

Northern HORIZONS

THE MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS
OF NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Winter 2012



To your
HEALTH!

Mailbox

Dear Editor,

As always, I read my *Horizons* cover to cover on the day it arrived. When I read "The Yellow Brick Road of Education" by Rodney H. Clarcken, to say I take issue with Dr. Clarcken's article would be an understatement.

It is interesting that Dr. Clarcken couched his article in a fantasy. I wish he would have prefaced his article with, "In my opinion." Since his article seems to be a statement of facts and perhaps university policy backed by his degree and position, I feel compelled to question several of his thoughts and positions.

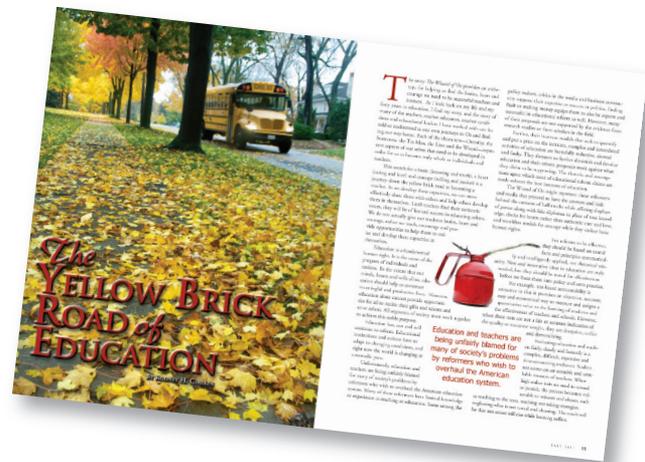
Education is a fundamental human right. Education in the United States is a privilege, an obligation, a legislated entitlement; mandatory to a certain level, but certainly not a right. One must apply oneself to education; it is not given.

If I interpret the rest of this fantasy correctly, education and especially teachers are being unfairly blamed, reformers outside the education community have no business nor capability to reform education, standardized tests are deceptive, unfair and demoralizing, and pay for performance is materialistic and selfish.

To say that reformers today have limited knowledge or experience in education is perhaps the most hubristic statement possible. Are those same incompetent reformers not products of our education system? To listen only to those who know the secret handshake of education will lead us away from best practices applicable throughout the spectrum of business, industry, military and education. Look at any successful large corporation; seldom do the leadership or directors have degrees or experience in that specific industry.

"Pay teachers a respectable wage and accord them the respect, honor and status they deserve. Pay for performance ... materialistic and selfish motives are counterproductive." This is completely backward. As long as schools of education accept and certify new teachers who are in the bottom third of their contemporaries academically (nationally approximately 50% of new teachers fall in that category), where is the motivation or demand for higher pay? Would a business owner pay top dollar for such an employee? Should the taxpayer? Look to Finland, where only 1 in 10 applications for a teacher credential is accepted; there they are paid respectable wages and have the respect, honor and status spoken of in this fantasy. We must first elevate our culture. Ask teachers if they would exchange their tenure for higher pay. Require them to have significant outside experience in their area of expertise.

Standardized testing is evil. I do agree this may not be the best method, but what is the objective cost-effective alternative? My administrators specifically have told me not to worry about the Colorado standardized tests; if you are providing the



education we want you to provide, your students will do well on any exam.

New and innovative ideas ... they are all around us and the wheel does not need to be reinvented. What were we doing before that we are not doing now? We have lowered our standards, especially at the secondary and undergraduate level. What are the 26 countries rated above the United States doing better than we are?

While Dr. Clarcken contributes to an important, ongoing national discussion, I strongly urge my alma mater's faculty, staff and alumni to be open to, and enter, the other side of this discussion.

—John Burkhart, '71 BS, Colonel, USAF, retired

Burkhart has been on the faculty and/or staff of the National Defense University, the United States Air Force Academy and a Colorado public high school. He currently teaches junior high science at The Classical Academy, a K-12 charter school, which was just rated the number 1 high school in Colorado by coloradoschoolgrades.com and in the top 2 percent on the 2009 Newsweek list of America's best high schools.

To read Rodney Clarcken's response or to join in the conversation, visit www.nmu.edu/horizons or write to us at *Northern Horizons*, Northern Michigan University, 1401 Presque Isle Ave., Marquette, MI 49855 or horizons@nmu.edu.

A note about the Winter 2012 issue

We are happy to feature the wonderful work NMU alumni are doing as medical professionals. However, please consult your personal physician or health-care specialist before making any changes to your treatments, medications, supplements or diet and exercise routines.

Alumni news



Wildcat Night Across the Country was shaping up to be the largest in NMU history. At press time, 22 parties were planned to watch the NMU hockey Wildcats take on the Michigan Wolverines at restaurants and bars from Atlanta, Ga., to Los Angeles, Calif., from Naples, Fla., to North Pole, Alaska. Thanks to the alumni who organized their local gatherings! Here's a group in Bay City at last year's Wildcat Night.

I am honored to have the opportunity to serve as the president of the Alumni Association Board of Directors. The board is composed of dedicated alumni who have made a commitment to give back to NMU with their time, treasure and talents. While it has been 30 years since I first walked across the stage at Hedgcock Fieldhouse, in many ways it seems like just yesterday. Did you ever have the feeling that you never left?

What has NMU meant to you? We all have a different story, but there are some universal themes. One is that NMU has had a powerful and positive influence in determining where and who you are today. Where would you be if it were not for the experiences you had at Northern? Personally, I would never have gained the knowledge, experience or many of the friends that have enriched my life. As NMU alumni we have acquired and share some common bonds. Take a moment to think back on ways that Northern has enriched your life.

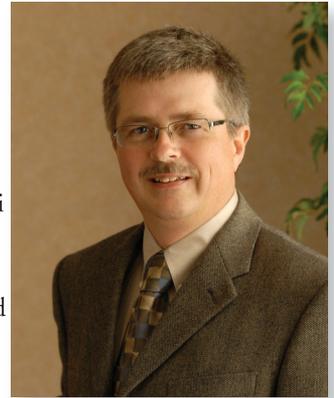
One of our goals at the Alumni Association is to connect and reconnect with NMU graduates. Let us know where you are

and what you're doing. Visit the Alumni Association website and update your contact information. Go to nmu.edu, click on "Alumni and Friends", then "Keep in Touch" and then "Update Record." It only takes a minute and we would like to hear from you.

Another goal is to develop and engage the next generations of alumni. Some alumni contribute by participating in mentorship programs and others through financial support. Some offer internships or hire NMU graduates. One thing all of us should be doing as demographics and the financial landscape continue to evolve is letting Northern students and others know how great we feel about NMU; something to think about the next time you have an opportunity to recommend a school or join a conversation related to higher education. Nothing is better than testimony from the hearts of Northern alumni.

We can all contribute to, build and share the culture of NMU. We hope you will all reach out to other alumni and help the association grow in numbers and strength. As I was often reminded by an influential school teacher—also an NMU graduate —“never forget where you came from.”

And remember: It's always a great day to be a Wildcat.



*Alumni Association Board president
Jim Jenkin '81 BS, '84 MBA*

NMU Alumni Association Board of Directors

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Of course I'm a member.



Carissa Waters '04 BSN
Lifetime member of the Alumni Association

During the second semester of my freshman year, I went home for Easter and caught up with some good friends from high school. Most of them were happy with the universities they were attending (University of Michigan, Miami of Ohio, Indiana University), but I could tell that no one else had the excitement that I did about their schools.

I had already joined my residence hall government, ASNMU, and Circle K, and had been accepted to the Student Leader Fellowship Program to start the following semester. I had endless energy, and I couldn't wait to see what I could get involved in next. It was when I got back to campus after that visit home that I really realized I had made the best choice for myself in attending NMU.

Now, through the Alumni Association I can give back to the university that gave me so much. I recently joined the Alumni Association Board of Directors and it really feels good to be actively involved again. I get to meet students and hear firsthand how the NMU experience is today, which helps me understand how I can best use my time on the Alumni Board to influence change in the best interest of the university and students. Selfishly, I also get a bit of that excitement back from my college days!

Being a member of the Alumni Association is my way to stay connected to NMU.

The NMU Alumni Association

www.nmu.edu/alumni • 1-877-GRAD NMU • alumni@nmu.edu