

# WHITE PINE PRESS

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

do This is temporary Be brave  
 Perseverance Keep trying  
 Grow Strength Great work  
 Opportunity You matter  
 Shift Inspiration Capable  
 Rise Get back out there Learn  
 Be positive Keep going  
 Look forwards Motivation  
 Achieve Encouragement  
 Clarity Work it out Courage  
 best Make it happen Good job  
 can Tough times don't last Focus  
 Balance Optimism Resilient  
 thrive One step at a time

## Giving Students Encouragement

PG 4

One breath at a time  
 You've got this Be kind  
 Hope Bravery isn't lack of fear  
 Amazing Progression Faith  
 Believe Stay true to yourself  
 Strong Failure is not the end  
 Be present Patience Embrace  
 Trust Don't be afraid to be wrong  
 Uplifting Anything is possible  
 Stay strong Evolve Reflect  
 You're not alone Change  
 Go for it Anything is possible  
 Shine on Future Let go of regret  
 Be bold Dream big Persistence

# News-in-Brief

On Feb. 27, Campus Life will host a volleyball tournament at 6 pm in the Rajkovich Physical Education Center. It is open to all employees and current students. You must sign up your team by 5 pm on the day of the tournament.

On Feb. 27 at 6:30 pm, NMC will hold an Alumni Trivia Night at Right Brain Brewery in honor of NMC's 75th anniversary.

Student Feedback Surveys are open for students to give feedback on their Spring 2026 semester classes.

A new BATA bus route is available, and it costs only 75 cents for NMC students with an ID. The route runs from Front Street Campus to Garfield, Hastings, and LaFranier. The Student Government Association worked with BATA to make this possible.

On March 18, there will be a Leadership Lab from 5 to 7 pm in the Innovation Center. The event is described as a "leadership training experience for students looking to bridge the gap between 'involved student' and 'impactful leader.'" Dinner will be provided. Sign-up required.

The next two mobile food pantries will take place on March 2 and 16 from 3 to 5 pm in Maple Lot.

On March 6, NMC will host a curling night at the Traverse City Curling Center from 5:30 to 7:30 pm. Students, employees, and their families are welcome.

Registration for the Fall 2026 semester begins March 11.

The *White Pine Press* will be in the Innovation Center lobby on Feb. 26 to have students fill out the student feedback form, featured on the right. The form will be open until March 31, and is posted around NMC and in the Feb. 12 edition of the *White Pine Press*.

## White Pine Press Student Feedback Survey

Help us understand how to best serve  
the needs of NMC students

Even if you've never read the paper before, we  
still want to hear from you!

Scan the QR  
code to fill out  
a quick Google  
form!



This survey is anonymous and will be used to help the  
White Pine Press team improve our service to students

Got questions? Contact our Editor-in-Chief, Minnie Bardenhagen, at  
barden34@mail.nmc.edu or our faculty advisor, Jacob Wheeler, at  
jwheeler@nmc.edu

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photographer? Looking for a job?

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during the NMC school year that offers real-world experience while  
you do what you love. And we pay!

If you would like to learn more, contact faculty adviser Jacob Wheeler  
at [jwheeler@nmc.edu](mailto:jwheeler@nmc.edu) or editor-in-chief Minnie Bardenhagen at  
[barden34@mail.nmc.edu](mailto:barden34@mail.nmc.edu)

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NORTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COLLEGE

## WHITE PINE PRESS

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# Young Democratic Socialists of America Group Joins the Political Conversation at NMC

**Jace Dunlap**  
Staff Writer

Last year, the organization Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA) established more than 100 chapters in high schools and colleges across the country, following the reelection of President Donald Trump, and success of New York City's Mayoral-elect Zohran Mamdani.

This month a local chapter launched at Northwestern Michigan College.

Several DSA members enrolled at NMC sought to bring a hub for Democratic Socialists to local public schools. Their original plan was to launch a chapter at Central High School, but was later discarded due to lack of interest at the high school.

NMC 17-year-old Early College student Arthur Lijewski-Lee has followed progressive politics his entire life, and when the opportunity arose to join a local YDSA chapter, he jumped.

Lijewski-Lee's motivations included a Turning Point USA (TPUSA) chapter's controversial launch at NMC in late January.

The YDSA organization has been gaining membership in the past year primarily due to Trump's presidency, and originating from Bernie Sanders' campaign during the 2016 presidential election. The election of Mamdani (a self-declared Democratic Socialist) as mayor in New York City has contributed to the increase in membership. Lijewski-Lee and fellow members established their own YDSA chapter, which began hosting events on Feb. 24.

Several members of the YDSA chapter at NMC are also members of the Northwest Michigan DSA (NWMi DSA) chapter.

"As a chapter, I think a lot of what we're working toward is community-building," said Jen Kruch, a co-chair of the NWMi DSA chapter. "Our membership has been exploring ways we can create systems of mutual aid to better connect and take care of one another."

"As we watch the ICE infiltration in Minneapolis ensue, we're drawing inspiration from the vast network of groups that have come together to support and protect targeted members of their community," said Kruch.

Camryn Jenkins, a second-year Social Work major, has joined the up-and-coming YDSA chapter and is also a member of the NWMi DSA.

Jenkins said that the local TPUSA chapter's launch motivated him and fellow members of the chapter.

"So we initially got it started because we found out there's a Turning Point USA chapter here. So, if they can get verification from the school [then we can too]."

Within the group, the members boast a wide range of political beliefs. When they began meeting to establish the group, no two people had the same views, Jenkins recounted.

Jenkins' main interest in joining the group was his connection to labor unions. He comes from an organized labor family and deeply cares about unions. Because of this and DSA's connection to unions, Jenkins feels like the YDSA chapter is a good fit for him.

The YDSA organization's mission statement highlights their involvement in communities across the country: "We are students organizing in our universities, colleges, and high schools to fight for the immediate needs of workers and students while building our capacity to fight for more radical and structural changes."

One of the structural changes that YDSA targets is labor. The organization's plan for unionization is to take a "bottom-up approach." YDSA wants students to go out into the workforce and encourage their coworkers to join their local DSA chapter to further strengthen the unions and further spread their message.

YDSA is implementing a "Rank-and-File Strategy" where members are encouraged to join union groups in education, healthcare, and logistics-related fields. The goal is to recruit Democratic Socialists in a variety of unions to spread their message.

In connection with YDSA's Ranks-and-File Strategy, Kruch believes that strengthening efforts to protect Traverse City's natural resources and energy infrastructure will continue to provide jobs for students in the future.

Kruch believes that the YDSA chapter may need to focus their efforts on the job market, to ensure future jobs for students, "If the current students at NMC experience anything like the students at countless colleges and universities which came before them, they will continue to see their job prospects diminish and their student loan debt soar. I say this not to be mean, but to point out the idiocy of young people falling for the lies of the corporate shills, political miscreants, and pseudo-religious grifters that make up Turning Point USA."

Lijewski-Lee mirrored Kruch's concerns about the impact TPUSA could have on NMC students. "Educating the student body and offering alternative resources may show people that there are alternatives to TPUSA," said Lijewski-Lee.

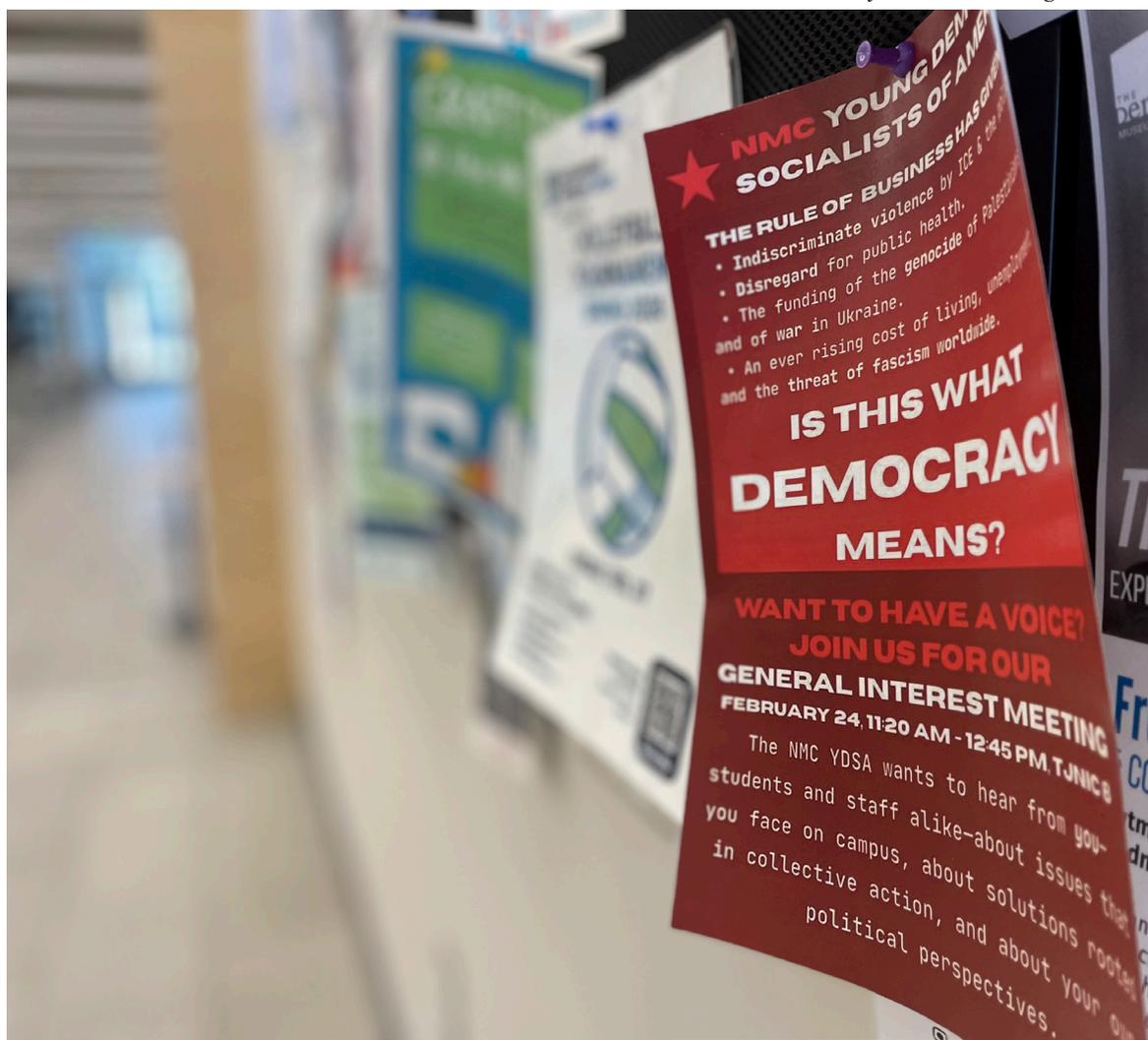
Photo by Minnie Bardenhagen

White Pine Press

# Your News On The Web




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# A Helping Word

## NMC Student Success Offers Words of Encouragement

**Sydney Boettcher**  
Staff Writer

College isn't easy. Coursework piles up, you fall behind, and it feels like a hopeless situation, even if it isn't.

However, it's the pressure you put on yourself that can really kill your momentum. Even if it doesn't feel like it at the moment, sometimes all you really need to get back on track is a few words of encouragement.

A few weeks ago, NMC Student Success did just that with their aptly named words of encouragement campaign. They put up flyers all over campus with a QR code to a Google Form. The Google Form asked students for their favorite motivational quote, as well as a few other things, like studying music or book recommendations.

The campaign was a group effort, created in a brainstorming session by the Advising Office staff around the start of the semester. "We talked about the challenges of coming back [to] classes after holiday break, and that many students would be graduating Spring 2026," said Tallula Morrison, an office manager for Student Success. "During Fall 2025 finals, we kept receiving feedback from students on how heavy things felt, [and] we knew this was a way we could share little pick-me-up moments."

What started as a few "pick-me-up moments" posted to some corkboards around the school became a campus-wide source of motivation. Morrison acknowledged the small start of the campaign, but remained firm in her belief in its value. "[W]e know that sometimes the most impactful things take the longest time to germinate and grow... This isn't a short-term campaign for us. Encouragement lies at the heart of what we do..."

Morrison said that they reached many students and, "probably more than we're aware of—that's the beauty of ripples, they keep expanding outward."

After receiving motivational messages through the Google Form, Student Success posts the messages to social media. Using pictures from around campus as backgrounds, the messages are typed into blocky, white text boxes.

"Challenges are opportunities," one of the posts said, with a photo of the sun peaking through the windows of the NMC library. Over a photo of the Tanis Building, another post read "This is tough, but so am I."

The campaign has been part of a much larger project called Fail Forward Week, which spanned from Feb. 11–18. "The words of encouragement was a piece of the toolbox... encouraging others and recognizing the impact of how we talk to ourselves."

Fail Forward Week, which aimed to help students reframe failure, included a Lunch & Learn with Student Life on Feb. 12, Student Success coaching on Feb. 16, and a Student Success Fair on Feb. 17. Attending these events would get you a "certificate of failure." Throughout the week, students could write on the "fail boards" posted on each campus.

Student Success also used social media to share testimonials from students and staff. A testimonial by communications instructor Janet Lively read, "I seriously thought about dropping out," when she had trouble in her math courses during her first semester at MSU. "Instead, I hired a math tutor and got a C- in the second semester. Success!"

Morrison said that the campaign has sparked valuable conversations between peers. She says she's seen "Staff and students, sharing stories of things that build us up or tear us down, and how it has impacted our forward momentum."

Morrison and the rest of the Student Success faculty are always looking for ways to connect with students here at NMC, and they're taking requests. Students can send ideas they have in an email to the Advising Office.

It's the little things that really matter. It can be a penny on the sidewalk, a smile from someone across the sidewalk, or a hand to help you up when you fall down. And sometimes, it's a few pick-me-up moments on a corkboard.

ADVERTISEMENT

## Serving community becomes full-circle moment for GVSU student

**Michele Coffill**  
Grand Valley State University

Now as a graduate student at Grand Valley State University,

Kristen LaPan has carried over the value of serving the community from her days as a student leader at Northwestern Michigan College.

LaPan serves as the vice president of GVSU's Richard Paul Clodfelder (RPC) Student Society, the service-focused student organization for the Physician Assistant Studies program that volunteers with Traverse City nonprofit organizations during food and clothing drives.

For RPC, LaPan works with fellow student leaders to coordinate and participate in volunteer efforts, including serving meals at the Central United Methodist Church community breakfast and volunteering at the Great Lakes Children's Museum.

Before beginning the master's program at GVSU, LaPan was president of the Pre-Physician Assistant Society at NMC, where she led student volunteer efforts with local nonprofits, such as the Father Fred Foundation and the Goodwill Inn. Those two organizations had once supported her family during difficult times.

LaPan said her family experienced periods of poverty and homelessness when she was younger. "There were times when we stayed at the Goodwill Inn and relied on food pantries and community



Kristen LaPan

clinics," she said. "Those local resources made a huge difference for my family and they inspired my goal of becoming a physician assistant who serves this same community."

The opportunity to give back to her hometown community in Traverse City has been one of LaPan's favorite

parts of studying at Grand Valley's Traverse City campus, now located in the Beckett Building on NMC's Front Street Campus. She values the close-knit connections and local service opportunities that both NMC and GVSU have provided.

It was her drive to help people that led LaPan to begin working at Munson Healthcare as a nurse assistant when she was 18. "I just fell in love with health care and the careers that were available," she said.

LaPan enrolled at Northwestern Michigan College and took classes as she could afford them. In 2023, she earned a bachelor's degree in allied health

sciences from GVSU. She continues to work at Munson, now as an emergency department technician.

"My advisors at NMC and GVSU were all very supportive of me enrolling in classes as I could afford them, yet keeping me on track to graduate," she said. "When I decided on physician assistant studies at Grand Valley, my NMC advisor knew exactly what classes I would need."

Grand Valley opened its satellite PAS program in Traverse City in 2015 to educate students who would receive training at Northern Michigan hospitals and health care organizations and then want to work in the area after graduating.

LaPan is among the more than 70% of GVSU students who plan to stay and work in Northern Michigan.

"We've learned a lot about rural health care. And I want to give back to the area that has helped me so much," she said.

### Physician Assistant Studies Preview Day

Attend the Physician Assistant Studies Preview Day on Friday, March 20, from 1-3 p.m. at the GVSU Regional Center at 1890 College Drive, Traverse City MI 49686 or go to [gvsu.edu/traverse](https://www.gvsu.edu/traverse) to learn more.

# The State, the Soldier, and the Student

## How Dr. Kori Schake is Challenging Assumptions about American Power

**Isabelle Plamondon**  
Staff Writer

When Dr. Kori Schake talks about American power, she doesn't start with tanks or treaties.

She starts with restraint.

"We would have a very different civil-military relationship in the United States," she told an audience at NMC on Feb. 19, "if it didn't start with George Washington laying the foundation."

In a political moment defined by institutional strain, foreign entanglements, and rising distrust, Schake's visit to the International Affairs Forum (IAF) was less a lecture on defense policy and more a meditation on the fragile architecture that has kept American democracy intact for nearly 250 years.

Moderated by retired Marine Corps Major General Mike Lehnert—who served 37 years and later received the Peacemaker Award for his human rights work in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba—the discussion quickly moved beyond abstract theory and into present-day tension: politicization of the military, domestic troop deployments, strained alliances, and the question of whether the United States is still perceived as "the good guys."

Schake's argument, drawn from her recent book *The State and the Soldier*, rests on a deceptively simple claim: the American military has never threatened civilian governance. Not because it lacks power, but because early norms constrained it.

After the Revolutionary War, Washington refused to leverage the loyalty of the Continental Army to pressure Congress for back pay and pensions. "An army is a very dangerous instrument to play with," he warned at the time: a moment Schake describes as foundational. The precedent he set—that civilian leadership determines strategy and resources—bought time for institutions to harden around democratic control.

The result, she argued, is historically rare. "As strong, as popular, as influential as the American military is," she said, "they have not ever been a threat of a military coup."

But rarity is not permanence.

In an interview with the *White Pine Press* earlier that day, Schake described her own entry into this field as accidental. "It was less a conscious choice than just the kind of collection of serendipitous opportunities," she said. A year spent studying Soviet and American militaries after college led to work under General Colin Powell during the final years of the Cold War—saying she was "the only civilian in a staff of 1,500 military officers." Those experiences shaped her belief that civil-military health depends on clarity, legitimacy, and public trust.

When asked what norm feels most fragile today, her answer was: "Political activity by junior uniformed people." Senior officers, she explained, are steeped in institutional tradition. Younger service members are "more impressionable." At the same time, she warned, civilian leaders are "shattering the norm of expected restraint" in how they engage in the military.

One of the evening's most sobering exchanges came when she addressed a widespread civilian misconception: that the military can simply refuse unethical orders.

"There is a widespread public expectation that the military can refuse orders they think are unethical. And that is just not true," she said. Service members can refuse illegal orders, but doing so invites court-martial, and "the burden of proof is on the person who refused to obey the order." That, she emphasized, is not a weight civilians should expect soldiers to carry.

"If we get to the point where a president is issuing an illegal order," she added during the event, "the system has already failed."

That failure, in her view, begins not in barracks but in civilian institutions.

Throughout the conversation, Schake returned to alliances as the true engine of American power. The run-up to the 1991 Gulf War, she said in her interview, remains "the best example I've seen of the United States doing something hard and doing it well," because it built broad international support through diplomacy and explanation.

Today, she worried the opposite is occurring.

"I cannot think of a time since 1949 that America's alliances have been tested as strongly as they are now," she said. Rhetoric questioning NATO commitments and threatening allies' territories like Greenland undermines credibility. "Being the good guys actually really matters," she said plainly.

Her concern is not abstract. "America's ability to act in a world is actually enabled through cooperation of other countries," she explained. Bases, overflight rights, shared intelligence, these are not entitlements but relationships. And relationships depend on trust.

Domestic division complicates that trust. "When there is sharp domestic division, it makes it harder for allies to consider us reliable," she said. The American system, by design, does nothing until political arguments are settled. But prolonged paralysis signals instability abroad.

History, Schake believes, offers instructions—if used properly. "History lets you learn from other people's mistakes," she said. "It's the cheapest way to think your way through a problem."

In her book *Safe Passage*, she argues that the peaceful transition of global dominance from Britain to the United States was historically unique. She does not see similar conditions between the U.S. and China. "If China were to supplant the United States, it's much more likely to happen through warfare than through peaceful transition."

She also cautioned against complacency. "We have lost the perspective that a really good military can still lose wars," she said, pointing to China's vastly greater shipbuilding capacity. Military strength without industrial depth and allied backing may not suffice.

At the reception before the event, community members voiced both anxiety and urgency. Jim and Barb VanDam said they hoped Schake would address escalating tensions in civil and foreign military affairs and expressed a desire for greater student engagement. "Look around," they said, "it's all older folks."

Interlochen instructor Brian McCall, who brought students to the forum, described shrinking political parameters and an overwhelming "free market on facts" that makes it difficult for students to parse what is true.

NMC student Victoria Strelczuk, attending for a Contemporary Ethical Dilemmas class, described Gen Z as deeply aware but economically constrained. "We're in the trenches," she said, adding that greater financial stability would likely mean "a lot more activism."

Schake addressed that tension directly.

"Distrust of the American government is a fundamentally healthy thing," she said. "But cynicism isn't." The remedy, she argued, is participation: running for office, joining institutions, improving them from within. "Cynicism doesn't fix the problem."

Near the end of the evening, she described the Constitution as "an invitation to struggle". Struggle is not dysfunction, abdication is. In her view, what has destabilized the system most is Congress failing to exercise its Article I authority.

The military, she repeated, cannot repair civilian weakness. That responsibility belongs to voters, lawmakers, and citizens—including the students at NMC.

Because if American democracy falters, Schake suggested, it will not be because generals overthrew it. It will be because civilians failed to defend it.

*Photo Courtesy of Tracy Grant*



# Learning to Write with Robots

## English Professors Consider AI's Place in Classroom

**Minnie Bardenhagen**  
Editor-in-Chief

“Does artificial intelligence have a place in college writing curricula?”

That is the prompt I wrote Google Gemini, to which it responded, “In 2026, the question is no longer *if* AI has a place in writing curricula, but *how* it is being integrated.”

“It is becoming a permanent fixture in the process of writing.”

Even before NMC rolled out its AI policy last August, instructors in all areas of study had to consider the question of Gen AI. This question can be particularly precarious for writing-centered curricula.

Since ChatGPT rose to prominence in late 2022, stories of students using chatbots to do writing assignments for them had gone mainstream, and instructors made AI use and cheating synonymous. This notion has changed recently as more curricula have adopted AI as a tool, and one that students entering the job market may find advantageous.

Ryan Bernstein, a curriculum and instructional designer and an adjunct professor teaching technical writing, requires AI use in his technical writing course. He noted that sounding robotic is “kind of the point” of technical writing, so AI is a tool that fits well.

In his technical writing course, Bernstein said that he teaches students how to write effective prompts and think critically about AI's responses. He emphasized that AI is a tool of writing, but not a replacement for the writer.

“People are afraid it's going to take [their] job, right?” Bernstein said. “There's a common response to that fear, which is, ‘No, AI is not going to take your job. Someone who knows how to use AI is going to take your job... so that's why I think it's important that we practice it.’”

Michael Anderson, who chairs the Communications Department at NMC, said that from a general English composition perspective, norms for AI use in specific professions are still being debated.

“Employers clearly know about AI, and they're interested in it,” Anderson said. “[Students] need to understand the tool and what it can and can't do... but the degree to which it actually gets applied in work is very much up in the air.”

In his English courses, Anderson recommends NotebookLM to his students as a tool for research and outlining. He makes it clear that he does not want that to extend to AI writing for the student.

“The language that chatbots produce simply is not good writing,” Anderson said, “It doesn't use any sources or examples or personality or any of the other things that we're discussing in composition that are so important for actually getting people to attend to your argument or to your essay.”

When he finds that students overrely on AI, Anderson engages with them directly. “Most of the time the students admit, ‘Oh, yeah, I used a chatbot to help me do this or that,’ and then we get to have that conversation.”

Most writing assignments begin with another task that's relevant for AI: research. While using AI in research can be helpful, Nicco Pandolfi, an NMC librarian, said AI cannot access a source the way a student can.

“My advice would be, if you use these tools at all in research, to treat them as pre-research tools, similar to how you might use Wikipedia,” Pandolfi said, “They can help you discover material to read, but letting them ‘do your reading for you’ is a recipe for misunderstanding and learning loss.”

Bernstein—who co-leads Strategy 1, “Future-Focused Education,” of NMC's current 2026–2029 strategic plan—noted a slow recognition among faculty to address AI's role.

“I think the most effective strategy is not to treat it as a punitive thing,” he said, “[but] to discuss it as an interesting tool that might be helpful and might be harmful.”

Bernstein noted the concerns that come with increased student AI use. “The biggest concern is that AI is going to remove that critical thinking process that a student has to go through to learn material and to demonstrate learning,” he said.

Bernstein also said security is a concern for the college regarding AI. NMC has safety measures in place, such as a site license for Google Gemini that stops the platform from using students' prompts to train its systems.

NMC's AI policy outlines several guardrails. The policy cautions instructors and students against submitting college data and intellectual property into AI platforms, and clarifies that students' academic work is the students' intellectual property. As for addressing communication concerns, the policy asks for caution from instructors and students.

“Because GenAI applications are incapable of intent, feeling, judgment, or authentic human communication, overreliance on GenAI tools in the creation of communications can have serious consequences,” NMC's AI policy states.

Energy and water usage by Gen AI platforms is another concern addressed by Bernstein in his interview with the *White Pine Press*. Data centers use water to cool down their servers and routers. The Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory estimates that US data centers used 17 billion gallons of water in 2023.

Despite ongoing ethical debates, AI has a grip on academics.

“Does the calculator have a permanent place in learning math? Does a wrench have a permanent place in learning to be a mechanic?” Bernstein asked, “To some extent, there is permanence in [AI], but only as a tool.”

Google Gemini responds to a prompt by reporter Minnie Bardenhagen about AI integration into writing curricula.

Does artificial intelligence have a place in college writing curricula?

◆ Show thinking ▼

In 2026, the question is no longer *if* AI has a place in writing curricula, but *how* it is being integrated. Most universities have moved past the “ban and detect” phase and are now treating AI as a core literacy skill, similar to how the internet was integrated decades ago.

The consensus is that while AI shouldn't replace the **act of thinking**, it is becoming a permanent fixture in the **process of writing**.

# State Hospital Playwriting Contest Marks Another Event in TC's Writing Culture

## Opportunities for Northwestern Michigan Writers Are There For Those Who Look

**Dominic Montoya-Arlt**  
Staff Writer

On Jan. 19, the Old Town Playhouse and the

Minervini Group opened the Northern Michigan Asylum Playwriting Contest, inviting playwrights to submit plays relating to the Traverse City State Hospital until the deadline on Dec. 31. The winner of the contest will see their play workshopped and then produced in 2027 or 2028, according to the contest's submission guidelines.

The Artistic Director of the Old Town Playhouse, Wes Curry, wrote in an email that the success of this contest may pave the way for more contests. "I could see a future where OTP hosts more writing contests focused on other local history!"

Curry says several plays have already been submitted from across the United States. The contest has been posted on several webpages, including NYCplaywrights.org. Curry expects more submissions as the deadline comes closer. "...There is lots of time for folks who haven't started writing yet but have that idea rolling around in their head!"

The submission guidelines state that the submissions will be judged by five people: two from the Old Town Playhouse (one of whom will be Curry), two from the Minervini Group, and one outside representative chosen by the Old Town Playhouse.

The Traverse City State Hospital was founded in 1881 and ran from 1885 until laws regarding the practices of asylums forced it to wind down operations until closure in 1989. The asylum persisted for over 100 years, and is sure to promise rich material for playwrights to work with for the playwriting competition.

The asylum has a history of tourists from all over coming to visit the scenic grounds, even during its operation, and there are records and accounts of people

vacationing on the grounds. This beauty was part of the design philosophy for the asylum, as it was constructed with the principle of "beauty is therapy" in mind.

James Decker Munson, after whom Munson Medical Centers is named, is credited with implementing an idea in the asylum that beauty and work will make a mind healthy. Patients would often work farms or tend livestock, and the architecture of the building followed the Kirkbride Plan. The Kirkbride Plan was established by Thomas Story Kirkbride to be implemented to improve the health of patients in asylums.

The Traverse City State Hospital was registered in the Registry of Historic Places in 1978.

The Minervini Group is notable for acquiring the Traverse City State Hospital in 2002 and transforming it into what is now known as the Village at Grand Traverse Commons. Curry, who recently moved to Northern Michigan, said that when he visited, he was "overwhelmed with feelings that 'if these walls could talk, I wonder what stories they would tell.'"

This is the first time the Old Town Playhouse has organized a playwriting competition, but it isn't the first time Traverse City has seen playwriting competitions. The City Opera House has been running a Young Playwrights Festival since 2010. The festival seeks out school-age playwrights to submit a 9-12 page play with four characters or fewer, and picks six finalists among the applicants. The finalists then win \$100 and get the opportunity to workshop and produce their winning play in the City Opera House.

There are many local programs dedicated to young writers, such as the Twisted Quills writing group hosted by Traverse Area District Libraries. This group of teenage writers collaborates to create stories and build worlds together. In 2024, they created a magazine consisting of

their own stories. Through 2025 and 2026, they've been working on creating stories for their new world, spawned from a choose-your-own-adventure project. The program is facilitated by Jacqueline Burke, a former member of the National Writers Series (NWS).

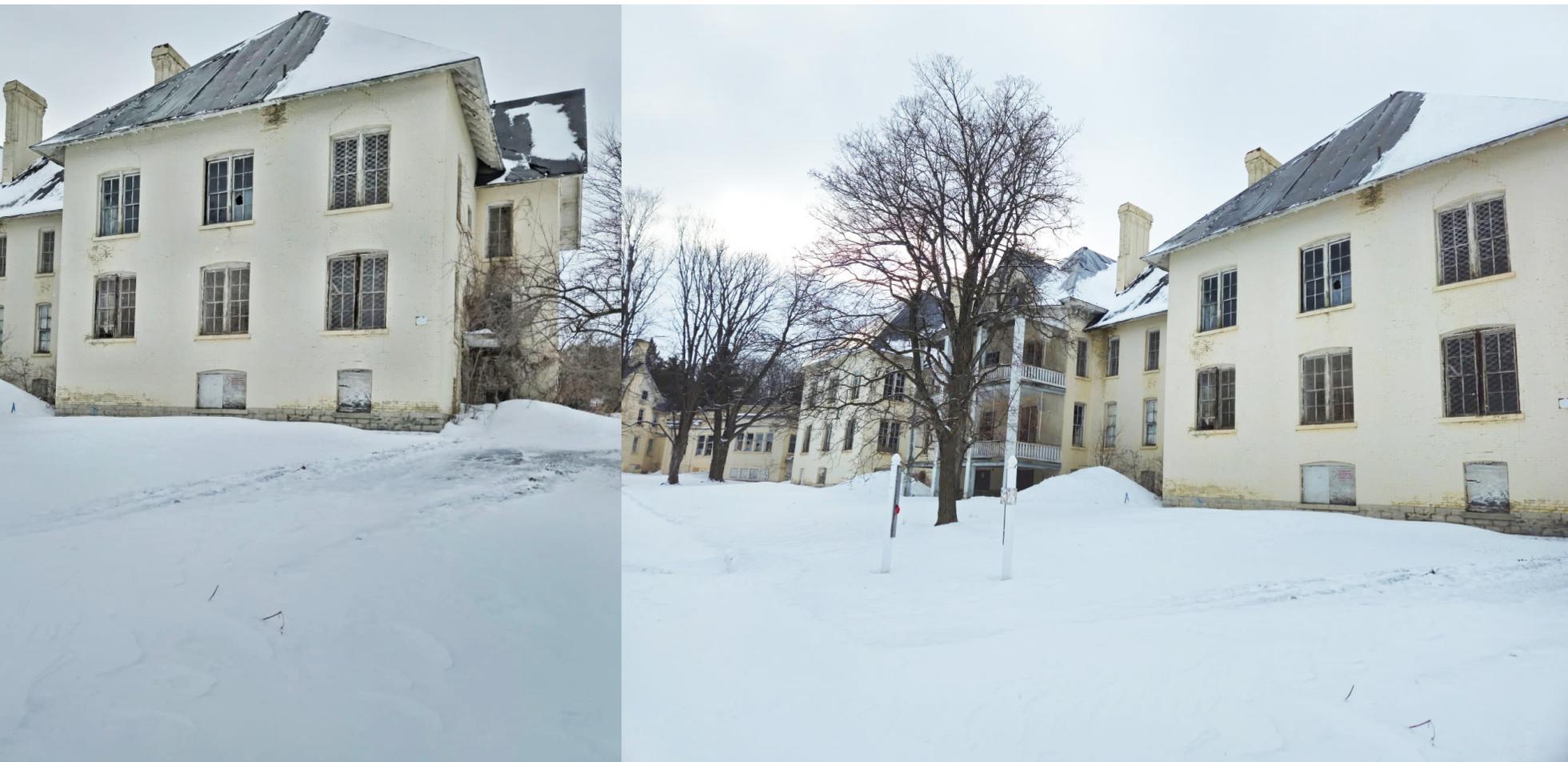
The Traverse Area District Libraries also hold an annual poetry contest called Poets' Night Out at the beginning of each year for the chance to get published in a chapbook. Winners are also invited to come read their poems at an event later in the year. This year's reading of the poems will be held on April 26 at Kirkbride Hall in the Village at Traverse City Commons.

The head of Teen Services at the Traverse Area District Library, Linda Smith, noted in an interview that the library has had a teen writing group for many years, but also said that this iteration of the writing group is only officially in its fourth year. She praises the versatility of the group, saying, "Even if you're not ready for the writing, there's still something to do with worldbuilding."

The National Writers Series, based in Traverse City, also funds several writing programs, such as the middle-grade Battle of the Books. It also organizes year-round classes generally geared toward middle and high schoolers, though most recently they held an adult-only class on writing romance in celebration of Valentine's Day. NWS is also notable for bringing famous authors to Traverse City to talk about their books.

The North Ed Career Tech Center also hosts its own two-year program called Writers Studio, taught by local poet Teresa Scollon. The program has been running for over a decade now, and students are encouraged to compete in the Young Playwrights Festival.

*Photos Courtesy of Landon Steel*



# An Album That Goes Down Easy

Something Today Review

**Sydney Boettcher**  
Staff Writer

A lot of people tell me they don't like jazz. Whenever I ask why, they usually tell me the same thing: it's too complicated. It's just a bunch of self-obsessed musicians trying to cram as many notes into as little space as possible, flexing their musical skill and knowledge over the masses with high-handed ideas and insane execution.

Even if all these people are wrong, I can see where they're coming from. The mistake they make is being exposed to the most complicated stuff first. It's like learning to read; you wouldn't give a first grader *The Count of Monte Cristo* and expect them to understand a single thing. You need a simpler access point to ease some people into jazz.

Now a lot of that stuff exists, but more is never a bad thing. To me, *Something Today* falls into that camp. It's exactly what it says on the tin. Just a nice, pleasant album that goes down easy. Featuring NMC's own adjunct audio tech instructor David Chown on the keyboard, John Richard Paul on bass, Ricke Kiehle on guitar, and Alex Wyant on drums.

The first track, "Something Today," is a perfect example of what I mean: it opens with a laid-back saxophone line that feels comfortable, like a nice cup of coffee on a bad morning. It's refreshing, and when the song breaks down into a slightly more uptempo keyboard solo, it's exhilarating.

The song slowly builds upon itself, masterfully weaving new ideas into the mix bit by bit, until it feels like everything is happening at once, exactly what all those people have said to me they don't like about jazz. But it's paced so well, they won't even realize it's happening. And before they can realize the wool has been pulled over their eyes, and despite their best efforts, they're starting to like this whole jazz thing, the song pulls back to the quiet sax and restrained drumbeat it started with. And no one was the wiser.

"Crawler" is another standout track for me, and a total trend-bucker. Instead of the smooth jazz fusion we've been expecting, this song draws just as much from rock and roll as it does from jazz and funk. Opening with a groovy bassline and driven by a singular syncopated groove, it snaps you out of your trance with a short burst of sound, and for just a moment, electric guitars wail in your ears. And as quickly as they appeared, they die down and just become another part of the ensemble. I'm also a massive sucker for organs, no matter the genre, so I can't help but give this song its flowers.

"NoRe" is a mellowed-out return to form for the album. We've had our fun rocking out, and it's time to simmer down. Muted guitars and crooning saxophones take you through a guided meditation of melody. I'd like to highlight Chown's gorgeous keyboard solo. It's atmospheric and spine-chilling. I get lost in it every time I hear it. I never want it to end, and I'm always a little disappointed when it does. Even if the guitar solo right after is just as good, there's just something special about Chown's performance, I don't know.

At just five songs, it's a tight listen, if a bit short. All in all, a stellar project. I'll be coming back to this one again and again. Even if you say you don't like jazz, you should give this record a chance. It just might make a believer out of you.

**Favorite Songs:** "Something Today," "Crawler," "NoRe"

**Least Favorite Songs:** None of them

David Chown - Keyboards

John Richard Paul - Bass

Ricke Kiehle - Guitars

Alex Wyant - Drums

**EAST BAY DRIVE**  
Something Today



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