

# WHITE PINE PRESS

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## EDUSTAFF DEBATE

NMC STAFF RAISE  
CONCERNS OVER  
THIRD-PARTY  
HIRING FIRM

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## NMC News In Brief

### Benzie County up for Annexation

Pending the results of a November 2024 vote, Benzie County is up for integration into the NMC school district. This initiative is intended to provide Benzie residents with easier access to NMC resources and programs.

### International Affairs Forum Events

Oct. 5 - Dennon Museum Center Milliken Auditorium - Ambassador (ret.) Susan D. Page is set to speak on the constant states of crisis faced by the African continent in "Africa: Permanent Crises?" held by the International Affairs Forum.

### NMC Jazz Band to Perform at Leelanau Uncaged

The NMC Jazz Big Band, directed by Josh Wagner, will be playing at Leelanau Uncaged in Northport on Sept. 30 at 7 PM. This event will be open to the public free of charge.

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## NORTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COLLEGE WHITE PINE PRESS

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF** Jacob Pszczolkowski

**STAFF WRITERS** Gigi Chavarria  
Pilar Judd  
Deanna Luton  
Aidan Pool

**PAGE DESIGNER** Emma Marion

**DELIVERY** Devon Bruner

**FACULTY ADVISER** Jacob Wheeler

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**EMAIL** [whitepinepress@gmail.com](mailto:whitepinepress@gmail.com)

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# NMC President Nick Nissley Sails on Great Lakes

**Aidan Pool**  
Maritime  
Correspondent

On Sept. 14, NMC president Nick Nissley joined cadets from the Great Lakes Maritime Academy (GLMA) on a sail across Lake Michigan to Milwaukee aboard the *State of Michigan*.

“I appreciated getting the real feel of staying in the cadet bunks and seeing the quarters and meals,” said Nissley, who has been at NMC since January 2020. “There is an organization called the Navy League and is similar to that of a fraternity for all things maritime. They have come together to create a scholarship for GLMA and we came together to celebrate that.”

Members of the Navy League also invited cadets, crew, Nissley and his wife Elise to a Milwaukee Brewers baseball game. “Going to the game was a blast,” said Nissley. “It was such a beautiful stadium. The excitement of the game was such an amazing experience.” The Brewers beat the Washington Nationals, 5-3.

Some cadets wondered aloud whether it was Nissley’s first time aboard the training ship. “I had been on a number of other times but it was my first time overnight,” he responded. “You know I’ve been on whale watches and smaller vessels on the bay. But I think that that was the largest vessel I have ever been on,” he joked.

The trip to Milwaukee takes about 20 hours, during which Nissley dined on the same meals as the cadets. “I think the quality of the food was something I noticed, too,” he said. “The respect that everyone has for the chef was impressive. I would hear ‘thank you’ from a lot of cadets when they were finished with their food. When we came from the game, everyone was

looking for (Chef) Joel when he got lost on his way back to the bus because he’s such a valuable part of the ship.”

Nissley reflected on the overall trip. “It gave me a lot of time to connect with faculty and cadets. But the biggest takeaway was the sense of pride and passion that you all have for the industry. I admire the dedication and not all majors have the clarity, but I feel that GLMA really has that. You’re all willing to work hard. Whether it’s painting the deck, cleaning the grill or toilets. You’re all willing to work hard to get to your goals.”

Nissley also noticed the murals that the engineers paint in engine spaces, “I thought the murals were quite neat,” he said. “It’s cool to see the stories that they have left behind.” The murals span at least two decades and mark a tradition of which the engineering cadets are proud.

From a cadet’s perspective, having the president of the college on the training ship was a welcome experience. There are times when NMC and the Great Lakes Maritime Academy almost seem like two different schools. With GLMA offering such a specialized education, the disconnect between the two institutions can feel very real.

However, when Nissley joined the maritime program for a trip across Lake Michigan, it’s a reminder that GLMA is larger than just the training ship or its campus. It shows that NMC brings people of all majors together to form a sense of community.

## Ship’s Journal: Life on Board The State of Michigan

From Sept. 2-4, I had galley duty. Galley duty means you do anything that the chef asks you to. This usually involves washing dishes, setting both the officer and cadet mess areas, refilling the water and juice containers, and setting out napkins and condiments before meals.

Three chefs rotate on board the boat. During my three days, I shared the galley with Joel Papcun, who was previously an instructor at NMC’s Culinary Institute across the hall from GLMA. He got his Merchant Mariner Credential in 2021, and prefers the pay and time off. Papcun is one reason GLCI approved a Culinary-Maritime certification for this Fall 2023 semester.

Chef Joel has been cooking for more than four decades. He is well liked because of his good food, positive attitude, and witty jokes. Every day he writes at least one joke on the whiteboard that tells what the day’s meal will be. The most popular joke during my galley time was: “A wife tells a husband, ‘I thought we agreed on three beers and home by 10’, to which the husband replies, ‘Sorry honey, I always get the two mixed up.’”

I don’t mind galley duty. It is nice to hold a normal sleep schedule for three days. But one of the most challenging parts about galley duty is trying to get reacquainted to your watch once you complete your three days. In my case, I did not have to go to my midnight to 6 a.m. watch because I would not get at least 12 hours of rest after my galley duty. This meant that the next watch I would have would be the 6 p.m. to midnight. Ironically, one of the main tasks of that watch is cleaning the galley after meal hours are over.

Galley duty can be a nice break from the everyday hustle and bustle of our everyday watches. It serves as a good reminder how much time the chef puts into the meals that we as hungry sailors enjoy. In addition, it can give us an opportunity to get to know the person that is hand cooking our meals. That friendship makes everything taste a little bit sweeter.



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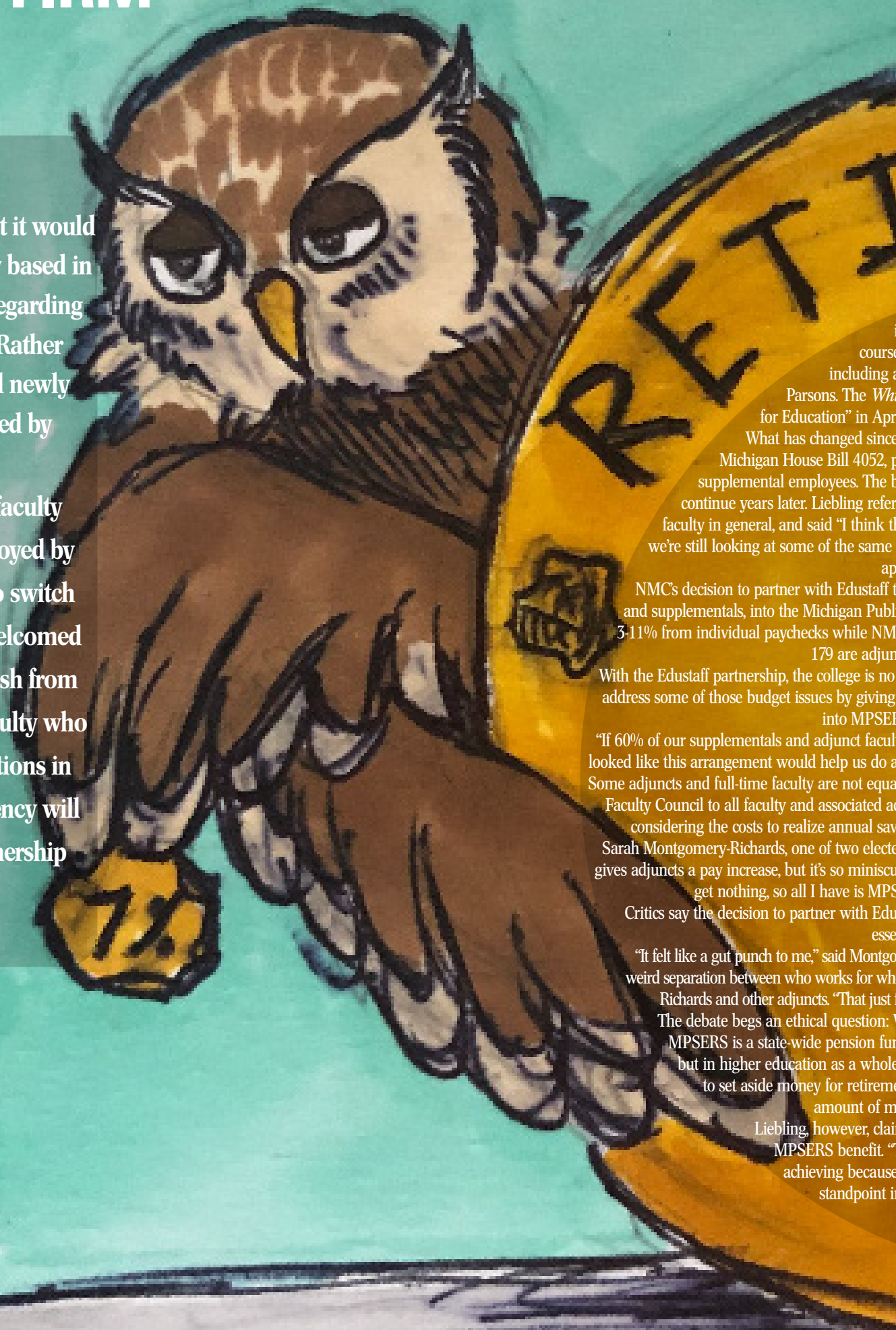
# NMC STAFF RAISE CONCERNS OVER THIRD-PARTY HIRING FIRM

GIGI CHAVARRIA

Staff writer

On May 4, two days before Spring Commencement, NMC announced that it would partner with Edustaff, a staffing agency based in Grand Rapids, for college operations regarding supplemental and adjunct professors. Rather than being employees of the college, all newly hired adjunct faculty would be employed by Edustaff.

Current adjuncts and supplemental faculty would have the option to remain employed by NMC under their current contract or to switch to employment with Edustaff. While welcomed by some, the decision has faced backlash from both adjunct teachers and full-time faculty who believe that outsourcing educator positions in the college to a nationwide staffing agency will cause more harm than good. The partnership went into effect July 1.



courses including a Parsons. The *Wh* for Education” in Apr What has changed since Michigan House Bill 4052, p supplemental employees. The b continue years later. Liebling refer faculty in general, and said “I think th we’re still looking at some of the same ap NMC’s decision to partner with Edustaff t and supplementals, into the Michigan Publ 3-11% from individual paychecks while NM 179 are adjun With the Edustaff partnership, the college is no address some of those budget issues by giving into MPSE “If 60% of our supplementals and adjunct facul looked like this arrangement would help us do a Some adjuncts and full-time faculty are not equa Faculty Council to all faculty and associated ac considering the costs to realize annual sav Sarah Montgomery-Richards, one of two electe gives adjuncts a pay increase, but it’s so miniscu get nothing, so all I have is MPS Critics say the decision to partner with Edu esse “It felt like a gut punch to me,” said Montgo weird separation between who works for wh Richards and other adjuncts. “That just i The debate begs an ethical question: MPSE is a state-wide pension fun but in higher education as a whole to set aside money for retireme amount of m Liebling, however, clai MPSE benefit. “ achieving because standpoint i



# REMEMBER

NMC considered bringing on Edustaff in 2015 – under then-president Tim Nelson – but reversed the decision amid backlash from many adjuncts and community members. An adjunct psychology instructor Susan Odgers and local attorney Grant Montgomery-Richards, who the *White Pine Press* ran an impassioned plea from the group “Adjuncts Concerned” in 2015 urging the board and Nelson to abandon plans to partner with Edustaff. In 2015? According to Mark Liebling, associate vice president of Human Resources, the proposal proposed in 2015, would have changed the relationship NMC had with its adjunct and full-time faculty. The bill was never passed into law, which allowed the conversation to partner with Edustaff to continue. He referenced the “tension in the relationship” in 2015 between the college’s administration and the faculty that drove a lot of the resistance at that point in time. “We’re many years down the road now, but the issues and problems, the budget issues that we’re facing and our ability to continue to pay people appropriately for the work is something that we’re focused on.”

This year was driven by concerns about how much the college is paying, on behalf of those adjuncts into the Michigan School Employees’ Retirement System (MPSERS). Under the previous system, adjuncts contributed 28% of gross wages, totaling nearly \$1.2 million in 2022. Of the 290 educators at NMC, 179 are full-time faculty; around 62%. Of those 179, 108 are currently teaching classes. Full-time faculty no longer required to pay into MPSERS for its newly hired adjuncts. The partnership allowed the college to offer new adjuncts a 7% pay increase while also drastically decreasing the amount of money the college pays into MPSERS – provided adjunct and supplemental faculty decide to switch over.

Faculty were paid through Edustaff, then the savings would be somewhere north of \$200,000,” Liebling said “It was a couple of things that we wanted to do, which was pay people more and save some money in the process.” He was fully convinced of the benefits. In an open statement on May 5 from the NMC Faculty Association and NMC Administration, Faculty Association president Brandon Everest wrote, “... we are very concerned, especially regarding savings of no more than \$150,000 in future years or about 0.3% of our annual budget in the best case.”

Adjunct faculty representatives for the Faculty Council, added, “I know the college is telling us that this is the best deal. We’re already not paid enough, we don’t get health benefits or retirement benefits from the college. We don’t get MPSERS.” Montgomery-Richards joined NMC as an Adjunct Instructor in Philosophy in 2015.

The decision to partner with Edustaff was made behind closed doors. By the time of the announcement in May, they say the deal was essentially done and there was very little adjuncts or faculty could do.

Montgomery-Richards. “It’s hard enough to create a sense of belonging amongst [adjuncts], let alone if there’s this much tension.” The college making the choice to not pay into MPSERS is another point of contention for Montgomery-Richards. “It feels wrong to me. An institution of higher learning should want to support their educators,” she said.

What is NMC’s responsibility to not only educators here on campus, but in the state as a whole? “We need to find ways and for educators that can help them plan, eventually, to retire. Most adjuncts, not only at NMC but in other colleges, are paid considerably less than their full time faculty counterparts and are therefore unable to save for retirement. The MPSERS fund provides a safety net for educators and the choice to decrease the amount of money the college pays into that has left some adjuncts feeling alienated.

Montgomery-Richards says that most adjuncts at NMC are never able to attain vesting potential for their pension plan. “This pension plan is a benefit very few adjuncts are getting anywhere close to. It requires a 10-year full-time equivalent for vesting,” he said. “So from that perspective, in most cases, the money that’s being paid into this pension fund is not being enjoyed by those faculty members.”

The average tenure for an adjunct at NMC is 6.7 years, according to Liebling.

Monetary discrepancies aside, adjuncts are feeling the keen sting of irony as they move through this transition. On a campus where focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are emphasized, critics say the

decision to partner with Edustaff feels antithetical.

Andrea Gerring, an adjunct who has been with the college for 13 years, has vocally opposed the partnership. “How does an educator contracted to work by Edustaff ‘belong’ at NMC?” she asked. Montgomery-Richards called the decision “divisive,” and Everest claimed that it “loosened ties”

between the college and adjuncts.

“The decision to partner with Edustaff is giving up responsibility and commitment to adjuncts,” said Everest. “It’s a big sacrifice for such a small amount of monetary gain, and the sacrifice is the relationship the college has with its adjunct staff, which make up the majority of educators at NMC.”

Liebling disagreed. “I’m not seeing it that way,” he said. “I haven’t seen belonging become an issue, and I’ve heard the concerns about it. I think it’s a non-issue and I hope that it stays that way. We’re trying to bring everybody together but we’re also trying to be practical about it.”

While the administration recognizes that “outsourcing” means different things in different places, NMC holds that this is not a typical outsourcing model. “That’s not how this is happening,” Liebling said. “We

don’t control the interactions between supervisors and employees at the college. We try to set a framework, and we do training on how to do those

things, but largely the adjuncts are managed by faculty. That’s how it happens in the academic areas of the college, so if there’s any distinction

or discrimination, (that’s) not our intent.” He stated that there was no difference in who is invited to attend college functions or training, and that the only discrepancy between current full-time faculty, adjuncts under

NMC contract employment, and adjuncts employed by Edustaff is pay. “To the extent that we can manage the experience centrally, there’s no

difference other than the pay issue. My approach to belonging is, well, I don’t think we’ve done anything that’s going to affect belonging.” NMC

holds that there will be no difference in employee experience, save for the 7% increase in pay if an adjunct decides to make the switch to Edustaff.

The decision to change employers is a personal financial choice, and ultimately, the college is encouraging all adjunct faculty to make an educated decision regarding what makes the most sense for them.

Everest formally advocated that “information workshops on rollovers be fair, balanced and in the interest of each employee who has questions,” and encouraged all adjuncts to “holistically examine the decision with

a certified financial planner, with financial, healthcare and retirement impacts in mind.”

NMC has held workshops, both in person and online, for those who have questions and have remained neutral in the process. “We’re not going to not talk about the benefits of joining Edustaff. We’re not going to shy away from the fact that there’s also a loss for the potential of that pension down the road,” Liebling

said. “It comes down to the key decision of the pay versus the pension.” As of August 31, 19 new adjuncts were hired on through Edustaff and 17 adjuncts under the old system have decided to switch to Edustaff employment.

Ninety-one adjuncts currently teaching classes elected to remain as NMC employees. Those numbers are locked in for the semester, but the college projects that as the news sinks in, more adjuncts will make the switch.

Edustaff declined to comment on the partnership.



## NMC Students Feel Shock and Disbelief of Moroccan Earthquake

**Pilar Judd**  
Staff Writer

On the night of Sept. 8 the mountainous region surrounding the city of Marrakesh, Morocco, was struck by a 6.8 magnitude earthquake, the largest the region has faced since 1960. During the following days the death toll reached nearly 3,000 while at least 5,500 people were injured. Villages along the Atlas Mountains previously lined with mud-brick homes now face heaps of debris and rubble.

Just three months before the disaster, 12 NMC Study Abroad students spent 10 days in Morocco with instructors Jim Bensley, Kristen Salathiel, and Marina Call. The humanities students participating in the Morocco Exchange stayed with urban and rural host families



while immersing themselves in the local culture and even taking part in a community service project in Ouazgita, a city of just over 6,000 just north of the earthquake's epicenter. The homes in Ouazgita managed to sustain less damage because of its location. Immediately following the earthquake, Morocco Exchange contacted the host families the NMC students stayed with, and received updates on their status. Fortunately, the homes in the village did not sustain significant damage, besides some structural fallout to the stone walls. While shocked by the event, they are returning to their normal lives as best they can.

Belle Marshall, a second year NMC nursing student who went on the trip, said she received a Snapchat video from one of the Moroccan students during the quake. Marshall said she "could feel the shock" and disbelief through the phone. At the moment the student seemed too shocked to process the event, Marshall said. He was almost laughing in disbelief. Marshall noticed while visiting how the culture taught her to take every moment as it came to her and also how to take a "deep breath and slow down". In the days following the earthquake, her friends demonstrated this by staying positive and staying present.

Marshall's biggest goal with the trip was to "go into everything with an open mind and open arms, really just fully embrace the good, the bad, the ugly." Whether it came to schedule changes or uncomfortable situations, she wanted to adapt to all the challenges this trip



handed to her. Looking back on the trip, she values how much she learned about Moroccan culture but also how much she learned about herself. NMC Study Abroad provided an itinerary for their stay that felt "like they had a month's worth of experiences." The program provided the students with one-on-one time with the Moroccan students to explore the area on their own time as well as guided educational opportunities with the instructors.

One early morning, humanities professor and director of international services, Jim Bensley, planned a hot air balloon ride for both the NMC students and the Moroccan students. It was very important to him that this adventure included all the students. Marshall recounts this morning as a very early surprise as she had to wake up at 3 AM with no previous warnings. Even with the early wake-up call, sharing that experience with her new friends was worth it.

NMC leads a number of study abroad trips every spring. This year's itinerary features Brazil, India, Costa Rica, and Ireland. Bensley has traveled specifically to Morocco three times, twice with students. While promising new adventures and thrilling experiences, his main goal with students is to help them make global connections. Overwhelmingly the most impactful part of the students' trip was staying with the host families and connecting with the Moroccan students. Marshall said that, if given the chance, she would definitely return to Morocco. She now even has friends who would host her again.

"That's what I want, I want those connections to be made, for students to understand cultures around the world, not be fearful of them. But find the similarities" said Bensley. When we take the time to connect to people different from ourselves, compassion grows. While Morocco faces the aftermath of the devastating earthquake for the foreseeable future, there are ways NMC students and our community can help. Morocco Exchange launched a GoFundMe campaign for the village of Ouazgita and within the past couple weeks they already surpassed their original goal of \$4,000 and now hope to donate approximately \$11,000 to the village. After this experience, Marshall and the other NMC students are incredibly grateful for the connections they have made to the larger community of Ouazgita and Marrakesh.



**To donate to Ouazgita's reconstruction efforts, scan the QR code to visit their GoFundMe page.**





## FEATURE

## Alumni Spotlight: Renee Sovis

**Deanna Luton**  
Staff Writer

“I still can’t imagine focusing on just one thing each day; the world is too big and exciting,” said NMC alum Renee Sovis. “In my career now, I might work

with an organization serving at-risk youth and a group saving rhinos from poaching in Botswana, all in one day. I’m very lucky.”

Sovis is among the *Traverse City Business News’ 40 Under 40* this year. With her varied interests, NMC allowed her to explore and discover her greatest passion. She quickly learned that she wanted a career that would allow her to use her talents but also provide a wide range of experiences.

As a program officer at Traverse City-based Neithercut Philanthropy Advisors, she manages the grant making operations of her clients. She works primarily with family foundations and major donors to assist with their charitable giving.

Her clients at Neithercut Philanthropy are primarily based in southwest Michigan. She joined the Rotary Charities Capacity Advisor Pool (CAP) to assist nonprofits with foundation relations since her professional life gives her little opportunity to work with local nonprofits. Joining CAP allowed her to share her experience and expertise closer to home.

Sovis “enjoys working with both grantmakers and grantseekers to understand their goals and make meaningful connections.” Before joining Neithercut Philanthropy, Sovis was a small business owner, an organization manager, and a nonprofit consultant. She was also co-owner of a bridal shop in Traverse City.

She chose NMC to reduce her student loan debt. As a daughter of a single mom with four kids, she weighed the options and chose to complete her first two years at NMC at her mom’s encouragement. After graduation, she was even more grateful for her time at NMC. “The instructors are truly world-class,” says Sovis. At NMC, some of her favorite

courses included Geology, English, Spanish, Anthropology, Eastern and Western Religion, and Art History.

Sovis said that Susan Odgers was one of her favorite professors. “I appreciate how Susan would use various teaching methods to engage us as students. From panel discussions to calling the authors of books we were reading, etc., learning was never boring with her. She was very direct and would tell it like it is, but also encouraged us to think critically. I appreciate that in a teacher and a person.”

Sovis fondly remembers playing disc golf with her friends between classes, the view of the trees from nearly any window on campus, and how close it was to walk from end to end.

“As you may expect from my varied interests, my career has taken some twists and turns. My time at NMC taught me to be open to opportunity, but persistent in the hard work. Every experience has something to teach you that can be carried forward. It has paid off to where I am now in a position I love, yet I didn’t even know my career existed at the time.”

She worked for the downtown restaurant Amical during her time at NMC, then later as a manager for Yen Yoga, before her transition to philanthropy full time. “Even though I do vastly different work, my heart (and body) is in basically the same place,” Sovis said.

She is involved locally with Big Brothers Big Sisters and actively volunteers for Norte and Great Lakes Humane Society. She has also been on the TEDxTraverse City Advisory Committee since 2011 and was its event coordinator for many years. On the state level, she is a board member and secretary of Emerging Leaders in Philanthropy, Michigan Chapter.

Sovis encourages current NMC students to “soak up as much of the experience as you can. It’s incredible how many of the small details stick out in my head after all this time.” She always wishes she was a bit more involved in campus life, but

says she enjoyed it. “The culture is welcoming and inclusive.”

For people interested in grant making, Sovis says to get involved with a local foundation. There are more opportunities to enter the field on the nonprofit side working in grant writing and development. “Grantmakers often look for people with experience in their field of interest when they hire.”



Sovis graduated from the General Studies program at NMC in 2011. Since then, she continued her studies with a Bachelor of Arts from Grand Valley State University as well as a Master of Science in Administration from Central Michigan University.

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# Recharge Your Body with Quality Sleep

**Deanna Luton**  
Staff Writer

Sleep recharges our brains and bodies. It allows us to regenerate and repair cells. When the brain doesn't get enough sleep, it becomes overworked. Without proper time to rejuvenate, a sleepy brain affects students' ability to concentrate on homework.

On average, according to Koleen Kerlin-Spigarelli, NMC's Director of Health Services, young adults should get 7-9 hours of quality sleep every night. The quality and quantity of sleep can impact learning and memory, cognitive and physical performance as well as mood and emotional stability.

"Sleep is also essential for health maintenance and prevention of disease," Spigarelli said. "Consistent quality sleep helps strengthen the body's immune system and ability to heal and fight off illness."

Poor sleep affects the brain's ability to properly function. Spigarelli explained, "This can result in impaired cognitive function and performance, impaired short term memory, poor attention span and decreased reaction time and judgment." Our brain controls not just physical health, but mental health. "Not getting enough sleep can impact your mental health and your ability to cope with stress."

Spigarelli also recommended, "Unplug your gadgets to help improve sleep. There are hormones and chemicals in the body that help determine when you sleep and when you're awake." Hormones and chemicals use natural light to promote wakefulness and sleep. "When the sun rises the body produces cortisol to make you feel alert. When the sun goes down the body produces melatonin which promotes sleepiness... Blue light emitted through cell phones, computers, laptops, and televisions can interfere with the body's natural sleep-wake cycle".

When you face daytime drowsiness, naps can sometimes benefit individuals in certain situations. "The best nap length for adults is about 20-30 minutes. This allows you to get a light sleep to boost energy without getting into deep sleep." If you wake up from deep sleep, you may wake up feeling groggy and worsen your sleepiness.

Spigarelli says a 90-minute nap will allow you to get through all sleep cycles without waking up during deep sleep. "For most people, the best time to nap is before 3 pm." If you set an alarm for 20 minutes, it will help you avoid waking up during deep sleep.

Caffeine can also provide a quick energy boost when you feel tired after a poor night of sleep. Long-term use throughout the day, however, can actually interfere with your sleep quality and contribute to sleep problems. "High amounts of caffeine can also cause jitteriness, headaches, and increased nervousness or anxiety. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends a daily caffeine intake of no more than 400 mg." Spigarelli recommends if you do need to use caffeine, it's best to stop use at least eight hours before bedtime. Instead of caffeine in the morning, Spigarelli recommends natural light and exercise to force your brain awake.

If you are struggling with sleep or daytime drowsiness, it's best to talk to your primary health care provider. A physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner can evaluate your sleep habits to determine if you have a sleep-related health issue. Sometimes it is necessary to be referred to a sleep specialist.

Renee Cunningham, director of nursing at Kalkaska Memorial Health Center, says it takes time to change or develop sleep habits. It's important to establish a routine bedtime to promote restful sleep. "The best sleep involves disconnecting from the world prior to going to sleep." Cunningham recommends sleeping in a darker room with a cooler temperature.

Lack of sleep can lead to many problems, according to Cunningham, "such as cardiac issues, stroke, depression, and a higher rate of accidents. Also weight gain, mood, disorders, and more." A weakened immune system results in increased susceptibility to illness.

Cunningham says it's best to avoid hypnotics, a psychoactive sleep inducing drug, commonly known as "sleeping pills" and used to induce sleep and treat insomnia. Exhaust all natural remedies before asking your doctor to prescribe hypnotics.

Natural remedies are ideal for patients who want treatment without drug interactions or side effects, says Charlene Gamaldo, medical director of Johns Hopkins Center for Sleep at Howard County General Hospital. In *Natural Sleep Aids: Home Remedies to Help You Sleep*, Gamaldo describes alternatives to sleep aid prescriptions. Natural sleep remedies include drinking warm milk, chamomile tea, or tart cherry juice.

## Sleep Hygiene Tips

- Try to stay on a regular schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- Sleep in a dark, quiet room.
- Avoid substances that disrupt sleep such as caffeine, alcohol and nicotine, especially in the afternoon and evening.
- Get regular physical activity, however, try to avoid exercising before bedtime.
- Reduce stress through exercise, meditation or reading. Etc.
- Do something to help you relax before bedtime such as read, meditate, or take a warm bath.
- Limit time on the phone, computer, tablet or television during the day.
- Turn off screens 1-2 hours before bedtime.
- Don't eat a large meal before you go to sleep.

### PAID ADVERTISEMENT

## Middleton shifts between GVSU, NMC to complete bachelor's degree

**Michele Coffill**  
Grand Valley State University

Reagan Middleton has found what she called "cruise control" in terms

of juggling schedules and responsibilities as both a full-time student and full-time employee.

There was some trial and error to get to this point, however, said Middleton.

The Maple City resident is now two semesters away from graduating with a bachelor's degree in allied health sciences from Grand Valley State University. While nearing the finish line, Middleton said her starting line proved difficult.

"My first year in college was 2020, right in the middle of the pandemic," she said. "I also missed a lot of the end of high school."

It was difficult to make friends and meet new people because of the health restrictions at her first college, she said. Middleton played collegiate softball and said she was grateful for the camaraderie of her teammates.

"My second year, I didn't play softball anymore and I was pretty unhappy," she said. "I remembered the University Center in Traverse City and did some research and found Grand Valley had an allied health sciences program, so I transferred.

"It was the best option for me. Grand Valley has been great."

Thanks to the partnership between GVSU and Northwestern Michigan College, Middleton takes classes at both institutions. "It has been easy for me to find

classes to take at either institution and have the NMC courses count toward my GVSU degree," she said.

One of Middleton's Grand Valley courses had her and other students researching the area's water issues through



Reagan Middleton

a week of firsthand experiences on the Boardman River, Suttons Bay and at Traverse City's wastewater treatment plant.

The "Wicked Problems in Sustainability" class was taught by Kate Fairman, affiliate faculty of integrative studies. Middleton said advisor Jackie Abeyta

recommended the class to her, saying it "would give a different perspective" to her usual load of health courses.

"It was really a unique experience. Throughout that week, there were lots of moments when you realized issues with water affect everyone," she said. "We were kayaking and learning about river dams and the impact they have on residents and wildlife. We scooped up amoebas from the bottom of the river to study. Water and its link to overall health became clearer to me."

The immersive week studying water issues concluded

with group presentations before community leaders. Middleton said her group researched septic tank failures and learned that Michigan is the only state without a statewide septic code.

"There is not a statewide policy. That was interesting to me, in fact, the whole week was really interesting," she said.

Finding a career path within the health care field clicked for Middleton when she interviewed a Munson Hospital employee for a class project. During the interview, the hospital floor manager detailed her job responsibilities and Middleton said was intrigued and found some correlation to her own work as guest relations manager for the Leelanau Pines Campground in Cedar.

"My experience at Grand Valley has been great. It's helping me reach my goals and become the best person I can be," Middleton said.

### Your pathway to the future starts in Traverse City

Grand Valley State University's Traverse City Regional Center serves students in the region by providing first-rate educational experiences. Whether you are an adult student returning to school, a transfer student seeking a bachelor's degree, or a graduate student, the Traverse City center has the programming and personalized support you need to get you to where you want to be. For more information [gvsu.edu/traverse](http://gvsu.edu/traverse) or (231) 995-1785.