

N O R T H W E S T E R N M I C H I G A N C O L L E G E

WHITE PINE PRESS

We hew to the line; let the chips fall where they may.

What's Up With Campus Wifi?



TC's Public Bathroom Project Wilts as Downtown Bakery Owner Arraigned

Nathan Neste
Staff Writer

A trip to downtown Traverse City can last all day, inevitably involving an unavoidable bathroom break. To help pedestrians find appropriate spaces, a program between the Downtown Development Authority and local businesses was established to help visitors quickly find public restrooms.

To make this information readily available, signs had been posted around downtown and inside buildings directing them to these businesses in such cases, but recently the list has rapidly shrunk.

On Nov. 29, downtown bakery owner Edward Witkowski was arraigned and is currently facing charges including one count of using a computer to commit a crime, one count of lying to police, and three counts of capturing an image of an exposed person — all felony charges associated with his alleged misuse of surveillance cameras in the women's restroom of his Front Street cafe, Morsels. He is out on bond now and is scheduled to appear in court in January.

Morsel's was one of two recent removals from Traverse City's bathroom maps, following the Brew's closure and shift into the Outpost last August and consequent remodeling choices possibly resulting in their own removal.

With the map shrinking and Witkowski's arrest, many are left to wonder about the legitimacy and safety of the downtown public restrooms. No person should fear being videotaped in a vulnerable moment, and no person should fear that an advertised bathroom may be a mousetrap. But who is checking that it's not?



Ed Witkowski, arraigned on multiple charges, including three counts of capturing/distributing images of an unclothed person, using a computer to commit a crime, and lying to a police officer.

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NMC Works to Wrangle Wi-Fi

Julia Belden
Staff Writer

We've all experienced it: you sit down in the West Hall Innovation Center (coffee in hand), unpack your homework, open up your laptop...and the wi-fi isn't working. Annoyed, you pack up your things and try your luck elsewhere.

Internet problems have frustrated NMC students, faculty, and staff all semester.

"The wi-fi system that we have was actually an updated system that we implemented in 2021—right smack in the heart of Covid," said Dan Wasson, NMC's Director of Systems and LAN Management. In a Nov. 9 interview, Wasson explained that the goal of the upgrade was to create outdoor wi-fi spaces so students could still have internet access even when campus buildings were locked.

Problems with the new system didn't appear until this year.

"When we put [the system] in in 2021 there was nobody here, and so the pressure on it was very light," Wasson said. "Same for '22, there were very few people around." Now that more people are back on campus, "we're discovering some performance issues."

The reports were anecdotal at first: general complaints about slow and spotty internet. Wasson explained that his team needed more information. "It's kind of like saying, 'here, my car's broke,' and then you walk away and have a mechanic fix it," he said. Only recently was the IT team able to collect good data—dates, times, locations, and the nature of the outages—and start to troubleshoot. A student comment written on the Student Government Association's table at a recent event finally got the ball rolling. People were writing down the "good and the bad" about NMC, "and someone wrote down 'wireless issues,'" Wasson recalled.

In a candid campus-wide email on Nov. 15, Network Systems and Data Communications Analyst Paul Martin echoed Wasson, urging wi-fi users to report connection issues to the IT Help Desk (with details). Martin, who has only recently taken over responsibilities for NMC's internet systems, called the problem "unacceptable" and reassured that it was being addressed.

On Nov. 21, specialists from NMC's long-time primary network equipment vendor, Grand Rapids-based People Driven Technology, Inc., were on site to

troubleshoot the issue. As Martin relayed in a follow-up campus-wide email, "several physical bottlenecks that were limiting both the wireless speeds as well as the ability to get and/or stay connected" were identified and addressed. Martin was confident that they're on the "right path," but remarked that there was still some work to be done and encouraged users to continue to report any issues to the Help Desk.

Wasson, reached again by email on Nov. 27, remarked that since then "performance has dramatically improved" but that he wants "to get a little more time under our belt before I'm satisfied." For those that want a little extra oomph in their internet, he recommends using a campus computer with a hard-wired connection. "The performance will always be faster on a wired vs. wireless connection."

As for phone signals, Wasson confirmed that there are some dead spots on campus, but unfortunately, you'll have to take it up with your cellular provider. "We have no control over that," he said.

**Experiencing internet issues on campus?
Here's how you can help!**

Contact the IT Help Desk
(231)-995-3020

helpdesk@nmc.edu

Visit in person in the Innovation Center

Submit a ticket on the NMC Student Website

Include as much info as possible in your message: time and date, location, which network you tried to connect to, any error messages that popped up, the name of the access point (if visible), the MAC address from your phone, etc.

ADVERTISEMENT

GVSU student grounds herself in education, commitment to community

Thomas Garrett
Grand Valley State University

Jacqueline Clark, a student at Grand Valley State University, has had a remarkable journey that took her from Florida to the American West, and back to her hometown of Traverse City. Her pursuit of education and dedication to volunteer work reflect her deep-rooted commitment to enhancing the health and well-being of her community.

In 2020, amidst the challenges of a global pandemic, Clark said she decided to return to Traverse City.

"Living out West I worked at an herbal pharmacy, practicing traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture," she said. "I became interested in people's health goals, in whatever form they may come."

That is when Clark began to pursue a career in health care. She is enrolled in the Allied Health Science program through GVSU's Traverse City Regional Center. In addition to her studies, Clark holds a part-time position at the Cowell Family Cancer Center, located at Munson Medical Center. Previously, she worked as a receptionist at the same facility.

"I was the first person that patients would see related to their care," said Clark.



Jacqueline Clark

She got to know patients and developed a rapport with them, as well as being the first line of support in their care. Clark said that sometimes meant passing information along to their physician or getting them aloe water for their sore throat.

"Whether it was these short interactions or long interactions, you got to

know people," said Clark.

Now, Clark has moved away from the receptionist position and works to reschedule follow-up appointments or administer questionnaires related to scans such as MRIs or CTs.

"It gives me a chance to work on the more medical side of things: telling people why these questionnaires are important, and why we ask about tattoos and gunshot wounds related to their scans," said Clark. "It is different, but it is a new challenge."

Clark will complete a bachelor's degree next spring. She is also pursuing a master's degree in public health. "I just love school, and I love to learn," said Clark.

In her free time, Clark volunteers for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northwestern Michigan. This organization works on changing outcomes and reversing the downward spiral brought on by poverty and childhood trauma.

Clark previously worked with the Big Brothers Big Sisters while she attended West Senior High School. After the pandemic, Clark began participating again as a mentor in the program, traveling to one of the middle schools in Traverse City to spend time with the student she mentors, whom she calls "my little."

"We can play games, spend time together on homework, whatever that individual needs from me in the time frame, I am there to support them," said Clark.

GVSU Allied Health Sciences in Traverse City

A bachelor's degree in Allied Health Sciences at Grand Valley prepares you for a career in the health care field or for graduate health-related programs at GVSU. Take the next step by visiting gvsu.edu/tchealth.

US Media Complicit in Enabling Gaza Genocide

**Jacob
Pszczolkowski**
Editor-in-Chief

You cannot claim self-defense against a people you have occupied by force.

On Oct. 7, Hamas, the political and militant group, which was elected by Palestinians to govern the Gaza strip — but which the United States and other countries consider a terrorist organization — launched a violent attack against neighboring Israel, killing 1,200 people in kibbutz communities and an outdoor music festival, raping women, pillaging homes, and taking more than 200 hostages. The attack was a response to decades of forceful occupation and economic oppression by Israel. The Oct. 7 massacre, the worst slaughter of Jews since the World War II Holocaust, became Israel's excuse to further their colonization of Palestinian territory under the guise of "self defense". Over the past two months, more than 15,900 Palestinians have been killed as a result of Israeli military action, either through bombs and bullets or lack of basic food, medicine, and water, the supply routes for which have been under Israeli blockade since 2005. According to United Nations (UN) experts, Israel's apartheid has evolved into a full-blown genocide. Yet instead of the people being driven from their homes under threat of death, major American news outlets and politicians have instead devoted their time to manufacturing consent for the genocide of Palestinian people.



Photo Credit/AHMED ABU HAMEEDA

While recent events have brought heightened attention to the region, Palestine has long suffered under Israel's apartheid state. In 1947, the UN General Assembly decided that the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural region would be partitioned into one Jewish and one Arab state. This decision would lead to an event called the Nakba, or the displacement of more than 700,000 Palestinians — over half the population at the time — from their homes by the newly-formed nation of Israel. This continued for two decades, during which Israel held tight control over the movement of Palestinians between villages and denied Palestinian refugees re-entry to the region as Israel evicted more Palestinians and erected settlements over their homeland. Following an unsuccessful attack by neighboring Arab countries, Israel seized the West Bank and Gaza strip in 1967, blockaded the region in 2005, and following a spate of Palestinian terrorist attacks during two intifada uprisings, constructed the Israeli-West Bank Barrier, a wall described by Palestinians as a representation of racial segregation and apartheid. By 2011, Israel had passed the Nakba Law, denying funding to any institution which recognised the Nakba for the atrocity it was.

Palestine has endured decades of violence, but American media only turns its attention to the region when they strike back against the state that oppresses them. In the US, journalist Alan Mcleod reported that CNN, The Hill, and Associated Press have all fired staff members for speaking out against Israel's disproportionate aggression, and MSNBC dropped Mehdi Hasan's show after he criticised Israel. The Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate (PJS), a member of the International Federation of Journalists, released a statement in October

stating that, "Even by the low standards set by media coverage of previous massacres in Gaza, the media discourse surrounding recent events represents a new low for the principles of journalistic integrity... Shorn of any pretence of objectivity or truth, some Western media organisations have parroted Israeli government talking points, failed to challenge or even attempt to verify blatant misinformation and propaganda, and adopted dehumanizing and violent language about the Palestinian people."

"When, for example, the Israeli and U.S. governments suggested — with no evidence whatsoever — that the Palestinian Health Ministry had inflated the number of Palestinians registered as killed in Gaza, many news agencies uncritically adopted this talking point," PJS wrote. "By engaging in such unfounded speculation — driven by the propaganda of the Israeli war machine — media organisations are facilitating the mass death of Palestinians and laying the groundwork for a genocide."

Still, American media refuses to use the term "genocide," despite confirmation from experts that Israel's actions constitute genocide. The Center for Constitutional Rights released an emergency briefing on Oct. 18 explaining the US' complicity in Israel's crime of genocide, stating "There is plausible and credible case, based on powerful factual evidence, that Israel is attempting to commit, if not actively committing, the crime of genocide in the occupied Palestinian territory, and specifically against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip." They elaborate, stating that the US is failing "to uphold its obligation to prevent the commission of genocide, but there is a plausible and credible case to be made that the United States' actions to further the Israeli military operation, closure, and campaign against the Palestinian population in Gaza, rise to the level of complicity in the crime under international law." This statement received no major attention in mainstream news, instead continuing to frame an occupying state using "self defense" as an excuse to expand their borders as a war between two equal powers.

The language used by Israeli officials to describe Palestine also points to their genocidal attitude towards Palestine. Echoing the language used to uphold white supremacy in the U.S., Germany, and beyond, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant stated "We are imposing a complete siege on Gaza. No electricity, no food, no water, no fuel. Everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we will act accordingly." Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office characterised their offensive as a "struggle between the children of light and the children of darkness, between humanity and the law of the jungle" on X (formerly known as Twitter). By ignoring these statements, American media manufactures consent for the extermination of Palestine.



Photo Credit/PALESTINE POSTER PROJECT ARCHIVES

In his resignation letter to the UN, Craig Mokhiber, former director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, states:

"As a human rights lawyer with more than three decades of experience in the field, I know well that the concept of genocide has often been subject to political abuse. But the current wholesale slaughter of the Palestinian people, rooted in an ethno-nationalist settler colonial ideology, in continuation of decades of their systematic persecution and purging, based entirely upon their status as Arabs, and coupled with explicit statements of intent by leaders in the Israeli government and military, leaves no room for doubt or debate."

It is the opinion of this paper's editor that standing by is not enough. Below are the phone numbers of Michigan's senators and 1st district representative, as well as a sample script from Nobel prize-winning organization American Friends Service Committee. I urge you to make your voice heard and advocate for an end to Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people.

DEBBIE STABENOW
Senior Senator for Michigan
202-224-4822

GARY PETERS
Junior Senator for Michigan
202-224-6221

JACK BERGMAN
Representative for Michigan's First Congressional District
202-225-473

My name is [YOUR FIRST & LAST NAME], I'm a [CONSTITUENT / SUPPORTER] of [SENATOR/ REPRESENTATIVE NAME], and I'm calling about Palestine and Israel.

[YOUR KIND GREETING]

For Representatives: [REPRESENTATIVE NAME] must publicly call for a ceasefire, pressure Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza, and vote NO on sending more weapons for this war. A "humanitarian pause" is not good enough. They should cosponsor the ceasefire resolution, House Resolution 786, introduced by Representatives Cori Bush and Rashida Tlaib.

For Senators: [SENATOR NAME] must publicly call for a ceasefire, pressure Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza, and vote NO on sending more weapons for this war. A "humanitarian pause" is not good enough. They should introduce a Senate Resolution calling for a ceasefire, similar to the one in the House.

I am passionate about this because...

I have family/friends in the region and...

I visited Palestine and witnessed firsthand how

My faith compels me to...

While I am speaking as an individual...

I talked to my neighbors about this and we all agree that...

I'm a member of ... and we all agree that...

Most U.S. voters agree that the U.S. should push for a ceasefire.

Thank you!

International Affairs Forum Discusses Mideast Water

Pilar Judd
 Staff Writer

Water. A word that is so synonymous with 'life', and yet it is so often withheld as a means to control people. How do we fairly manage a resource that is so easily commodified as a bargaining chip during international conflict? As locals of the Grand Traverse area, we have an always comfortable relationship with water. We have it when we need it, which is a stark contrast to many people in our world.

On Nov. 9, NMC's local International Affairs Forum (IAF) featured Dr. Kaveh Madani as their guest speaker on the hot topic of water resource management in the Middle East. Dr. Madani is the director of the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment, and Health, also known as UNU-INWEH or the UN Think Tank on Water, where they address water resource issues globally. Growing up with parents working in the water district of Iran, Madani's interest in water was built from the start and he has committed his life to preserving its access and stability. He is a widely respected environmental scientist, educator, and activist, previously serving as the Deputy Head of Iran's Department of Environment as well as the Vice President of the United Nations Environmental Assembly Bureau.

The event, "Mideast Water: When the Well Runs Dry," offered a dynamic perspective on the world's tumultuous relationship with water, specifically how water resources often become a power tool during human conflict. This issue is especially pressing considering the ongoing human rights violations surrounding water access between the Palestinian and Israeli governments.

Like in this conflict, water resource issues are often not the original conflict, they are almost always the symptoms of larger economic, cultural, or political

issues in a state. The ability to control a group's access to water immediately assures control over their food production, sanitation, and eventually life as a whole.

"Complex problems are greater than the sum of their parts," Madani says. These complex problems require complex solutions that have been curated with diverse perspectives in mind while also understanding their unintended effects. For example, redirecting a water source to an area in need then deprives another group of people.

While at this point we are facing the consequences of resource depletion, "water bankruptcy" as Madani calls it, he also remarks how the general appreciation of our environment has increased. So has the global commitment to do better for our future generations. He urges that no matter how hopeless we feel around the melting ice caps in the Arctic Ocean or the increased drought in the Middle East, as long as we care, we have hope. Considering our area's access to water is never a question, it is the responsibility of our community to honor and respect it like the essential resource that it is.

The 2023 IAF season will wrap up with a presentation on Dec. 14th on the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel by former advisor for Palestinian peace negotiations Leila Hilal, J.D., and former senior U.S. diplomat in Tel Aviv, Israel, Jack Segal.

To find more information on this event and future events, visit <https://www.tciaf.com/events>. The events are accessible online and in person free to all NMC students and educators.

Traverse City Residents March for Peace in the Middle East

Nathan Neste
Staff Writer

On Nov. 18 - Hours before Traverse City's annual sparkling holiday parade, a group of locals gathered outside The Workshop Brewing Company to parade downtown for their own cause: peace in the Middle East.

As tensions within the Israel-Palestine conflict reached a peak this fall, residents gathered by MidEast: JustPeace and Women's March Traverse City conversed, marched, and promoted awareness with songs and signs calling for a ceasefire, declaring indigenous solidarity, and distaste for the United States' financial involvement in the war. Through tears, laughter, and discussion emerged a curious question, "What are NMC students doing about this?"



Glen, Rhine, and Stacy Hannert show their signs calling for an end to the violence and standing in solidarity with the people of Gaza.

"We are showing that we are here for you," Stacy Hannert said.



Courtney Wiggins, the 2022 Sara Hardy Humanitarian Award Honoree and partaker of the march, asked those interested to review a documentary called *The Occupation of the American Mind*.

"It speaks to the reasons why news in America leans towards Israel," Wiggins said. She also said that the documentary has different versions with varying lengths of watch times, noting its accessibility for those on a time crunch.

After the march, participants returned to The Workshop Brewing Company to listen to speakers organized by Women's March Traverse City.

Gina Aranki, Executive Director at Child & Family Services of Northwestern Michigan, said, "I rage against the cynicism of the war mongers who think they can bomb and shoot their way to victory... Call your elected officials today!"

Chants of "ceasefire now!" ensued.

The Battle For The Telos of The Sea Of Thieves

Emma Marion
Assistant Editor

My favorite game isn't what it used to be. From Minecraft adding auto-crafting, to Fortnite essentially transforming into three distinct games across different game engines, live service games have completely uprooted the way we experience entertainment. This new wave of videogames has made fictional worlds feel more alive than ever before, but at the cost of alienating longtime fans.

The ability to push updates over the internet to any type of product is a relatively recent invention that only garnered mainstream understanding with the rise in popularity of computers and phones. At the time, this was a revolutionary concept. It simultaneously allowed companies to retroactively fix problems with their products and add value to them over time. This was an especially important innovation in the games industry, as glitches and bugs (sometimes gamebreaking ones) could be patched after release. "Live service" was coined to describe video games that continue to receive updates and developer support after their initial launch. Essentially, an entire category and genre of entertainment made solely possible by updates. Typically these are also multiplayer games that support a thriving community for many years. This allowed developers to add extra monetization into games beyond the one-time purchase of the game itself. Virtual cosmetics and currencies can be sold to players over the course of years, becoming a sort of non-contractual subscription.

However, this has created a new problem with consumers. The game one loved years ago could essentially be a completely different game today. The massively popular battle royale game Fortnite was once originally a co-op player vs. environment (PVE) base-builder. Once the battle royale gamemode proved to be more popular, the original PVE gamemode gradually stopped being worked on over time. Today, Fortnite has become a makeshift game engine in the same way Roblox is, a game with many smaller community built games inside of it. Fortnite even recently had an "OG" event, where they added elements from how the game used to be in 2018 and 2019 back into the game.

Currently, the PvEvP (player vs. environment vs. player) game Sea of Thieves is going through similar growing pains. Since the game world is shared between real players and AI threats, a portion of the community wants to enjoy the game without the threat of other real players. However, many core players (and even the developers themselves) argue what makes Sea of Thieves special is the shared world between real players and emergent non-player threats. This begs the question: What is the telos of Sea of Thieves?

Telos is a Greek word that Aristotle used to describe the purpose of an object. His famous example being that the best flutes should be given to the best flute players, not because it would produce the best music, but because that is the inherent goal of flutes. Although an ancient and simple concept to grasp,

telos is at the heart of many of the most controversial contemporary issues. Considering the telos of any even thing forces the collective to come to a consensus on what components are integral to the whole. The same concept can be applied to live service games. Is the shared world integral to what makes Sea of Thieves what it is?

At the time of writing, a new way to play Sea of Thieves is set to launch on the same day this article is published: safer seas. A mode that gives the option to play in a private server devoid of player threats, albeit with heavily handicapped progression. This effectively fractures the game and player base into two. The intent of safer seas is to give players a safe space to learn how to play the game before being thrust into the shared world. Also, since proximity voice chat with other real players is a large part of the appeal of the game, safer seas gives a space for younger kids and families to enjoy the game without the risk of verbal harassment.

There is no easy answer to these questions, as it is up to the relationship between communities and developers to determine what the telos of any given product is. Some players might feel ripped-off by a game undergoing such major transformations, as it no longer reflects the product they originally paid for. Minecraft Java Edition offers a problem to this situation by allowing players to select which version of a game they want to play. After a controversial rework to the game's combat system the majority of the player base decided to not update to the newer version of the game. However, this solution does not exist in Sea Of Thieves today. For now, the battle for the telos of the Sea Of Thieves will continue to rage on until a consensus is met.

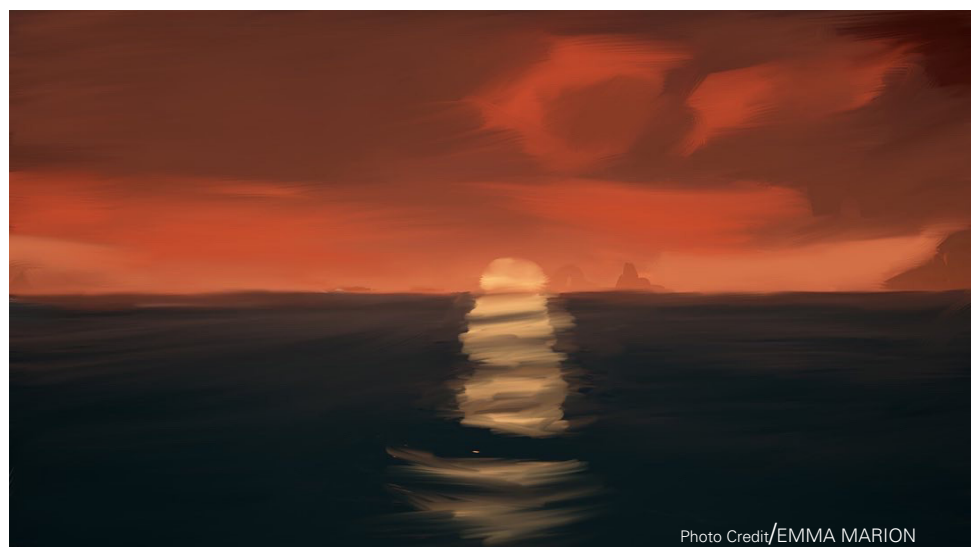


Photo Credit/EMMA MARION

A stylized painting of a sunset in Sea Of Thieves



The Alliance of Live Service Games

Twin Flames Universe Cult Manipulates Online

Megan Thoreson
Staff Writer

Everyone has heard about cults, from the latest headline of NXIVM to the mass suicide event of the Heaven's Gate cult in 1997. These dark spots on humanity are interesting, and the more twisted the

more curious we become. It's tempting to assume that cults were a thing of the past and that open access to the internet would prevent someone from being pulled into these illogical communities of crazies? We have a cult right here in Suttons Bay called the Twin Flames Universe.

Jeff and Shaleia Ayan (who also use the last name Divine) are the cult leaders of Twin Flames Universe. The couple met while on personal spiritual journeys — Jeff in Hawaii and Shaleia in Sedona, Arizona. They met online and claimed “instant connection,” and decided to start “Twin Flames Universe” as a way to share what they have with others, initially founding their ideas in love, and the philosophy that twin flames are a part of one's own soul in another body and that by healing oneself, blocks could be removed between you and your intended other.

Both had backgrounds in vlogging and podcasts, and they started a website and Facebook group called Twin Flames Universe in 2017. They began offering courses for interested individuals to teach lonely individuals how to attract their twin flame. Quickly, Twin Flames Universe became popular, which was when they escalated to more of a pyramid scheme model.

They created “classes” for people to pay for and then become “ascension coaches,” and pay even more to become “master ascension coaches,” which allowed those people to start making money from coaching and recruiting new members into the community. Of course, all the coaches gave a majority of their earnings to Jeff and Shaleia, making them multi-millionaires by 2020. Their online following is approximately 66,000 members. They offer “teaching sessions” with their members to talk about their ascension process, they encourage them to buy more “lessons” (which are all videos of Jeff and Shaleia telling them how to “heal” and attract their twin flames). Occasionally they invite select followers to their home in Suttons Bay to help them do more “spiritual work”. The Ayans use manipulation, gas lighting, emotional manipulation, shame, and religious guilt to coerce their members into buying more products, often claiming that blockages were created to one's twin flame by not being “ascended” enough. This could be healed by paying more money, of course.

Jeff Ayan believes he is the second coming of Christ, that he is “The Master Christ” and that Shaleia is “The Mother Christ.” They started a church called “The Church of Union,” whose purpose was to unite all religions under one spiritual umbrella. “As Unionists, our goal is to create Heaven on Earth, or the optimal reality, through each our own personal connection to God and knowing His finest creation, you. This results in a wonderful, joyful, fulfilling, satisfying, and meaningful life worthy of a child of the Most High God. It also resolves all the underlying causes of suffering and misery that so many of us end up experiencing as a result of living based upon the unconscious thought system of the world” states the Church of Union. Perhaps this is lofty new age spiritual lingo that really is rooted in their theology, or, just maybe, a ploy to get tax exempt status on all the money they're making. Packages begin at around \$3,333, and go all the way up to \$8,888. They have a few smaller packages and workshops available as well.

The couple systemically separate cult members from their family members, pressure and shame members into paying more money for their “services,” offer a bullshit guarantee that they will find your twin flame and give you eternal happiness. That only they can give you happiness. They pressure members into becoming ascension coaches as well, resembling Scientology in the “climbing the rungs” sort of structure. No one else in the cult will ever make as much as Jeff and Shaleia, and there are an infinite number of rungs

to climb, with more than 750 hours worth of “material” to complete before receiving the title of Master.

On the darker side of things, cult members do not know they're in a cult. Jeff and Shaleia are literally deified, profiting off of their “lambs,” and not giving their members anything for their membership. Out of the 66,000 members, hardly any of them between 2017 and 2020 had found their “twin flame.” There were 27 “success stories” on their website, half of which did not partner up within the twin flame community. Eight percent of the members were women, leaving the Ayans in a pinch. With no one finding love, and so many of them being women, they started partnering up members in the community and just saying “God divined and channeled through me that this is your twin flame,” coincidentally not the person they had been chasing. This was a massive let down for some of the members, considering one of them had gone to jail after violating a restraining order on Jeff's recommendation.

The cult duo started grouping women together, saying that their previous twin flame was false. They began partnering women together within the cult, and borrowed the idea of the divine masculine and the divine feminine, and started calling one person in the pairing “male” and the other “female.” The couple forced one of the two to change, even go as far as bullying and berating them to change their pronouns and names. Some were even pressured to transition their gender. No questions or doubt was allowed; upsetting Jeff resulted in one being banned from the Facebook community.

Cults of the Past

Cults are not new. Since ancient Greek times, people have sought something to believe in and give them purpose. Charismatic narcissists have taken advantage of this since the beginning of recorded memory. Every cult has several things in common, including the megalomaniac “face” of the organization who often identifies themselves as Jesus, reincarnated prophets, or ultra-super-important-and-intelligent people who just deserved to be worshiped. After spouting their nonsense and finding a few followers who always seem to have low self-esteem and loads of trauma, they gain confidence and start doing atrocious things. The atrocities generally don't start until the victims are thoroughly brainwashed, and they begin to accept any form of abuse and mistreatment.

For example, “The Manson Family” lead by Charles Manson in California in the 1960s, used similar manipulation tactics to gain followers. Reducing an individual's self-esteem and ability to think and choose for themselves to point where they would accept anything he said, even directions to murder.

The Branch Davidians were led by David Koresh (real name Vernon Howell) in the '90s in Waco, Texas. The “religion” (Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventist Association, and other offshoots) had been around since 1935, originally founded by Victor Houteff (then called General Association of Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists). David Koresh “took over” the group in the '80s, claiming to be the Lamb of God, paving the way for what they claimed was Jesus Christ's second coming. Like Jeff Ayan, David Koresh had delusions of being “immensely important,” elevated to a status of “God like.” He exercised great control over the followers, especially the women. Followers were forced to separate from the world, just as Jeff and Shaleia instruct their followers to “cut off” people who don't support their journeys. Koresh wanted his followers to dissolve their marriages because all the women in the community were his “wives” to take as he saw fit. He had sexual access to every woman in the cult. He even pursued teenage girls and children. His youngest “wife” was only 10 years old. He had as many as 20 wives by the time he died in the Waco Siege on April 19, 1993. Here in Suttons Bay, Jeff Ayan has talked of purchasing land in Leelanau County to create a literal community to birth “golden children,” or children who are already ascended.

NXIVM sold self-improvement seminars, similar to Twin Flames Universe.

Founded in 1998 by Keith Raniere and Nancy Salzman, NXIVM operated as a multi-level marketing scheme to sell self-improvement and personal growth seminars. The secret society within NXIVM called DOS “branded its female members and made them record false confessions and provide nude photographs for blackmail,” according to Wikipedia. As the cult leader, Raniere was elevated to a status of absolute power and authority over its members. At the cult’s height, it had around 700 members. He made fantastical claims about his intelligence, often claiming to be “the most intelligent and ethical man in the world” despite low IQ scores. He convinced many female members that he had “super sex powers” and could heal them by having sex with them. At one time, NXIVM tried to “cure tourettes”. Participants described great distress in being involved with the study, and all of their efforts were deemed “scientifically worthless.” Twin Flames did something similar with their MAP (Mind Alignment Process) campaign, trying to sell cures for mental illness and trauma by further manipulating and traumatizing its participants.

Manipulation Tactics

Every cult seems to operate under the same set of “rules and operations,” interchanging their beliefs and cult leader faces. According to Study.com, cults used many tactics to form and keep people in:

A charismatic leader: Cults always follow a charismatic leader, living or dead, whose teachings are considered of the highest importance. This leader may be considered a genius or may be considered a religious figure like a messiah or prophet.

Ideological purity: Members are strongly discouraged from questioning the cult’s doctrine and any doubts are met with shame or punishment.

Conformity and control: Cult leaders often exercise an extreme degree of control over members’ lives, including dictating what they can wear and eat and what kinds of relationships they can have. Conformity is also enforced by group members who police one another.

Mind-altering practices: Sleep deprivation, chanting, meditation, and drugs are often used to break down individuals’ defenses and make them more susceptible to cult ideology.

Isolation and love-bombing: It is common for people in cults to be encouraged to cut contact with outsiders, including close family members. Within the cult, new members are often subjected to love-bombing, a practice where new initiates are showered with love and praise to bring them deeper into the cult and foster a sense of belonging.

Us-vs-them mentality: Cult members are often encouraged to see the cult

as superior to life on the outside and to feel that those outside the cult lack understanding or insight.

Time and energy: Followers are expected to dedicate huge amounts of time and energy (and often money) to the cult to the exclusion of their own lives, interests, jobs, and families.

What our community needs to know

The most vulnerable populations seem to be women, those with low self-esteem or trauma, younger individuals, people of lower academic success (high school education or lower), those without religious identities, and young adults looking for their own personal identities. College students in particular are among the most vulnerable. But particularly, those who are lonely.

Thirty percent of U.S. adults use dating apps today. The cult targeted people looking for love specifically, quickly gaining upwards of 60,000 members under the “guarantee” of a twin flame, or eternal, perfect love. Like other cults of the past, they manipulate their members under a common theme or precipice of purpose, which is what drew the members in to the cult in the first place. Twin Flames found a way to monetize a basic human need, that being the need for love and acceptance.

Members remained hooked after spending tens of thousands of dollars and joining the multi-level marketing scheme. The “mirror exercise” destroyed the members’ already low self-esteem, asking them to blame themselves for every problem in their lives, and for their lack of love, or even being mistreated by their partners.

According to Ann DelMariani, a clinical social worker in Lake Leelanau, “These folks often use ‘treatments’ that draw loosely from established, legitimate therapeutic models but, sometimes intentionally and sometimes out of ignorance and lack of trauma informed training, they are manipulated in ways that often cause significant harm. The mirroring technique that this group uses is a good example. These approaches use spiritual bypassing to manipulate, invalidate and gaslight individuals.”

The first step to not being pulled into a multi-level marketing scheme cult is to be aware that they exist. Knowing how manipulators manipulate can help raise red flags before getting in too deep. Something of importance to note is that not just cult leaders use these types of manipulation techniques, plenty of people without a following do it to their significant others. The manipulation is similar in sex trafficking, violent domestic partnerships, and abusive parents.

Awareness is the key to living your own life, staying safe, and out of cults.



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What is Toxic Productivity?

Rosie Stallman
Staff Writer

Productivity is a complex subject, and an individual's relationship with productivity depends on many factors.

However, with the rise of technology and social media, are these various platforms rising to be the number one contributor for college students? Does this pose a threat to their education and well being?

Toxic productivity is the incessant need to be productive, trying to be so efficient in every area of life that it disrupts the work, school, and relaxation balance. Productivity is a wonderful thing in moderation, and is necessary to be independent and reach goals, however, many high school and college students struggle to find this balance. It's also important to note that the balance itself is very fragile and varies dramatically from person to person, as this concept in its entirety can be very dependent on upbringing.

However, regardless of background, it is reinforced many times by teachers, advisors, and peers that students' number one priority should be maintaining their GPA and preparing for their "next step" in life. The societal idea we preach so insistently that GPA is the most important aspect of a student creates unhealthy pressure to perform. In some cases this can lead to students feeling as if they need to overwork themselves with sports, clubs, and extracurricular activities on top of work and school. This typically results in burnout, and experiencing burnout while straining to keep up with all of their responsibilities is likely to decrease the quality of work they're pumping out.

"Students are experiencing strong emotions of fear of missing out. For some, this means they say yes to join more clubs, more work hours, and more classes. They don't have the time for extra commitments, but still say yes to not miss out. They eventually realize they are overcommitted," said Marina Call, a Student Success Coach at NMC.

"Don't keep yourself busy working more hours or adding more classes to your schedule if it is not absolutely necessary," she added. "This becomes a toxic productivity. Best to do less things, but to do them better."

According to "Break the Stress and Self-Esteem Cycle to Improve Your Academic Performance," a 2021 academic article by William Peace University, this creates a subconscious "self esteem/stress/feedback" cycle that is notoriously hard to break.

"The effects of low self-esteem on academic performance often appear as subpar grades; whereas, high self-esteem can result in higher grades."

When kids of all ages are taught by so many influential figures that their self-worth is dependent on their GPA, It's easy for them to adopt the "work a little too hard" mindset. This is typically the first step when falling into the toxic productivity loop. Toxic productivity can be very deceptive, and sometimes without the right tools it's difficult to realize that it is harmful.

Social media influencers are rising in recent years to be very influential along with primary figures in young people's lives. These creators disguise toxic productivity as something to be romanticized, they by far set the most unrealistic expectations regarding productivity. It's these creators that students look to for a solution, and for help managing their overcommitments.

For instance, "productivity YouTubers" create videos to draw in viewers and monetise their content (as almost all YouTubers do). Because of this initial motivation, there is definitely something to be said about clickbait and the intentional deceptiveness of thumbnails and titles. This is prevalent especially in this sub-genre of social media. A quick search reveals titles such as:

"How to exit your lazy girl era"

"How I stay productive 99% of the day"

"Become the perfect student!"

On top of that, influencers preach on all sorts of different "second brain" databases, to do list apps, and calendar systems. They are all advertised as "the best" with titles like:

"I tried 137 productivity tools. These are the best."

"6 best productivity apps & systems"

"How to build the ultimate productivity system"

Firstly, these tend to be extremely misleading titles. For most people, it's simply not possible to complete tasks and push out work 99% of the day without frequently reaching the point of exhaustion. When students attempt to follow these videos and create a lifestyle like their favorite creators, they inevitably fail due to the unrealistic standards set to obtain these lifestyles. They are chasing goals that are almost impossible to reach, and it can get to the point where individuals begin to feel guilty for their inability to be productive every second of the day.

Some consumers of this content become overwhelmed and believe their lack of self esteem, inability to perform at 100%, or academic struggles are the result of not having the right productivity system. When students have trouble focusing, they spend their study time watching productivity gurus, romanticizing second brain databases and productivity systems, and ultimately are not being productive.

It's true that applications can be extremely beneficial when organizing and prioritizing tasks, taking notes, and planning. However, the reality is, the systems that work "best" for others may not work best for you. The sheer amount of influencers promoting so many different apps ruins the very concept of the apps themselves. Students will try one system and ditch it halfway through to try another "best" app. They don't have time to figure out what works best because they are being constantly bombarded with a new "perfect" way to manage things. This creates an endless cycle of unfinished systems, therefore a lack of actual work being done.

Social media programs us to constantly divide our attention, we consume copious amounts of content in chunks of 60 seconds or less. We as humans are not made to take in so much information at once. An excerpt from author Byung Chul Han's philosophical book titled *The Burnout Society* offers an interesting perspective that can be directly applied to the age of social media and short-form content.

"An animal while busy must also attend to other tasks... It must constantly be on the lookout, lest it be eaten while eating. (...) In the wild, the animal is forced to divide its attention between various activities."

When we constantly divide our time and attention, it could be argued we become one step closer to animalistic form. We are not fully able to attend to our deeper speculations and thoughts. Simply put, it is significantly harder to fully immerse ourselves in the task at hand when we are regularly being stimulated by huge amounts of content. Whether it be an essay, working, or even taking care of ourselves, we are producing lower-quality work and are achieving the opposite of what we're striving for. However, it's important to note that some individuals are more susceptible to this cycle than others. The effect of social media on productivity in daily life varies greatly from person to person, and we cannot assume everyone is affected at the same intensity.

Nevertheless, consuming productivity content (or any content for that matter) on social media decreases our ability to focus along with instilling many other negative side effects of social media, and causes us to have much lower productivity even when we think it's assisting us.

Productivity culture on social media may have deeper roots in toxic productivity than we thought, and it's likely that the rise of social media and technology will continue to make toxic productivity more common and accessible. Productivity influencers romanticize and idealize unrealistic standards while creating content on platforms that inherently decrease

our productivity.

So, how can we begin to relax?

"In this world we are always on the go, so taking a moment every day to relax and recharge is so important to maintaining balance. Develop a schedule, and try to stick to it. It will keep your anxiety lower!" said NMC Student Success Coach Nathan Bootz.

There is a great deal of truth in this, as a healthy balance between work and rest is absolutely crucial to any kind of success. Taking breaks even for a short while can be extremely beneficial when done on a regular basis, and it's definitely important to recognize that taking breaks does not equate to being in your "lazy girl era."

With finals coming up, tasks tend to get more daunting and stress can build up to be overwhelming. If short breaks aren't enough to fully recharge you, attempt to take at least one whole day let go. Forget the schedule, sleep in, do whatever you want for a day! Whatever you know will replenish your energy and motivation. Many students, in order to succeed academically and financially, become so tied to their workload and obligations that they don't realize how much stress a schedule with seemingly endless tasks inflicts onto them. If putting work on the back-burner and relaxing for a whole day is a difficult feat for you, consider working ahead in order to block out longer periods of time to relax.



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White Pine Reviews - Scott Pilgrim Takes Off

Jacob Psczolkowski
Editor in Chief

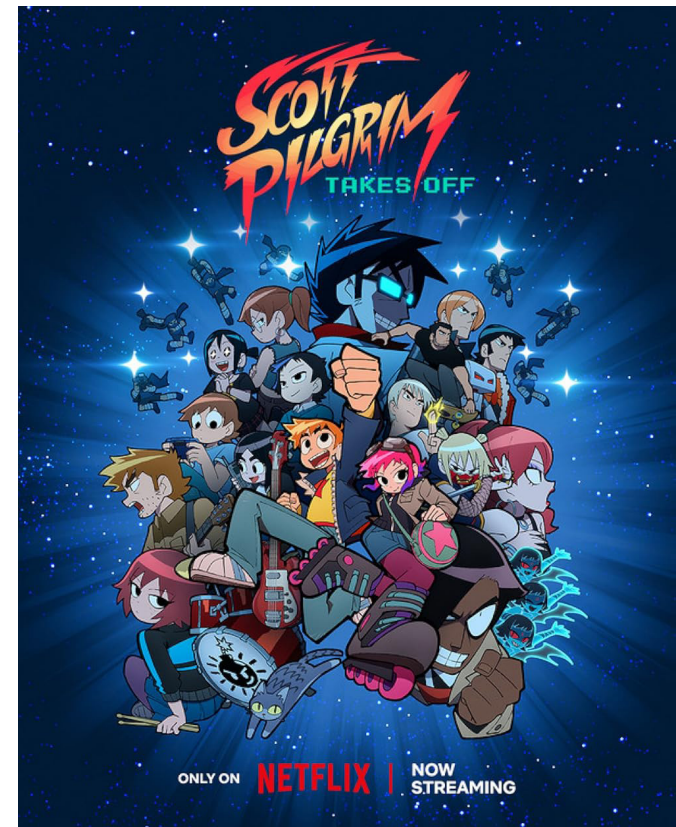
In 2004, Canadian comic author and illustrator Bryan Lee O'Malley released *Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life*, the first installment of a series that would become an instant cult classic, beloved for its absurd, witty portrayal of finding yourself in your 20s and learning to grow up and reconcile with the ghosts of your past. The final volume, *Scott Pilgrim's Finest Hour*, released in 2010 alongside Edgar Wright's film adaptation, *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*. While the movie also became a beloved cult classic, the 112-minute simply wasn't enough to cover the full breadth and depth of O'Malley's comics.

Over a decade later, Netflix would follow up with *Scott Pilgrim Takes Off*, a beautifully animated eight-episode anime series which, at first glance, seemed to be a more faithful recreation of O'Malley's beloved comic, in which Scott Pilgrim, a Canadian loser with a sordid past who mooches off his friends, begins dating Ramona Flowers, a closed-off American girl escaping from her past to Toronto. In order to continue dating, however, Scott must defeat Ramona's seven evil exes, unraveling both his and Ramona's turbulent past actions and relationships, growing into better, more well-adjusted people in the process. *Takes Off* follows the beginning of the comic very closely for most of the first episode before completely ditching the comic plot for the rest of the series. For this, the original comic series is required reading to fully understand the content of *Takes Off*.

Rather than Scott taking on Ramona's exes and learning to atone for his past, *Takes Off* centers on Ramona as the protagonist, confronting her exes over Scott's disappearance and in turn learning to grow from her mistakes and flaws. In this aspect, it does better than the comic and movie in characterizing Ramona, at the expense of Scott.

Takes Off also succeeds at developing the evil exes into genuinely lovable characters instead of obstacles for Scott to punch away. Rather than fighting Scott, the exes must confront their past with Ramona, growing into better people alongside her. These versions of the exes are a genuine delight to watch, and for that, *Takes Off* deserves genuine praise.

However, by the end of the series I found myself still wishing for what the trailers promised: a complete adaptation of O'Malley's comic. *Takes Off* started strong, began to dip in the middle, and by the end I had partially lost interest, wishing it had either kept the energy and quality of the first four episodes or just stuck to the comics. A worthwhile experience overall, but falls just short of making up for the bait-and-switch marketing.



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FEATURE

Resurrecting a Living Campus

Nathan Neste
Staff Writer

As December's last fleeting birds sing the closer to an unavoidable end of a quiet semester on campus, some use this time to look forward into what next year's bloom will bring, while others gaze longingly at the past with bittersweet hearts. It seems to be universally understood that this time is stagnate and one for endings, but there are other ways to spend the winter months that can melt both of these perspectives into one that prepares a sparkling spring semester for student life.

By resurrecting traditions and inspiration from the past and melding it with what appears to be a greater desire for a vibrant community for both resident and commuter students, plans for post-break adventures or extravaganzas can be developed.

It is imperative that this planning begins as soon as possible, not only to guarantee its occurrence, but also to provide a lifeline for students in need as NMC enters its longest stall of the academic year. If you are looking for festivity inspiration that will garner campus attention, the most acclaimed and verified examples can be found right within NMC's own foundation.

1956 - NMC BBQ



The NMC Barbecue was one of the largest and oldest annual events in Northern Michigan, bringing 4,000 people together in 2019. The tradition was laid to rest in 2020, but it funded and assisted in funding multiple projects across campus, including scholarships, the Great Lakes Campus Redevelopment, the University Center, and updated technology for Lobdell's. At the very least, the decades-old picnic is remembered as proof that food and sunshine will bring the right people together.

Sometimes, the best gathering is one that is bittersweet. With current young students having missed out on high school milestones such as prom and homecoming, I can think of no better way to attract the entire community than a campus dance or party. It is important to note the involvement of those who live on and off campus as well as students and employees for such an event.

1960 - Winter formal with Roy Arnoldt



1982 - Campus clean-up



1990 - Intramural football



1979 - Phys Ed class



1959 - Bernie Rink (far right), archery advisor

1960 - Snow statue outside Mark and Helen Osterlin Library



1980 - Pre-BBQ Buffalo



Artistic and outdoors-minded people can be brought together for fantastical creations that provide joy and beauty any season, any year.



As you tie up the ends to your first, second, third, or fourth fall semester, let this break be a rejuvenating time that makes you thrilled for what spring could bring. If you are not excited, create something to be excited about! Get involved with your Hall Council or Student Government Association, find like-minded people, and you'll find that there are other people just as interested in resurrecting a vibrant community. You are not alone.