

## **Lost & Forgotten Courses** **Russell M. Magnaghi**

Over the last 122 years Northern has had a number of courses that are usually not associated with the university today. One of these was Conservation and Agriculture, which went back to 1905 and offered by the Biology Department. When Samuel Magers arrived in 1911 he was given the responsibility for developing a course that would teach Northern students to assist their pupils in planting and cultivating school gardens and beautifying the areas around their homes. He told *The Quill* reporter in November 1914, that "I shall refuse to pass any girl who fails to develop blisters on her hands."

The agricultural program was greatly aided by the passage in 1917 of the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act, which promoted agricultural and industrial education among high school students. The federal government paid the salaries of teachers of agriculture whose training met the requirements of the Act.

George Butler, with a degree from Michigan State University joined the faculty in 1935. He developed an elaborate agricultural program that allowed students to gain hands on experience, train at the field station at Munuscong Bay in the eastern Upper Peninsula beginning in 1948 and be part of the program that allowed students to transfer credits to MSU. Butler retired in 1959 and the agricultural portion of the geography-based program ended in 1963 as agriculture was no longer seen as a field attracting students in the Upper Peninsula.

The Consumer and Family Studies program began in 1910 and catered food for all events on campus. Eventually better known as Home Economics, the program has developed into the popular and successful Hospitality and Tourism Management degree.

From 1917 and into the 1950s Northern offered a biology course titled "Heredity

and Eugenics” which dealt with “more fundamental aspects of inheritance with particular reference to man.” Eugenics was taught in most colleges and universities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1939 the course treated “the possible application of genetic principles in the improvement of the human race . . . .” Dr. Luther West was hired to teach eugenics in 1938. The idea was that scientifically and politically the human race could be “improved” by eliminating defective members from society. This was horribly seen in Nazi Germany and sterilization programs in the United States and passed out of existence.

On a more positive note we have other courses. In the past Latin was required in colleges and this tradition came to Northern in the early 1900s. Latin was taught by Earle Parker and in 1910 a Latin Club was established. By the 1930s a plethora of courses dealing with Caesar, Virgil, Livy, Horace, poetry, literature and medieval Latin were available to students. However by the 1940s interest declined and Parker was relegated to offering “Our Classical Heritage.” When he retired in 1946 Latin was no longer listed in Northern’s *Bulletin*. In the 1980s, Latin was offered a number of times by Dr. George Javor on a student demand basis but never caught on.

Prior to World War I, German was the most popular language course taught at Northern and colleges around the United States. Due to the war, interest in the language declined and was replaced by French and today by the popularity of Spanish.

Good handwriting was an important skill for teachers and was a required course. Casey C. Wiggins between 1914 and 1951 taught the course Business 91 or Education 91” Improvement in Handwriting for those students who were found to be deficient in penmanship. One student, George Holman in the 1930s knew the process and entered the class writing with his left hand and eventually changed to his right hand and passed

the course. The course ended in 1960.

As we focus on the future, we find Northern offering Native American Studies; Forensic Research (FROST), Forensic Chemistry; Medical Plant Chemistry and Cannabis Studies; Hospitality and Tourism Management; and most recently Indoor Agriculture. As an organic institution, the University is continually changing and improving with courses unheard of in the past, but developing to meet student educational demands.