

A New Chapter

A CONVERSATION WITH LES AND PHYLLIS WONG

By KAREN WALLINGFORD '02 MA

RIGHT AWAY YOU KNOW THAT LES WONG LIKES HIS LITERATURE. He often talks about his life and family in terms of stories. He's an avid reader and has been since he was a child. When asked to name a few of his favorite authors, the list is exhaustive and includes novelists, playwrights, poets, activists, and philosophers. He names thinkers such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Edwin O'Connor, Edward Said, and Wallace Stegner. He said he's intrigued by everything written and spoken by the Dali Lama and can get lost in anything written by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

All of these authors resonate the themes of self worth, change, and overcoming challenges—themes that, in one way or another, are deeply significant to Wong. He has a personal goal of reading one novel every month, and despite his busy professional schedule, it's clear that this is not a goal he takes lightly.

"I make it a priority. I fit it in," he said.

Northern Michigan University's new president is a devoted husband and father, a self-described learning junkie, an alpine backpacker, and a fly fisherman. He has led numerous technology initiatives, pioneered diversity programs, and written in a variety of disciplines ranging from health, medicine, and psychology to history and Asian American studies. Wong, who took over as NMU's top administrator on July 1, has found Northern to be a thriving, well-run university. He believes that an NMU education is a gateway for anyone from anywhere to achieve world success, and he's prepared to spread that message throughout the state, across the nation, and around the globe.



The American Dream

Wong's story begins on the West Coast but has roots that extend east to China and south to Mexico. He was born in Englewood, California, and raised just across the bay from San Francisco in Oakland. His father, Wallace Wong, was born in Canton, China, and raised in Hong Kong until the age of 8, when he immigrated to the United States with his mother. Because immigration laws in 1929 permitted parents to bring only one child across the Pacific per trip, Wong's grandmother went back to China to get another family member. As far as anyone knows, she never returned to the United States.

Wong's father was then raised by an Irish family in Southern California, which is where he met his wife, Beatrice Rubio.

Beatrice came into the United States from Chihuahua, Mexico, when she was a young girl. Chihuahua borders New Mexico to the north and Texas to the northeast and is the largest state in Mexico. Its people have been described as stubborn, courageous, tenacious, and faithful.

The spirit of the Chihuahuan people comes out in Beatrice's competitive nature, a trait Wong said he shares with his mother. In the majority of ways, though, he feels he's more like his father, whom he characterizes as steady, hard working, goal oriented, respectful of people, and very social.

Wong describes his father's career as one of the great Horatio Alger "rags to riches" stories. Alger, who lived from 1832-1899, wrote more than 100 novels for boys with titles such as *Strive and Succeed* and *Struggling Upward*. His heroes are young boys who are born into poverty but achieve success through

hard work, courage, determination, and honesty.

Wallace Wong's first job was as a janitor working for the National Dollar Store. He got the job from the company's founder and close family friend, Joe Shoong. Over the course of his career, Wallace eventually rose to be the company's CEO.

The National Dollar Store was bought out after Wallace's death, but during his tenure as CEO, Wong said, "It was the largest owned and operated Chinese American business in America."

Wong is the third of four siblings. His younger brother Curtis passed away at age 49. His older brother Roger and sister Jerry still live in California. In talking about his upbringing, Wong said it was "as close to the American dream in the Eisenhower years as you could expect. Very middle class. Very solid. My parents wanted us to be good students. They wanted us to stay out of trouble."

Although both of his parents are now deceased, Wong often refers to them as if they were still living.

"I don't think about their deaths," he said. "I actually think they are still with me. I think my father is immensely proud now that I'm the president of a great university."

Wong's parents taught him to speak his mind, but they also instilled in him a deep respect for family. This is one of the many shared core values that attracted Wong to his wife Phyllis.

High School Sweethearts

Les and Phyllis met in high school when they were 16. At first they were friends, but it wasn't long before they began dating. They were together through their senior year but decided to go their separate ways in college—

he to Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, and she to the Drexel Institute of Technology (now Drexel University) in Philadelphia. They kept in touch, and the connection they established in high school eventually proved stronger than the 2,500 miles that separated them in college.

"I recognized that there was a lot of resonance in the way that we believed about the world and about each other," Wong said.

At the end of Wong's junior year of college, they decided to get married. They exchanged vows the week after Wong graduated. The couple celebrated their 32nd wedding anniversary this past spring. They have three sons: Isaac, 29, Nathan, 25, and Brian, 22.

Isaac, who is a mathematician and programmer by trade, is also an antiquities scholar. Nathan is a flutist, a marathon runner, and a world traveler. He teaches and performs in the San Francisco and Oakland Bay areas. Brian graduated from Seattle University with a degree in physics and is a 2nd lieutenant in the U.S. Army. He is currently stationed in Seoul, Korea. Most of his work is with Special Forces. He also plays the piano and enjoys building cars.

After Les and Phyllis were married, Phyllis transferred to The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, where she received a bachelor's degree in liberal studies with an emphasis in literature and history. She then went on to earn a master's degree in American history and American literature from Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma.

Like her husband, she is an avid reader, but unlike him she said she's not as disciplined about reading every day. Phyllis describes herself as more the "can't-put-a-book-down-once-I-

open-it” type. She enjoys a variety of authors such as Richard Wright and Naguib Mahfouz, but has a particular interest in literature written for children. She cites C.S. Lewis, Holling C. Holling, Madeleine L’Engle, and Ursula LeGuin as among her favorite children’s authors.

Her interest in reading is complemented by a love of the outdoors, floral design, and horticulture. These interests developed when her children were growing up. Gardening, she said, gave her a way to be alone with herself and her thoughts.

She has done more with her green thumb, however, than just enhance the beauty of her own backyard. She helped develop a land trust in Washington, and in North Dakota, she was co-president of a garden club.

Professionally, Phyllis has taught in both physical and virtual classrooms. Prior to moving to Marquette, she was the director of online learning at Valley City State University in North Dakota.

Challenging Expectations

While a career as an educator and academic administrator seem like natural extensions of Wong’s psyche, that wasn’t always the case. In high school, he was better known for his performance on the baseball field than in the classroom. When it came time to think about life after high school, Wong’s guidance counselor told him that college would be a waste of his parents’ money. He encouraged Wong to consider a vocational career that would capitalize on his physical abilities rather than pursue a career that would rely on his creative and intellectual capacity.

“He said, ‘You know, Les, some people are made for college, some aren’t. You’re not.’”

His counselor was clearly wrong. Wong’s passion for education was ignited at Gonzaga University where, for the first time, he was treated like he had a brain that he was supposed to use. Two professors from Gonzaga really stand out in his mind.

“Father Dave Leigh taught me the importance of thinking clearly about complex ideas. John Firkins taught me to love calculus,” he said.

Wong graduated with a bachelor’s degree in psychology in 1972. His curiosity about the human condition led him to pursue a master’s degree in experimental psychology at Eastern Washington University in Cheney. It was during this time that he said he blossomed intellectually.

Wong was more than a decade into his career before he even considered getting a doctorate. His first job was as a psychology instructor at Pierce College in Tacoma, a community college of around 13,000 students. He enjoyed teaching and had no ambitions beyond a master’s degree until his passion for ideas and his gift for finding creative solutions caught the attention of faculty members at Washington State University.

After giving a series of lectures there, faculty members were surprised to learn that Wong did not have a doctorate. They asked him if he’d be interested in getting one. And so he pursued his doctorate at Washington State while teaching at Pierce. He completed his doctorate in 1986. Once again, opportunity sought him out.

“I was perfectly happy at the community college level,” Wong said. “And then one of my former students from Pierce who went on to Evergreen recommended me to give a lecture. After that, they asked me if I was interested in a job.”

He started at Evergreen in 1988 as a member of the faculty, but took on responsibilities as an academic dean in 1990. Wong’s move from the university’s faculty to its administration surprised many of his colleagues. Some felt it was a waste of his creative potential. Others suggested he had sold out. But Wong doesn’t see it that way.

“I’d like to think I’m bringing a teacher’s mind to the leadership of the academy. Someone who is grounded in academics is not going to forget the purpose of the university, which is to teach and to learn,” he said.

Wong was recruited by the University of Southern Colorado in Pueblo, where he was provost and academic vice president from 1996-1999. He served as interim president of USC for the first six months of 1997. His move to Valley City State University in 1999, he said, was a combination of recruitment and personal choice. He served as vice president for academic affairs at VCSU until June 2004.

Wong has always been intrigued by the question of how technology can or cannot influence teaching and learning. Helping a university to answer that question was one of the main reasons why he and Phyllis chose to move north to VCSU. It is also among the reasons they chose Northern.

“When I did my research on NMU, I looked at faculty talent, student talent, location, and technology. Everything added up,” he said.

Settling In

Wong plans to spend the next year or two settling into his role as president and getting to know Northern. But don’t think for a moment that he’s filed away his lecture notes. In all of his years as a university administrator,



As Les and Phyllis Wong settle into the president's residence, they'll doubtless be giving the house a few personal touches. Phyllis has a penchant for collecting abandoned bird's nests and likes to display them around her house. Les, who collects antique measuring instruments such as scales and measuring tapes, may put some of his treasures on display as well. Photographs by Andy Gregg '93 BFA.

he has remained active in the classroom. He sees teaching as an integral component to his success as a university president.

"The best way to understand the heartbeat of an institution is to be in the classroom," he said. "As an administrator, I think there's a danger in thinking we know something about the student experience when we really don't. I want to keep teaching so that I understand the student culture. It will keep me grounded."

Along with his experience as an educator, Wong brings a distinctive professional perspective to the leadership of NMU. It's a perspective that was inspired by his father, who Wong said was one of a dying breed of CEOs.

"My father knew that an organization ran from the ground up,"

said Wong. "He said that everybody's role is critical. He had enormous respect for secretaries, facilities people, everyone. And I think I have that same trait—enormous respect for all levels of employees."

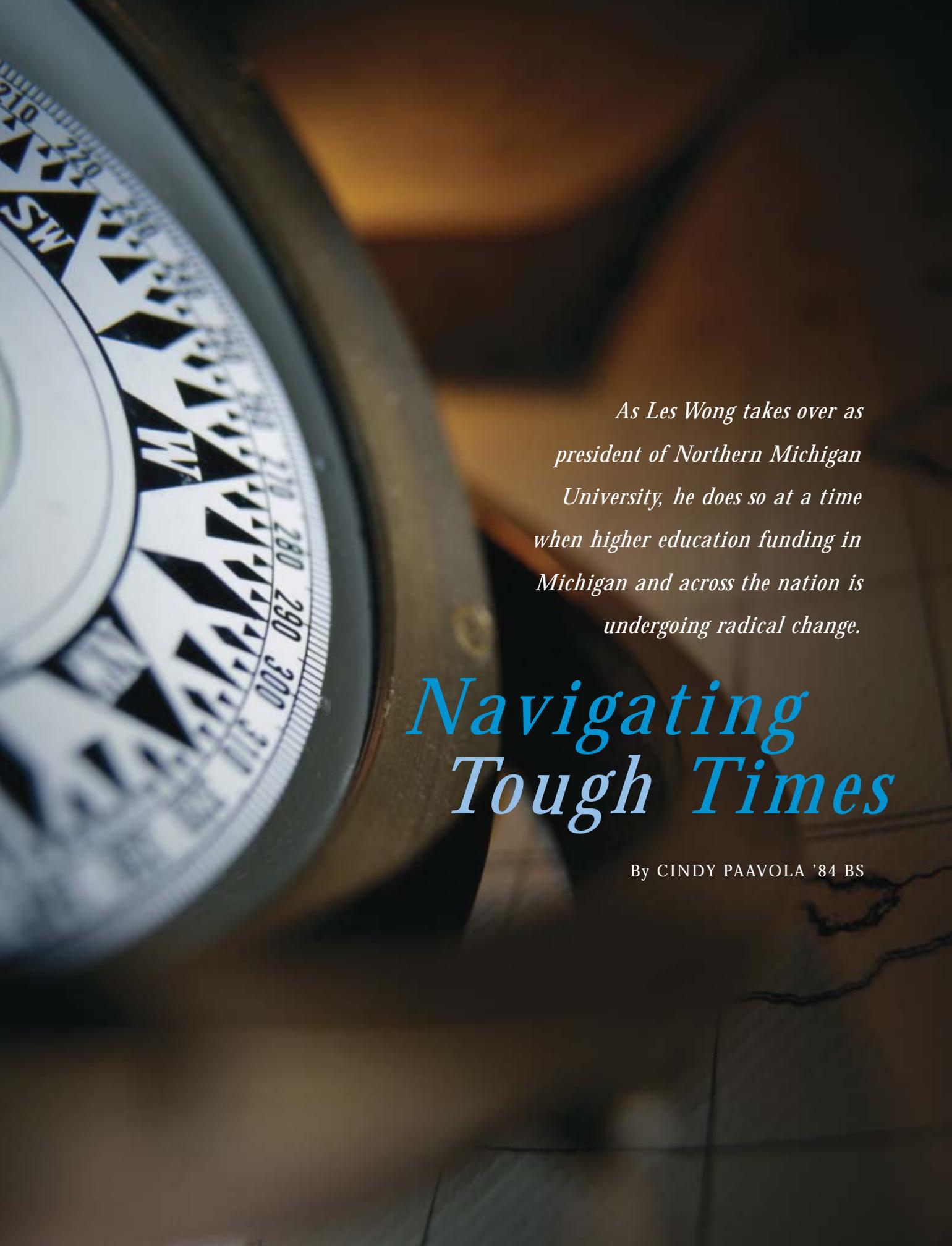
It's too soon to talk about Wong's vision for the university and, according to the new president, somewhat inappropriate. He believes that a vision isn't something that is held by a top administrator and imposed onto the members of an organization. He said that good visionaries are able to synthesize many visions and dreams that exist within an organization.

"I need to listen and learn what those dreams and visions are," he said. So instead of talking about missions and visions, Wong has asked the university community to

think about a number of questions, which he hopes will spark active discussions over the next year.

"How will we think about and use technology to create a more enriched learning environment? How might we use or engage interdisciplinary studies to help students understand how interconnected the world is? How will we bring young people into performing undergraduate research to teach them how to create ideas and solutions?"

In talking with Wong, you get the sense that he and the NMU community are about to embark on a great adventure together. The outline for this adventure is visible but barely perceptible, and the destination is not yet known. But the journey is already showing signs of great promise. ■



As Les Wong takes over as president of Northern Michigan University, he does so at a time when higher education funding in Michigan and across the nation is undergoing radical change.

Navigating Tough Times

By CINDY PAAVOLA '84 BS

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With state budgets running deeply in the red, legislators across the country have been forced to wield hefty knives. In Michigan, most state-supported programs have felt the pain of budget cuts, but the slice to higher education funding has been particularly deep. Over the past two years, Michigan's 15 public universities lost \$240 million in state appropriation funding. Northern's share was a \$7.5 million reduction.

And the outlook for fiscal year 2005? Michigan's economy is seeing some improvement but the recovery continues to be stubbornly slow. A revenue estimating conference in May projected a \$250 to \$300 million deficit for the fiscal year that ends September 30 and as much as another \$1 billion shortfall for the upcoming fiscal year.

That news leaves university presidents, students, and their parents trying to navigate what appears to be waterways fraught with icebergs.

"We used to say public universities were state-supported institutions, but now we refer to being state assisted," said Mike Roy, who returned from the interim president position to vice president of finance and administration when Wong came on board July 1. "Today, it is like universities are carefully maneuvering around ice flows, hoping that each decision we make doesn't cause us to crash into an unseen iceberg that could seriously damage our ship."

He points out that in the 1970s, state appropriations made up 75 percent of the public universities' general fund budgets and tuition and fees the other 25 per-

cent. In 2004, state dollars and tuition and fees each contributed 49 percent to Northern's general fund budget. External funding, such as private gifts and grants, made up the remaining two percent.

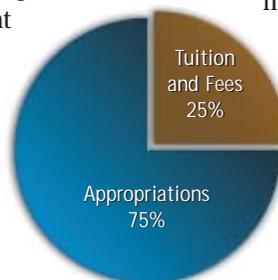
Roy, one of Northern's money managers for the past 26 years, said that the current state of higher education funding is "the worst I've ever experienced."

Cutting costs, redefining priorities

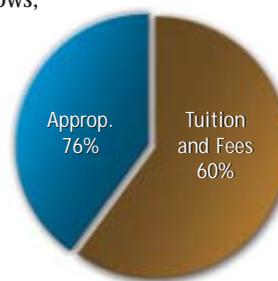
Even before the drastic state funding reductions of the past two years, Northern had been reorganizing and reallocating. Since 1991, NMU has reduced its university divisions from eight to three, its vice presidents from five to two, its colleges from five to three, and merged numerous academic and administrative departments. Since March 2003, the campus community has identified and begun implementation of nearly \$12 million in budget reductions, elimination, and cost-avoidance measures. By the end of the next fiscal year, 135 positions are scheduled to have been eliminated and 70 people laid off or retired.

According to Roy, the budget situation has forced the university to look at every department, program, and function and ask: How do our spending decisions reflect the goals of the university's mission and vision?

How do they advance Northern and NMU students? Roy said nothing was spared from this review, but areas determined by the campus to have the highest impact on the student experience were protected from major reductions. These included course availability, class size, financial aid, and student jobs.



1972-73



2003-04

As one of the largest notebook computer universities in the world, technology has turned out to be a beacon of light in these dark economic times for Northern. It has allowed NMU to change the way it performs university business, resulting in significant savings over the past two years. For example, grades and payment reminders are no longer mailed to students but are delivered electronically for an estimated cost savings of \$20,000 in postage each year.

“We’ve looked everywhere to see if how we were doing things matched the priorities of the university, which are to offer quality academic and student programming with individual attention in a high-tech learning environment,” said Roy. “Making the amount of changes we’ve made in the amount

of time we’ve had to make them has been painful, but if there is a silver lining to this experience, it is that Northern is today a much more efficient and more focused university than it was two years ago.”

Climbing costs

Last year, Michigan’s public university students faced an average tuition and fees increase of 10 percent. Northern’s increase of nine percent was the third lowest increase in terms of both dollars and percent, and it bumped NMU from the fourth most affordable university in the state to second.

“Northern has proven itself to be fiscally responsible. In fact, NMU’s increase in cost per student has remained below the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increase for 11 consecutive years,” said Roy. “I remind people that we’ve accom-

plished that position while still being the only public university in Michigan to provide every full-time student with a notebook computer, software, and technology support as part of tuition and fees,” he said.

The reduction of state funding is the main factor driving tuition and fee increases across the state, but there are other factors impacting Northern’s costs that the university has little control over, such as rising health care and insurance costs, increasing utility costs, and state mandated programs.

Critical crossroads

Though the recovery picture for Michigan’s economy is murky at best, one thing is crystal clear: Northern is at a critical crossroads.

NMU’s challenge has become one of how to maintain quality when funding is going down but

2003-2004 Tuition and Fees at Michigan’s Fifteen Public Universities



“We’ve cut. We’ve reorganized. We’ve developed new ways to carry out university business. But now the staff and resources have been stretched about as far as they can. Without taking immediate measures to address our growth, we will fail in our commitment to provide a learning environment of small class size and personalized attention we are known for.”

enrollment is going up. Last year, Northern’s enrollment broke the 9,000-student mark for the first time since 1981. This upcoming year, NMU expects to set a school record of nearly 9,700 students.

Growth is good, points out Roy, because it provides the university with additional revenue and it lessens NMU’s political vulnerability during the appropriation funding process. However, decreasing state dollars means having to serve more students with fewer resources.

“We’ve cut. We’ve reorganized. We’ve developed new ways to carry out university business. But now the staff and resources have been stretched about as far as they can go. Without taking immediate measures to address our growth, we will fail in our commitment to provide a learning environment of small class size and personal attention we are known for,” said Roy.

A new captain on board

As Wong became Northern’s new leader, Roy’s message to him was this: Continued rough waters ahead, but the ship is still on course.

“Great things are happening at NMU,” Roy said. “Despite the stress of the budget situation, our students are experiencing phenome-

nal learning, our faculty members are doing what they most love to do—teach—and our university has continued to excel. We cannot lose sight of those facts. All of our decisions now must ensure that what is great about Northern Michigan University today is what is great about the university decades from now, so that we can continue to fulfill our mission of successfully serving the students of the Upper Peninsula, Michigan, and the Midwest.”

Wong is impressed with Northern’s practical and resourceful budget planning and management.

“What I’ve seen so far is that NMU is an efficiently run university and that its approach to the current budget situation has been not only reasonable but frequently innovative,” he said. “This is good because, as a university, we have much to do other than continuously spending time on developing cost-cutting options. Obviously, being fiscally responsible is vital—and it appears NMU has been so for many years—but I hope soon we will be able to once again concentrate our energies less on the budget and more on elevating Northern to its next level of achievement.” ■



Advocating for higher education

Last fall, Northern created an advocacy program made up of alumni, donors, parents, and friends who want to support NMU specifically, and Michigan higher education in general. The group’s members write letters, call, or meet with their state policy makers to discuss the impact of their own college education or that of their children’s.

“The challenges facing our state legislators are tough ones, but this group’s goal is to make sure Michigan’s decision makers do not forget that supporting higher education is supporting the future of our state,” said Mike Roy. “I am grateful to those who have become partners with Northern in this effort.”

To learn more about Northern Michigan University’s advocacy program, contact the Office of the President at 906-227-2242 or NMUPres@nmu.edu.

ETHICS EDUCATION

Who should be responsible for educating the next generation of leaders?

By MIRIAM MOELLER '00 BA, '02 MA
and KAREN WALLINGFORD '02 MA



WE CAN ALL RELATE TO THE FEELING. It's after midnight during the last week of classes. Your final, seven-page research paper is due at 8 a.m., and you're staring at a blank computer screen. What do you do? Stay up all night and write the paper? Ask for an extension? Or do you download a ready-made research paper off the Internet and get busy counting sheep?

According to NMU political science professor Steve Nelson, the latter option seems to be a growing choice of students. Nelson has noticed an increased need to talk to his students about the misappropriation of materials, especially those from electronic sources.

"It seems to be that there isn't as much of a line between what seems appropriate and what doesn't," Nelson said. "Sharing drafts and papers is only a mouse click away."

NMU dean of students **Ed Niemi '79 BS, '83 MAE** said that while there has been a slight decrease in violations of the student code, incidents of plagiarism have increased.

"I think the Internet has given students more opportunities to take advantage," he said.

However, Niemi also feels that as students adjust to advances in technology, instances of plagiarism will fall. He believes that most students who plagiarize either don't realize it or don't know how to credit their source.

When looked at from a broader perspective, then, should student plagiarism be considered a minor offense—something that will pass either with knowledge or with time? Or, could this behavior be symptomatic of a larger, more insidious problem?

The Josephson Institute on Ethics has conducted a survey of American high school students every two years since 1992. The results of

their "2002 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth" show that of the 12,000 high school students polled, those who admitted they cheated on an exam at least once in the past year jumped from 61 percent in 1992 to 74 percent in 2002. The number who said they stole something from a store within the past 12 months rose from 31 to 38 percent, and the percentage who said they lied to their parents or teachers also increased.

Student cynicism is also on the rise. From 2000 to 2002 the number of high school students who agreed with the statement, "A person has to lie or cheat sometimes in order to succeed," jumped from 34 to 43 percent.

Michael Josephson, president of the Institute said, "The evidence is that a willingness to cheat has become the norm and that parents, teachers, coaches, and even religious educators have not been able to stem the tide. The scary thing is that so many kids are entering the workforce to become corporate executives, politicians, airplane mechanics, and nuclear inspectors with the dispositions and skills of cheaters and thieves."

In the wake of government and corporate scandals such as those at Enron, Global Crossing, Tyco, and Worldcom, universities are increasingly being called upon to take the lead in educating the next generation of business, community, and family leaders in ethical decision making.

Taking a major role in providing a solid ethical education has long been a cornerstone at Northern Michigan University. According to the NMU mission statement, Northern students "will study ethics, humanitarian values, and cultural awareness..." and indeed, if you look through the university's *Undergraduate Bulletin*, incorporating ethics education in the classroom appears to be an important component in virtually all academic programs. But how should universities go about laying the ethical groundwork for the next generation? We asked several NMU professors to weigh in on the issue. Although they may not agree that America is on the fast track to moral and ethical decay, each has some interesting insights on the state of ethics in America today and their approach to ethics education.

Business professor Robert Miller teaches human behavior and organization in the legal and political environment. All of the texts he uses have an ethical component woven into them. While his goal is to teach ethics to his students before they go out into the business world, he said this is problematic because he believes "a common ethical denominator" is missing in American society today.

He said that in the past, Americans had a more coherent ethical and moral perspective that was rooted primarily in Christian values, but that gradually, this foundation has eroded to the point of virtual collapse.

“A primary part of the process of educating future managers has consisted of attempting to persuade them to strive for higher standards and to see applying those standards as mutually beneficial to them, their organization, and society.”

Starting in the late 60s and strengthening through the 70s, 80s, and 90s, the view that any ethical perspective is as good as any other was promulgated, Miller explained. He has observed that many of his students believe that the appropriate basis for determining whether something is good or bad is how they feel. Based on this perspective, students have argued to Miller that it is unacceptable for him to tell them what is right or wrong.

“There is no role for an intellectual examination of ethics in this formulation,” he said. “Ethics and morality are treated as simply personal choices for which little or no responsibility is felt. Right and wrong are sold to students based upon ‘what works.’ It is more difficult for students, and others in our society, to distinguish between successful spin and true concern for employees, customers, or the environment. Students today are living in a world where no standards have been considered worthy of societal support.”

Miller recalled a conversation he had with one of his colleague’s daughters, who asked why her parents were still together when all of her friends’ parents were divorced.

“It’s to the point where it seems abnormal to have a long-term relationship,” he said. “Ethics and

morality have become oddities, and we use the excuse that we don’t know any better.”

Miller believes his students should know better, so he tries to present them with a more complete ethical perspective. He teaches them about personal responsibility and asks them to consider the long-term consequences of their actions. He encourages his students to build an ethical belief system based on the common tenets of integrity, respect, and caring for each other.

“The world presents us with conflicts and, a lot of times, people choose options with more rewards. Sometimes that’s the road that is seen as requiring cheating or lying. The basic idea of responsibility is that every time you have a choice, you also have a responsibility.

“A primary part of the process of educating future managers has consisted of attempting to persuade them to strive for higher standards and to see applying those standards as mutually beneficial to them, their organization, and society,” he said.

But Miller also feels there is a downside to teaching ethics. He said universities are often criticized for not placing enough emphasis on teaching ethical behavior.

“Teachers can only teach ethics and responsibility, but how students apply that in the real world, teachers can’t control,” he said.

Philosophy professor David Cooper teaches applied ethics, social and political philosophy, and the philosophy of psychology. He said that changes in students’ ethical behavior seem to be tied to economic issues and national events such as the attacks on the World

Trade Center and the Pentagon, business and government scandals, and the war in Iraq.

Cooper said that today’s students grow up with a fear about their futures that he didn’t have when he was their age. When he was a student, Cooper and his peers knew they would be more successful than their parents. This is no longer the case.

“Today, students face the fact that there isn’t a safety net out there, and that scares them,” he said.

In order to face the challenges of an increasingly complex world, Cooper said most students are looking for a vision or a role model when they come to college—someone who will help guide them through the maze. Finding an appropriate role model, however, can be complicated and confusing. Whether in business, politics, or through reality shows, students see the scoundrel portrayed as someone who is successful and admired, and this confuses students’ moral and ethical code.

Cooper uses Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill* movies to illustrate his point.

“On one level, the movies are campish and amusing,” he said. “But what is the overall effect of showing all that carnage and murder in an amoral fashion?” Cooper asked. “The murderers become the heroes. There are really no good guys to root for.”

The reason we can show movies like these today when we couldn’t 30 years ago, he said, is because the moral sensitivity of the movie-going public has been lowered.

“Students don’t seem to be aware that there are different levels of moral sensitivity, and that these kinds of movies are making fun of those who are the most morally developed,” he explained. “In reality, the reaction of audiences to killing does matter, and

yet many people have become desensitized. This leads to the easy way we shrug off 'collateral damage' when it is reported in the news."

Over the course of five years, Cooper conducted a moral development test at the beginning and end of each semester to help his students understand their own level of morality. Based on their answers, students were able to identify whether their morality emphasized one of three perspectives: the egocentric, someone concerned only with him or herself; the ethnocentric, someone who gives most weight to the views of his or her community; or the universal post-conventional, someone who acknowledges the views of all people, even those who differ greatly from him or herself.

Cooper said that almost all of his students believed that they should have a moral conscience that emphasizes universal values and that about 90 percent of them had moved in that direction by the end of the semester. However, a few stayed at the same level, and a couple actually moved back one level. This was not because those students became less moral or ethical over the course of the semester, but because they were confused about how complex morality has become in the modern world. Much of that confu-

sion, Cooper believes, can be traced to how the popular media presents moral complexity.

"Students naively think they are not influenced by advertising and the general propaganda that comes out," Cooper said, "but I do believe they buy into a lot of what they see on TV, including bad things."

Cooper pointed out that while many news reporting agencies say that they strive for neutrality, this becomes increasingly difficult as larger chunks of the media are bought by a few, big investors.

"Ideology is not supposed to drive news channels, and yet more and more it does. Popular opinion is easily manipulated when ideological types control the popular media."

He said that the way to address this at the student level is to teach critical thinking skills so that students can evaluate multiple points of view and identify dishonesty and bias even in cases where the source claims to be neutral.

"At the college level, students need to move beyond what has to do with the self," Cooper said.

"Helping develop a universal conscience is one of the goals of teaching at the college level."

Nelson, who teaches research methods, public policy, and law classes, said that while he believes that the family should be the primary place where children learn about ethics, he understands that there are many cases where the family doesn't teach ethics and the children are left adrift.

"Some of the problems of society are traceable to kids who don't have a sense of what is right or wrong," Nelson said. "What do we do as a society against that? Higher education should be one

place, not the only place, where students are exposed to ethics."

He said teaching ethics in the classroom can be problematic because there are so many different perspectives on ethical behavior. For example, his son doesn't think it's wrong to download music from the Internet. Nelson disagrees although he admitted to having taped songs that were played on the radio when he was a kid. He wonders what the difference is.

Ethics, he said, must be taught on a continuum.

In his classes, Nelson tries to focus on ethical questions without giving answers so that his students can decide on their own personal, ethical belief system. He reminds students in some cases not to get personal but to focus on the policy or the law. However, he also cautions that in public policy and social welfare policy in particular, it's easy to get caught up in ideological questions and ignore the human element.

"In public policy, you have to remind students that policies impact people."

Nelson points out that even though instances of plagiarism are on the rise, there are a lot of students doing extraordinary things at NMU—from the many students who participate in the Washington Internship program to one student who went to Africa to help people who have AIDS. All of these students, he said, are doing something to help someone else. This is the message Nelson delivers to his students. He teaches them that law is a helping profession and that success should be measured by good deeds.

"Get out there and help people," he said. "That is what will make you stand out." ■

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