



Northern
HORIZONS

FALL 2004

THE MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Leslie E. Wong

The new face of leadership
at Northern Michigan University.

Fall 2004 ■ Vol. 94, No. 1

Publishers

Cindy Paavola '84 BS, Director
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Martha Van Der Kamp, Executive
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Editor

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LuAnne Thurston '93 BS

Contributors

Miriam Moeller '00 BA, '02 MA
Matthew Schneider '04 BA

Horizons, the magazine for alumni and friends of Northern Michigan University, is published three times a year (winter, spring/summer, and fall) by the Office Communications and Marketing and the NMU Alumni Association.

Funding is provided by Northern Michigan University, NMU Alumni Association members, alumni, and friends. Subscriptions are available at \$15 per year, \$7.50 for NMU retirees. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the NMU Alumni Association.

Letters Policy: Unless noted as "not for publication," communications to the editor are considered for publication. Letters will be printed as space permits and may be edited for space and clarity. Please limit your comments to *Horizons* magazine or to topics mentioned in the magazine. Mail to: Editor, *Horizons*, Northern Michigan University, 1401 Presque Isle Ave., Marquette, MI 49855; fax: 906-227-2722; e-mail: horizons@nmu.edu.

Northern Michigan University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Horizons*, Office of Communications and Marketing, Northern Michigan University, 1401 Presque Isle Avenue, Marquette, Michigan 49855. Third-class postage paid at Midland, Michigan 48642.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Do you remember the first time you had one of those 'aha' moments? A moment when a concept or an idea that for so long had seemed impossible to grasp suddenly clicked and was as clear and real to you as if it had always been inside you? It's a moment most of your professors here at Northern and elsewhere would probably cite as being one of their main reasons for getting into, and staying in, the teaching profession.

These moments don't necessarily occur in a classroom, and they don't necessarily occur in an instant. One of my biggest 'aha' moments took several years to come to fruition. When I finished my undergraduate degree in English, I was overwhelmed at the thought of the thousands of pages of literature I had read over the course of the previous four years. I had always felt a sense of wonder at professors who seemed to be able to glean so much meaning out of a few lines of Shakespeare—or any other author for that matter. But I also didn't understand why they would bother.

I didn't fully grasp what I was supposed to do with all of this information. So I did what most graduates do—I got a job and didn't think about it anymore.

Somewhere in between understanding the difference between an essential and a non-essential clause, writing my senior thesis, and my second year as a full-fledged adult complete with a 40-hour-a-week job, I began to wonder if I had missed something essential.

I had been exposed to complex ideas, new concepts, and alternate perspectives, but I hadn't really taken the time to explore them in a meaningful way. I had been a surface learner.

The sense that I had missed something crucial stayed with me. Eventually it had enough of an impact on me that I decided to continue my education. If nothing else, I would have the opportunity to explore an alternate way of life than the one I had started. This time, I came away with much more than I had expected.

I learned that, for me, one of the most effective ways to better understand complex ideas is to view them from as many different perspectives as possible, and that often it is more important to focus on how various people find meaning than it is to bring people to a single, definitive answer. A closed perspective allows no room for growth.

It's easy to forget what it was like to be in a classroom, the books you read, and the notes you took. But the excitement of exploring new ideas or seeing old ideas in a new way is something that I hope, to some degree, stays with everyone who passes through the halls of NMU. It is something I hope has translated onto the pages that follow.

—KW



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In his inaugural fall convocation address, Les Wong described himself as a person who is reflective, thoughtful, respectful, inquisitive, and sometimes even edgy. We'll tell you a little more about Northern Michigan University's new leader—from his family and academic background to his professional history and his philosophy about teaching, learning, and leadership.

8 Navigating tough times

Over the last two years, Northern has confronted reduced state funding head on by reorganizing its administrative structure, reallocating funds, streamlining operating procedures, cutting a few of its programs, and laying off some of its employees. As the State of Michigan enters its next fiscal year, many university administrators are asking, "Is there light at the end of the tunnel?"

12 Ethics education: Who should be responsible for educating the next generation of leaders?

Every day, government, business, community, and family leaders make decisions that impact the lives of those around them. Recent government and corporate scandals have some wondering whether or not American ethics and morality are in an irrecoverable tailspin. We asked several NMU professors to give us their perspective on the state of ethics in America today and share their approach to teaching ethics in the classroom.

ON THE COVER AND ON THIS PAGE

Northern Michigan University's thirteenth president, Leslie E. "Les" Wong. Cover photograph by Andy Gregg '93 BFA. Table of contents photograph by Bill Sampson.