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## State suspends license from central Oregon school for troubled teens

By **Michelle Cole, The Oregonian**

**November 03, 2009, 10:30PM**

State officials have told parents to remove their children from a central Oregon boarding school after investigators found students were subject to inappropriate sexual role-play, public humiliation and physical deprivation.

Following a seven-month investigation, the Oregon Department of Human Services has temporarily suspended **Mount Bachelor Academy's** license. Investigators found nine substantiated allegations of child abuse and neglect as well as numerous licensing violations.

Their conclusion: "There are conditions present that pose a serious danger to child safety."

The private school caters to troubled teens 14 to 17 1/2 years old. It has operated near Prineville for more than 20 years, drawing students from all over the world. Tuition runs \$6,400 a month, and students typically stay 14 to 16 months.

State officials released a summary of the investigation Tuesday in response to a public records request from The Oregonian, but they refused to respond to questions about the school.

The summary chronicles incidents dating from 2007 to this year. They involved five students and often centered on the "emotional growth" workshops required of every student. The report says what those five students experienced was "substantially consistent" with the experiences of all teens in the program.

State investigators found students were required to engage in sexualized role-play and other humiliating activities, such as re-enacting past abuse, in front of staff and peers. Students were deprived of sleep or use of the bathroom.

According to investigators, discipline at the school included so-called "bans" requiring students to go a week or longer without being allowed to talk, touch or look at others.

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Sharon Bitz, Mount Bachelor's executive director, did not return phone calls from The Oregonian on Tuesday. Interviewed in April, soon after the investigation started, Bitz called the allegations groundless and said the school has helped more than 2,000 students since it opened in 1988.

It's not clear how many students were at the school this week. It is licensed for up to 125 students. State records show 88 students and 77 staff were there in March.

Several former students say the state's findings mirror their experiences.

At the same time, other former students and parents say Mount Bachelor helped change young lives.

Jim Bianchin's son attended the school from 2005 to 2007.

"They helped open his eyes to a lot of destructive behaviors that he had," Bianchin of Redding, Calif., said Tuesday. "At no time did we observe or hear of any inappropriate behavior or policies."

The state has given Mount Bachelor 90 days to correct a list of violations or see its license permanently revoked.

In the meantime, parents with children at the school are scrambling.

"I'm in shock," said Nancy Bishop, who has a 14-year-old daughter at Mount Bachelor.

Bishop lives in Southern California and said she received the call from Oregon officials at 6 p.m. Monday telling her she had to make arrangements to get her daughter. Bishop didn't know about the ongoing investigation.

Before catching a plane early Tuesday, Bishop asked whether the state would make counselors or others available to help parents and students. The answer was no.

"I feel like they pulled the rug out from us," she said. "The last thing these kids need is to be yanked around."

**--Michelle Cole**



#### School for Troubled Teens

Private Residential Treatment Program for Boys & Girls ages 13-17.  
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Posted by **jakeandrex**

November 04, 2009, 12:24AM

i was at MBA in the 90s. That all sounds like the school i went to. it wasn't all bad by any means but i also still have nightmares about the place sometimes. part of what is most confusing is making sense of that. it was where i grew up, as much as anything else, it was my childhood. it was messed up, but i learned a lot. i don't know what other alumni think but my feeling is, the law's the law. i mean, what may not have harmed me may have been traumatic for someone else. and considering what some of my peers had already been through before going there--a lot of rough histories of abuse and neglect, things i never had imagined before i got there--i think it's important that schools take care not to do anything to harm the kids. or, i guess i feel like, no matter what the kids' histories are, the school should take care to do no harm, but ESPECIALLY with kids who have histories of abuse. anyway i'm glad the law is looking out and something came of this.

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Posted by **anonymousgraduate**

November 04, 2009, 12:21PM

i went to mba. in my experience most of the staff there, the ones responsible for these abuses, were trying to help. if what was going on was abuse it was out of pride and ignorance, not cruelty. intent matters. none of the staff were getting rich, most of them were over-worked, several made helping kids their life work. i definitely saw these abuses go down in the lifesteps and can also say that the staff responsible for them were compassionate and loving people, just misguided i guess. i hope that understanding is reflected in any related criminal investigations. and that the company and CEOs behind mba are held accountable too. and that someone investigates how this went on for so long, the school was doing ALL of these things long before Sharon Bitz arrived

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Posted by **fingaroll**  
November 04, 2009, 1:29PM

The action that the DHS took is extremely disruptive to the lives of the students and the teachers at this school. The question that needs to be asked is why they could not have taken a less severe disciplinary action?

You look at some of the things that they call out, like not letting students go to the bathroom... now don't you think that most high school football coaches can be just as "abusive" to their players?

The reenacting of past abuse... could that also be construed as part of the therapeutic process?

The sexualized role play... whatever exactly that is. But even it were bad, might this have just been limited to one teacher, might a particular student have lent an less than objective point of view?

Somebody is on a witch hunt here. This business of rehabilitating these problem students is not cut and dry, latitude is required, let's get real here. Now maybe the school crossed the line... and if so, I say a handslap is what is required, not a school closure.

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Posted by **anonymousgraduate**  
November 04, 2009, 3:00PM

"The sexualized role play... whatever exactly that is. But even it were bad, might this have just been limited to one teacher, might a particular student have lent an less than objective point of view? "

It was a regular thing when I was there, years before these allegations.

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Posted by **shakelmakin**  
November 04, 2009, 3:02PM

In my experience, almost anyone who is in the business of rehabilitating troubled teens, is in it for the power and the feeling of control that is lacking in their personal lives. It does not surprise me at all that this happened.

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Posted by **anonymousgraduate**  
November 04, 2009, 3:11PM

"The sexualized role play... whatever exactly that is. But even it were bad, might this have just been limited to one teacher, might a particular student have lent an less than objective point of view? "

It was a regular thing when I was there, years before these allegations.

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