum and Living Building Challenge™ certification—the highest environmental performance standards available. It brings together wastewater recycling, renewable energy, and other sustainability elements that can be replicated. Designed by the renowned firm BNIM Architects, the OCSL also demonstrates environmental leadership through its carbon neutral operations and by supplying all of its energy needs. It is heated and cooled using geothermal systems, as well as by drawing photovoltaic power from its solar array.

The core of the facility is a 4,500-square-foot greenhouse containing a water filtration system called the Eco Machine™. Combined with a constructed wetland, this living system uses plants, fungi, algae, bacteria, snails, and other organisms to recycle Omega's wastewater into clean water that restores the aquifer. The system is chemical free, uses zero net energy, and creates a closed loop hydrological cycle. John Todd Ecological Design is the architecture firm that created the Eco Machine™.

## TOURING / VISITING THE BUILDING

From late May through October free public tours of the OCSL are offered weekly by OCSL staff. Private tours are available year-round by appointment, to groups of educators, students, contractors, and others who want to learn more about natural water reclamation, sustainable living, and green building. Contact [OCSL@eOmega.org](mailto:OCSL@eOmega.org) for more information about tours.

## WHAT IS THE LIVING BUILDING CHALLENGE™?

The OCSL was one of the first buildings in the world to achieve full certification under the Living Building Challenge™, the most advanced green building rating system in the world. The OCSL received this designation on October 12, 2010. The Living Building Challenge™ is a program of the International Living Future Institute. The Living Building Challenge™ was launched by the Cascadia Green Building Council (a chapter of both the U.S. Green Building Council and Canada Green Building Council).

## WHAT IS LEED® PLATINUM STATUS?

The OCSL achieved LEED® Platinum certification, the highest green building designation available from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) Green Building Rating System™ is an internationally recognized green building certification program. The OCSL received this designation on October 7, 2010.