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NMC Looks to Replace Moodle

Julia Belden
Staff Writer

Moodle's reign may be coming to an end.

This fall, NMC's Education Technology Department hopes to begin pilot testing a new Learning Management System (LMS). There are two contenders for Moodle's replacement: D2L's Brightspace and Instructure's Canvas. Both are in wide use among U.S. colleges and universities.

On Jan. 31, representatives from D2L conducted a demonstration of Brightspace to NMC faculty, staff, and students. This presentation was part of a series of virtual and in-person opportunities for the NMC community to discuss and evaluate Brightspace and Canvas (a third potential vendor did not respond by NMC's deadline). Terri Gustafson, NMC's Director of Education Technology, and Ben Post, Education Technology Specialist, were on hand to offer support and answer questions.

NMC has used Moodle for more than 16 years, and while it has served us well, Gustafson and Post said it's time for a change. One of Moodle's disadvantages is its lack of functionality compared to other LMS platforms. In today's technology-driven academic environment, many students rely on their phones to check grades, access course materials, and complete assignments. Canvas and Brightspace both have user-friendly mobile apps. When Education Technology began investigating new vendors, Gustafson said they asked, "in the long run, how can we save faculty and students time?" Indeed, a streamlined mobile app increases flexibility and access: during the Brightspace demonstration, D2L Solutions Engineer Justin Mullen showed off Brightspace's mobile version on his phone, commenting that it's possible for a student to complete an entire degree using only the mobile app.

Accessibility—a critical feature in our technology-heavy world—is an important concern for institutes using LMS software. Both Brightspace and Canvas employ "accessibility checkers": with the click of a button, instructors can check their content for potential accessibility issues, such as color contrast, video captions (which can be auto-generated), and descriptive image text.

Such a feature helps improve the digital learning experience for students with disabilities.

On the more technical side of things, replacing Moodle will ease the pressure on the Education Technology Department. Moodle is an open-source software, meaning that its code is freely available to the public to modify. According to Gustafson and Post, this also means that NMC is responsible for storage, security, and troubleshooting. "We are really kind of on our own," Post said, noting that there isn't much support available for Moodle. The software's dwindling popularity has also made it more difficult to integrate third-party apps. Brightspace and Canvas both offer technical support—making problem-solving much easier for the Ed Tech team.

Although an LMS swap is bound to include some initial hurdles, faculty and staff seem supportive of the change, with many looking forward to "quality of life" improvements. "Since its inception, I've truly disliked inputting grades into the Moodle gradebook," said Astronomy instructor Dr. Jerry Dobek. After last summer's major Moodle upgrade, Dobek discovered, much to his annoyance, that he could no longer use his keyboard to input grades—only his mouse. "I'm an old-school person," he said (D2L's Mullen assured him that Brightspace allowed the use of keyboards for entering grades, easing Dobek's concerns about developing carpal tunnel syndrome).

Now that the vendor demonstrations are complete, Ed Tech will move on to the next phase: conducting Sandbox evaluations of Brightspace and Canvas. Interested faculty are encouraged to participate in these evaluations, which will continue through Mar. 14. In April, Ed Tech will present its final recommendation to NMC's Board of Trustees.

If all goes well, some courses will begin implementing the new LMS for the Fall 2024 semester. Gustafson says that the transition will take some time as everyone becomes accustomed to the new system. The full switch should be completed by the Fall 2025 semester.

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Winter Poses Extra Hurdles For People Living In The Elements

Deanna Lutton
Staff Writer

As nighttime temperatures drop into the 20s, unhoused Traverse City residents huddle under blankets in makeshift tents this winter. From under the pines in the Grand Traverse Commons to beneath bridges and bushes, there is a not-so-secret dark side to the scenic beauty of Traverse City. Cost of living has amplified the national housing crisis on a local scale. Homelessness is a timely topic here in Northern Michigan as winter poses extra hurdles for those living in the elements.

The gap between the rich and the poor is steep. In a 10-minute drive across downtown Traverse City, the contrast is stark. You are transported from a land of cookie-cutter condos and new developments to crowded homeless encampments. Busy streets congested with commuter traffic petitioned by people with hand-written pleas in cardboard.

Blizzard conditions in January brought our area's local emergency overnight shelters beyond their capacity. Ill-prepared for a sudden freeze, people experiencing homelessness in Traverse City scrambled for plans to stay warm. A campfire can't cut the below-zero windchill on a cold night in Northern Michigan. In fear of loss of life, local hotels offered discounted rates and free rooms donated for people in need.

"I became homeless after my dad died when I was 19," said Kori Wickham, who experienced homelessness during her time as a student at Northwestern Michigan College (NMC).

"I dropped out of college and lost relationships. I became pretty overweight from depression and not eating healthy. I was sad to see so many others experiencing the same thing as me.

"I felt like the 'new girl' at the shelter," Wickham reflected.

"Many my age were couch surfing and not staying at the shelter much. Many people I was homeless with were homeless many years before me and still remain homeless. I see them on the streets when I'm driving".

Wickham was part of a "demonstration project" program at East Bay Flats—on Munson Avenue, just half a mile from NMC's campus—piloted by the Northern Michigan Community Action Agency (NMCAA) in collaboration with Goodwill Industries and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The program for 18-to-24-year-olds, aimed to combat homelessness among young people, helped keep Wickham, along with other youth, off the streets. Our region is one of 10 other areas across the country who received this funding, and we are the most rural location of the beneficiaries.

In November 2023, Goodwill purchased East Bay Flats with plans to turn the entire former hotel-converted apartment building into 100% permanent housing for individuals experiencing homelessness. According to the *Traverse Ticker*, Traverse City commissioners unanimously approved a payment-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILOT) agreement last fall.

Goodwill's goal is to dedicate 100 percent of the units to permanent supportive housing, which is defined to service individuals earning 60 percent or below average median income (AMI) who are homeless, have a disability, or are fleeing domestic violence.

A memo from Interim City Manager Nate Geizner stated that 25 units will serve the "chronically homeless" population, while 29 units will serve people who are experiencing transitional or temporary homelessness. "Ten units will be dedicated to at-risk youth experiencing homelessness," the *Ticker* reported. "Housing vouchers will be accepted and used to cover rent in many units."

Rental rates will be determined based on a percentage of each tenant's income. Therefore, if they do not have any income, they will not pay out of pocket, said Dan Buron, executive director and CEO of Goodwill Northern Michigan.

"I still experience trust issues and PTSD from the violence, alcoholism, and bad behavior," said Wickham, who remembers her time navigating homelessness as a young woman in Traverse City.



"Sleeping in parking lots, feeling insecure, and not being able to do much about it. I did have a job and a car." That helped Wickham persevere through the scary experience. "I'm grateful Traverse has resources to help people like me. Because other towns don't."

"One day I was sitting at the homeless shelter, eating dinner. Some recruits from the Goodwill Inn were specifically looking for homeless youth. And that was my miracle."

East Bay Flats was still under construction. But building crews worked hard to get the homeless youth under a roof and out of the elements. They finished the project two weeks ahead of schedule.

Wickham spent two and a half years under the wing of the NMCAA program which helped financially to secure rent incrementally as the youth adjusted. From paying nothing at the start, they increased from partial payments to eventually equal the "market rate."

Wickham spent some time at the Jubilee House for access to laundry and a computer. During her time unhoused, Wickham found the volunteers at the shelter brightened her day. They were helpful and kind.

She said they had a twinkle in their eyes. "It feels nice to be respected by them [the volunteers]." She recommends anyone struggling with housing instability or homelessness to reach out to Goodwill Inn, NMCAA, and the Tip of the Mitt Housing Agency.

"I am the only original youth homeless person still in the apartments and I'm proud of that because that means I am able to pay my rent and be stable. Some others were able to find alternative housing, I don't know what happened to the rest."

Youth homelessness is a complex social issue. Homelessness looks different for everyone. From living in cars or storage units to tent cities and abandoned buildings, in motels or on friends' couches, on the streets and in city parks or "under the pines," the day to day of someone experiencing housing insecurity is full of obstacles.

No matter what it looks like, everyone who experiences homelessness has something in common: a need for housing.

People experiencing homelessness have jobs, work hard, raise families, and face their own unique challenges on top of shared basic survival needs.

"The biggest issues people experiencing homelessness face as the temperatures drop are the same no matter what the temperature is: safety from attacks, access to basic needs, and the need for a place to live," said Ryan Hannon, Community Engagement Specialist at Goodwill of Northern Michigan "Getting out of the weather, whether it's cold and rainy or too hot and sunny is always an issue."

"People experiencing homelessness have a much shorter life expectancy than people who don't, sometimes up to 30 years less. Medical and mental health issues are exacerbated while homeless," emphasized Hannon. It's challenging to focus on preventative health measures when struggling to meet human civilization's hierarchy of basic needs.

It requires near-constant problem solving to survive in the elements, especially in our sometimes harsh and unforgiving winter climate. "People experiencing homelessness are always in survival mode and dealing with the temperatures, the weather, and the dangers associated with being out there in the streets always." Hannon added.

"We consider youth homelessness to include anyone who's under the age of 25 and unaccompanied from their parents."

In order to combat homelessness, we must also combat the negative stigma associated with it. It's important to remember humanity and be hopeful. Positive social action is key to eradicate the homelessness epidemic. "By understanding and spreading the word that people experiencing homelessness are mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. Nobody wants to be out there. Maybe the right approach to help hasn't been offered, or housing is not currently available." Hannon highlighted, underlining the importance of recognizing the humanity of people who are experiencing homelessness.

As of December 2023, the Northwest Michigan Coalition to End Homelessness has tracked 274 people actively experiencing homelessness in our region. Programs and organizations like Habitat for Humanity, Safe Harbor of Grand Traverse, the Goodwill Inn, Pete's Place, Jubilee House, and Northwest Michigan Supportive Housing provide support to people experiencing homelessness in our community. They are always looking for resources in the form of donations and volunteers.

Habitat for Humanity of Grand Traverse serves the people of Kalkaska, Leelanau, and Grand Traverse Counties.

Safe Harbor is an emergency shelter that is open until April 30 from 6 pm to 8 am.

The Goodwill Inn is a year-round emergency shelter with 120 beds that includes 11 suites for families. They provide safe, supportive shelter that includes food and other basic needs.

Pete's Place, part of Child & Family Services of Northwest Michigan, is a safe space where teens receive shelter, food, someone to talk to, access to community resources, and support from a team of caring professionals. When it's unsafe to be at home or a struggle to find shelter as a runaway or couch surfer, call them.

Jubilee House, an outreach missionary of Grace Episcopal Church, provides assistance with basic needs like laundry, showers, hygiene items, and community.

The best way to end homelessness is to create permanent housing solutions for unhoused people. Some ways to contribute to the solution involve signing up to volunteer locally, donate, or support national or multi-state organizations.



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of Northwestern Michigan

NMC's New Master Plan Advances Rapidly

Tadd Kaiser
Staff Writer

Imagine you are an aspiring Northwestern Michigan College (NMC) student walking across campus 10 years from now. Enrollment numbers have rebounded after bottoming out during the COVID-19 pandemic. A new dormitory has been built by East Hall, consuming an adjacent parking lot. New apartments have been erected to accommodate the skyrocketing demand for affordable, on-campus housing. Imagine, the expansion of NMC's academic programs has gobbled up space, and available parking is absent. Campus is crowded, as University Center courses have migrated into unused classrooms on the main campus. The NMC University Center next to the Boardman Lake has been bulldozed to make way for more lakeside condominiums, as the absence of renters to share the space created an unsustainable asset for the college. Finally, academic programs on main campus are so constrained by a lack of room to grow that promising NMC programs are significantly limited in their resources and offerings. This future attracts developers and real-estate opportunists, but it poses difficult, strategic choices for NMC.

Less than a year ago, NMC began developing a new Facilities Master Plan for its five campuses. The college hosted a pair of community workshops in December and January. Both events allowed members of the community, including instructors, administrators, students, staff, alumni, and the general public, to consider the proposals being discussed for the master plan and offer feedback.

The first workshop was hosted at NMC's Hagerty Center by Brandon List, manager of landscape architecture and planning at TowerPinkster, the architectural and engineering firm that would complete renovations and new construction on campus as determined under the new Master Plan.

NMC president Nick Nissley began the workshop by expressing that NMC follows a principle of transparent and open communication with members of its community and the public. The college has always wanted to be a "good neighbor" to the city because, ultimately, it is this community of people that the college serves, he said.

Nissley described the challenges and issues the college currently faces, as they relate to the condition of campus facilities, the state, and the economy—above all, a trend of declining enrollment. NMC is currently experiencing record-low enrollment following the economic shutdowns during the pandemic. This stands in stark contrast to 2010, when NMC experienced its peak enrollment cycle after the 2008-2009 economic recession boosted interest in studying at community colleges.

Nissley said that NMC may be experiencing the highest demand for on-campus housing the college has ever seen. No studies were conducted by the planning firm to validate this, he conceded, yet post-pandemic inflation has increased the cost of living everywhere. There is currently a waitlist for NMC student housing. The school's housing analysis appears to be a reasonable expectation based on the growth of academic programs on all of its campuses, particularly on the Aero Park campus and at the Great Lakes Water Studies Institute. Future plans to grow these unique programs may revert the negative enrollment trend, including the creation of a new Freshwater Research Innovation Center, which has already attracted \$20 million in investments.

Nissley cited the relationship between declining enrollment and funding for NMC programs. The fewer students that attend, the less money the college collects in tuition. In the last 10 years, there has been an 11% decrease in the school's appropriation funding from the State of Michigan. Events like the International Affairs Forum are a potential boon for boosting the college's revenue, Nissley said, yet, the school faces the major challenge of bringing in

more revenue to truly offset these downturns.

As for the University Center's location, several partners, including Grand Valley State, Central Michigan, and Ferris State, have shown interest in migrating their classes and administrative offices onto NMC's main campus. List of TowerPinkster advocated for developing a centralized "academic core" on main campus, adding that his firm could help NMC create new buildings and structures. This move would create a more vibrant main campus. Their study found that many classrooms on the main campus are unused.

The consequence of such a move would be the school treating the University Center campus as an untenable real estate asset—one that would likely be liquidated to avoid financial loss. Nissley said the building is an expensive and underutilized asset, and the only option would be to find other entities to lease space or to sell the property.

TowerPinkster favored creating a close-knit "academic core" on the main campus. That could include reconstructing the Osterlin Building to create a new Student Services Center with "one-stop shopping for students". This would likely involve migrating enrollment and financial aid services out of the Tanis building.

TowerPinkster also encouraged NMC to expand its residential facilities in the northeastern part of the campus to create an adjacent "residential core", abutting the bulk of its academic facilities. East Hall, according to List, is nearing the end of its usable life, and could potentially be torn down. The firm advised construction on the site of the current Dogwood Lot. TowerPinkster also proposed building more apartment buildings on Campus Drive, near the existing campus apartments complex.

The future of the 55-acre parcel of land north of campus across from Eastern Ave was also discussed. This land is owned by NMC but has not been developed. While its importance and use is still undecided, one possibility would be for a new parking lot. One participant at the session took offense, out of environmental concern for wildlife and forestation. Less than 22 acres within the parcel comprise an "opportunity zone" for its development, owing to the sloping and wet landscape. These areas constrain the potential for using the entire area for infrastructural development. The parcel could also be used as a material holding zone for the college, or perhaps for a viticulture program.

For more information, visit www.nmc.edu/facilities-master-plan.



Artificial Intelligence and The Future of Technology

Emma Marion & Eli Stallman
Staff Writers

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is everywhere, and it can be really confusing. There is practically an endless amount of questions to ask spanning all disciplines of knowledge. From philosophy and ethics, to law and economics, it can be really difficult to keep up with new discoveries surrounding AI.

Some professors at NMC have started incorporating AI policies into their assignment descriptions and syllabi. Anecdotally, a surprising amount of professors are allowing the use of AI to aid in the completion of essays. While plagiarizing AI remains off the table, using it as a tool to brainstorm and organize ideas is being embraced.

While AI can be an incredible tool for aiding in the creation of original work, unfortunately it can also be used to generate new information. Currently, there does not exist a truly self-aware general purpose AI that is sentient. Instead, humanity currently has Large Languages Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT. These LLMs are trained on a curated selection of literature (sometimes without the original author's permission, especially in the case of images), rather than having access to the internet. At the end of the day, any LLM is not aware of what it is saying. Rather, they attempt to generate the next best word. Essentially, humanity's current AI is a really sophisticated version of the auto-complete feature one might find on their phone. This is commonly considered "narrow AI," an AI that excels at a single category of task, but is not representative of general human intelligence.

This leads to an issue where AI is extremely good at quickly generating misleading or nonsensical information that almost passes as being human-made. This has escalated the amount of spam and botting present on all social media platforms. Historically, creating spam online would require the use of less fluid scripts. Now, AI is being used to bypass CAPTCHAs and other forms of human authentication, and generate unique spam that can evade being caught. Furthermore, prompting AI to get many variations of a specific message begins to blur the lines of human interactions online. It has become more difficult than ever to discern if a conversation is happening between two bots, or two humans. This essentially allows bad actors to fabricate entire conversations and dialogues online, and steer the narrative of public discourse. X (formerly known as Twitter), and YouTube have both been suffering an influx of AI spam.

As stated earlier, AI is currently nothing more than sophisticated auto-complete. Many tech giants are betting on a future where AI will be sentient and have true general intelligence. If people are already struggling to tell the human from the non-human, this problem will only get worse as time goes on.

Recently, Apple released the long awaited Vision Pro, their first Virtual Reality (VR) headset with a strong emphasis on Augmented Reality (AR). Rather than fully immersing the user in a virtual environment, the selling point of the Vision Pro is to be able to place virtual screens around the user's real environment. This is accomplished using cameras on the outside of the headset that allow the user to see their surroundings as if they did not have a headset on (commonly referred to as passthrough). Although this feature has been around for years, the Vision Pro is notable for doing it better than any other headset on the market.

In the Vision Pro, narrow AI is already helping with technologies such as eye-tracking in the same way an iPhone uses AI for spell-check. However, as passthrough technologies continue to get better and the real world becomes more blurred with the digital one, more generally intelligent AI might begin to integrate itself more into day-to-day life.

Furthermore, the natural evolution of VR headsets suggests that they will be made smaller and more accessible. Currently, users have to strap glorified ski-goggles to their face in order to augment their surroundings. However, it is not too difficult to dream of a world where VR headsets will eventually become glasses, and those glasses will eventually become contacts, and those contacts might eventually become implants. Whether consumers will buy into this idea of the future is yet to be seen. Regardless, it seems to be where technology is trending.

This idea reveals a whole new school of ethical difficulties, one specifically being the discussion of the fusion of AI and Brain Computer Interfaces (BCIs). BCI essentially allow a being to control devices using brain signals. BCIs have been experimented with since the early '70s, beginning with monkeys and eventually on humans in the '90s. They have been used to great success within the medical industry for years, their main goal being to improve the general quality of life of disabled patients. They have been working to restore motor function of individuals with neuromuscular diseases, brain injuries, and other debilitating disabilities.

Now that AI has been introduced to the medical field, what does the potential fusion of AI and Brain Computer Interfacing look like? Turns out that in some cases, Artificial intelligence has already been utilized within the field of Brain Computer Interfacing. As of right now, it is being used to process signals more efficiently which has allowed for further enhancements in the realms of visual, auditory, and motor assistance. It has also opened up the possibility to use brain signals to control a cursor on a screen, all of which is classified as narrow AI.

However, as technology continues to progress, interacting with the internet and generally intelligent AI through our minds becomes a possibility. It is difficult to imagine a world where humans who permanently fuse sentient AI with their brains could be considered human. If AI can hand us all of the knowledge we could possibly imagine right within our brains, we could consequently have no incentive to learn or experience life in the way we do now. We could essentially become super humans or living robots.

Imagine a world where one could ask AI a complex math problem using thought alone, and instantly get an answer directly in their head. Although the technology to accomplish this might still be decades away, it is important to start to consider the ethical and moral questions surrounding the issue now. The combination of AI, BCI, and VR technologies reveals an exciting, yet potentially dystopian future for humanity.

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*Romance! -***- It's Okay to Slow Down****Eli Stallman**
Staff Writer

In honor of Valentine's day, discussion and celebration of love is in the air. Humans are completely enthralled by the idea of love, which can be clearly seen as it is fused within the very foundation of our society through pop culture, media and politics. And rightfully so, as love in all its forms are arguably the most fundamental aspect of the human experience. Humans are innately driven to seek out deep emotional connection with other beings, isolation is absolutely not in our nature. From an evolutionary psychology perspective, seeking out a romantic or sexual partner is one of the most crucial factors to survival, as reproduction is in the nature of all living things and is essentially what keeps the world going round.

With human connection being such a crucial aspect of our very existence, it is also important to take a step back and view our current societal perspective on romance in a critical light. As our view on romantic love ever-lastingly continues to become fused to our host of societal "norms," we lose the ability to take a step back and evaluate our perspective. This begs the question, is our societal view of romance really all that healthy?

Love, whether it's romantic, platonic, or sexual, is an endlessly fluid and opaque concept. When asked to describe the feeling, people tend to be lost for words. This feeling is so powerful and irrational that picking it apart or even simply describing it can be a nearly impossible feat. Considering this, it is perfectly reasonable that we have tried to simplify it for the sake of our own sanity. We have divided love into three comprehensive categories, being romantic, platonic, and sexual. However, deep human connection typically transcends these surface level labels. It is crucial to acknowledge the fact that the unspoken rules we have assigned to each one of these categories could potentially be harmful or even destructive to our relationships.

On this foundation of "love types" we have established, and the fact that deep romantic and sexual love is so crucial to our survival, we hold this unspoken societal value that romantic love is the absolute pinnacle of a happy and fulfilling life.

Shockingly, we are exposed to the idea of prioritizing romance as early as elementary school. "Any crushes from school?" or, "Got a girlfriend yet?" family members tease every holiday. Teens especially are subject to feeling as if they need to cultivate a romantic relationship in order to view themselves as

worthy or happy. "Popularity" in school is more often than not rooted in social status, which according to our societal view is rooted in romance. And as we all know, popularity is top priority at that age. They are prone to going to great (and sometimes unhealthy) lengths to obtain this romance, and when their efforts are not successful, self esteem plummets. Susan Odgers, a social sciences professor at NMC says, "Theorists define adolescence through age 25. People need time to develop, have friends, explore and live. Our variables are different than our great-grandparents...where procreation and life expectancy were key. Look at our divorce rate. Little kids shouldn't be constantly asked about their boyfriends or girlfriends."

This ideology we set children up with can and will carry on throughout adulthood, and has potential to result in controlling or dependent behaviors. And the cycle continues. Considering this, it's also beneficial to recognize that it is important to experiment with romance early on in life, in a low-stakes environment such as middle or high school. Understanding boundaries, rejection, affection, sex, and emotional needs are only some of the many benefits that come with experimenting. Nevertheless, viewing romance under a less intense light may prove to be beneficial for teens and adults alike, and allow for cultivation of healthier relationships in a less tumultuous environment.

Additionally, since romance is up on this pedestal, it is perceived as healthy for your romantic partner to be top priority as opposed to platonic relationships. It is common to see individuals expecting one romantic partner to meet all emotional needs, when realistically different needs are met across friendships along with romantic ones. You may have a friend that provides exactly the emotional support and comfort you desire, while your partner isn't able to do so as effectively. This is normal, and it's important to recognize that it's healthy to reach out to different people in your life for different types of support.

This Valentine's day season, take time to appreciate the immense value of platonic relationships just as much as romantic. "Ask yourselves....how did I behave during the height of the pandemic...with regard to my relationship with myself, others, isolation, etc. What did you learn about yourself? Work you need to do for you, by you," Odgers says. Take time to treat yourself, and appreciate the value in being single! There is no rush to obtain a romantic relationship, and no feelings of shame should come with being single at this time of year.

Romantic Meal for the Unlucky Romantic

Jacob Pszczolkowski
Editor in Chief

Even with all this talk of our cultural conceptions about love and sex being potentially harmful and limiting the human experience to rigidly defined versions of the undefinable that is love in its entirety, being alone on Valentine's Day kinda sucks. It can get overwhelming, remembering that millions of people are out there celebrating their love for one another, and the only thing stopping you from having the same thing is being significantly more interesting, attractive, wealthy, funny, and intelligent. This meal is one that I find equal parts comforting and fancy, balanced for turning a long night alone into a short one. It could serve four, but let's be real, you're eating the whole thing alone in an armchair watching whatever movie takes your mind off the world around you. Most of these measurements are approximate anyway, and you best be tasting as you cook and adjusting ingredients and flavors as you see fit.

BACHELOR'S SHRIMP PASTA

A creamy, spicy seafood pasta dish perfect for filling your stomach in lieu of your heart.

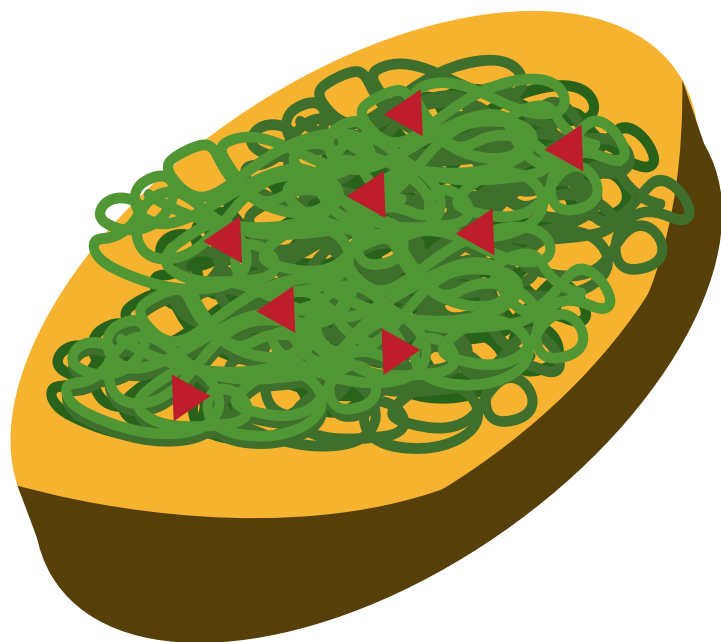
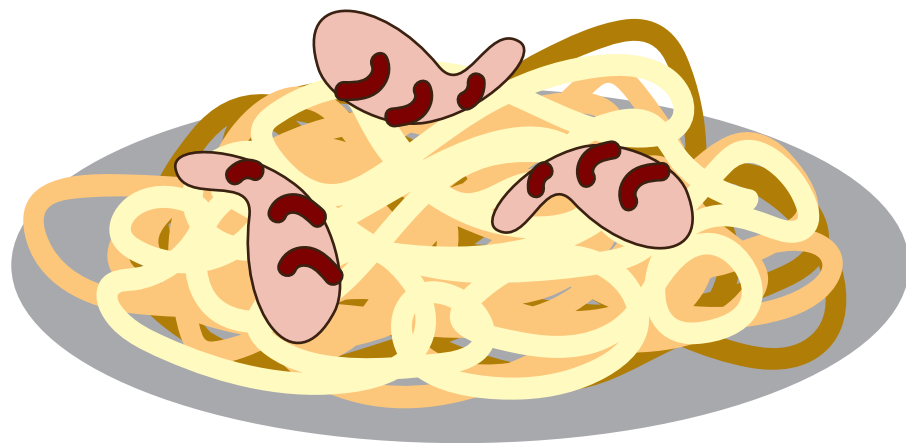
1 LARGE EGG, room temperature
6 TABLESPOONS BUTTER, room temperature
½ CUP PARMESAN CHEESE, grated
4 CLOVES GARLIC, finely minced
½ CUP HEAVY CREAM
½ TEASPOON CHILI OIL
¾ POUND LARGE SHRIMP, peeled and deveined
12 OZ LINGUINE
1 SMALL SHALLOT
SALT AND PEPPER, to taste

A & E

In a large bowl, whisk together the egg, butter, parmesan, 3 cloves of garlic, and salt and pepper until the mixture is an even, creamy consistency. Set the bowl aside for now.

Boil your pasta until it is a minute or two away from al dente and drain.

In a large skillet, heat a thin layer of olive oil to a sizzle. Add the shrimp in an even layer, and when one side has been nicely seared, flip to the other side and add the remaining garlic, shallot, and chili oil to the skillet. Once both sides have browned and the inner meat is pink, set the shrimp to the side and deglaze the pan with the heavy cream. Once all the browned material has been scraped from the pan, add the pasta, egg mixture, and shrimp to the pan, stirring to combine evenly and finish cooking the pasta, about two minutes.



CROSTINI SIDEPIECE

A compliment for soft, rich, creamy pasta, essentially an inverse of your own solo existence.

1 BAGUETTE, cut into thin slices
 2 TABLESPOONS OLIVE OIL
 1 BUNCH ITALIAN PARSLEY, finely chopped
 2 CLOVES GARLIC, finely minced
 1 LEMON
 SALT AND PEPPER, to taste
 RED PEPPER FLAKES, to taste
 6 TABLESPOONS BUTTER

In a small bowl, melt down your butter with 1 clove of garlic and a pinch of salt. Stir to combine.

On a wire toaster rack, lay out as many slices of baguette as you want, and apply a wash of garlic butter to each slice. Toast until they get as toasty as you prefer.

In a small bowl, combine olive oil, parsley, 1 clove of garlic, the juice of one lemon, and salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes to taste.

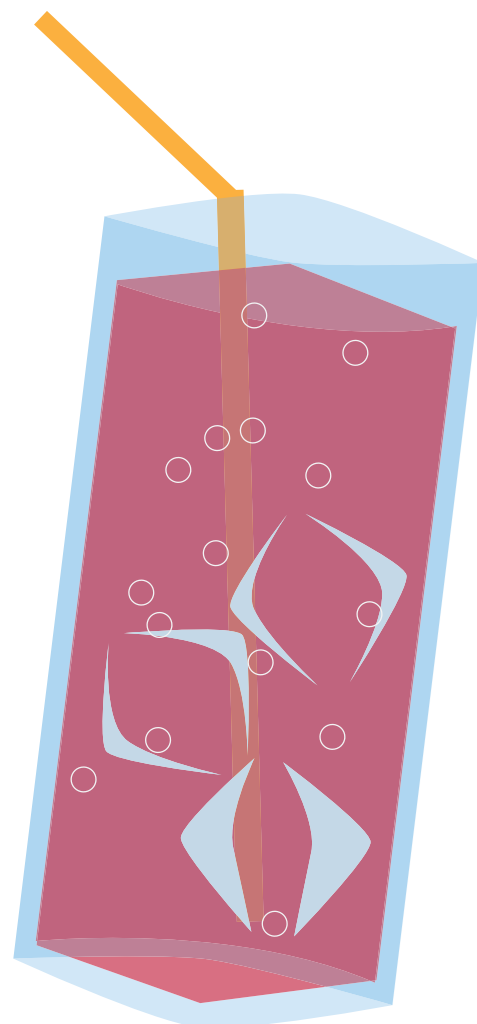
Once the toast is finished, spread the parsley mixture onto the slices or use as a dip on the side.

LONELY ISLAND ICED TEA

Sure to make you fall asleep quick and forget this night even happened. Not for the kids – they have some time before they have to be thinking about disappointing their parents and never measuring up to their little brother yet.

½ OZ GIN
 ½ OZ VODKA
 ½ OZ LIGHT RUM
 ½ OZ TEQUILA BLANCO
 ½ OZ TRIPLE SEC
 1 OZ LEMON JUICE
 ¼ OZ GRENADINE
 RUBY RED SQUIRT, to taste

Just mix it all in whatever glass you like with ice. Just add the pop last. It really doesn't matter.



Twin Flames Survivor, Cult Expert to Visit Traverse City's National Writers Series

Megan Thoreson
Staff Writer

Dr. Janja Lalich, an authority on cults and author of *Take Back Your Life: Recovering from Cults and Abusive Relationships*,

and Keely Griffin, a survivor from the Twin Flames Universe "love cult", will share their experiences as part of the National Writers Series on Thursday, Feb. 22, at 7 pm at the City Opera House in Traverse City. Guest host Jacob Wheeler recently covered the Suttons Bay-based cult in the *Glen Arbor Sun*.

While Twin Flames Universe takes center stage at the City Opera House, the local cult claims it will host a "Spiritual Life Summit" in-person gathering June 13-16 with early bird tickets already sold out. The event will allegedly host workshops to manifest your "twin flame," and will also be the location of a twin flame wedding on the fourth day. No location has been announced at this time. Several regional venues have reportedly turned down Twin Flames' request to host the summit.

Despite the overwhelming amount of bad press Twin Flames Universe has received following a scathing Netflix documentary in mid-November 2023, the cult is still alive and thriving with a reported 14,000 members. Visited by a reporter at their house near Suttons Bay, Twin Flames leaders Jeff and Shaleia Ayan declined to comment on the current state of their organization, on the summit, or on the National Writers Series event.

"In my opinion, this group is harmful and potentially dangerous for many reasons," Lalich said about Twin Flames. "Twin Flames is a high control group that exploits its followers monetarily, spiritually, and sexually. From pressuring followers to stalk their 'twin flame' to transitioning their gender, Jeff and Shaleia exercise an immense amount of control over the victims' pocketbooks, minds, and actions."

Lalich expounded on the use of the word cult. "There is a continuum that a cult falls within, from relatively benign to highly dangerous. But similar patterns appear across all cults. While Twin Flames is no Jonestown, all cults employ the same cookie-cutter strategies and tactics. They tend to separate their followers from their friends and families, isolate them, and through methods of indoctrination get them to buy into the philosophy or the 'answer to all their problems' so that they will carry out the will of the cult leader without question (e.g., raise money, recruit, run the cult's business). In essence, cults have nothing to do with religion; yet, many claim to be a religion so that they can hide behind the First Amendment in order to protect themselves against investigation."

Lalich hopes to use her and Griffin's appearance at the National Writers Series to educate the public about the danger of cults.

"Keely and I have slightly different motives for attending and speaking at the National Writers Series later this month," she wrote in a statement. "My hope and role for the last 30-plus years has been to educate people on the subject because everyone could fall victim to a cult. Some want to say: 'Those people do all that of their own volition and choice'; but free will is out the window when we're talking about cults."

"Cult leaders are very good at making you think it's your own idea. Knowing how cults operate empowers individuals to recognize the behavior of cults and their leaders, the red flags, which may prevent a future follower from falling victim. Keely is being incredibly brave and will shed light on things that weren't covered in the documentaries. It's her story and her insider knowledge that she'll be sharing."

NMC Philosophy and Communications instructor Sarah Montgomery-Richards urged caution when labeling organizations such as Twin Flames as cults.

"It's really important to ask questions. When we see labels like 'cult' we need to ask who is doing the labeling and why they are doing it," said Montgomery-Richards. "That word bothers me as an academic and I am careful when I use it, I try to avoid inflammatory language and labels, I would call Twin Flames a new religious movement. As such, religious tolerance and equality should be considered. If it is a religion, they should have the same rights and privileges as any other religion."

"While I personally don't agree with or believe that all the things that they are doing are necessarily positive, there are things that they are doing that very well established religions engage in. Scientology offers community and a worldview that connects aggregates to the divine, but they also sell products and services. Is it a religion or not? Its followers say it is. Defining that has been the discussion of religious academics for years and likely will not be resolved any time soon. To adopt a broad view of it suddenly invites many things to become a religion, while narrowing it could exclude others."

"Twin Flames also isn't the first to sell matchmaking services to the public. But I try to maintain an objective viewpoint as an academic. As a comparative religionist I try to bracket my subjective feelings about a movement to look at the facts. And that is what I encourage all of my students to do, consider your research and ask questions before joining any movement, for that matter. Knowledge is power."



Above: Keely Griffin. Below: Dr. Janja Lalich.



Photo Credit/National Writers Series

A Tale of Two Adaptations

Percy Jackson and the Next Underwhelming Adaptation

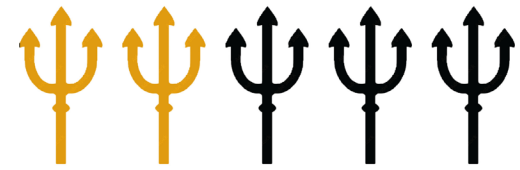
Like many my age, Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series of novels filled my adolescent mind with stories of fantastic heroism and mythical creatures. As I aged out of the target demographic, I found the novels holding up far better than *Harry Potter*, a series comparable to *Jackson* in tone, popularity, and audience. Where *Potter* had *Jackson* beat, however, was film adaptations. All seven *Potter* novels have been adapted to feature-length films of commendable quality, while *Jackson* fans received two bafflingly poor films which showed no respect at all for the original story. When it was announced that *Jackson* would see a television adaptation on Disney+, and that Riordan himself would be intimately involved with the production, fans couldn't help but get their hopes up. While the new series certainly eclipses the disastrous films, it still falls pitifully short of the beloved original novel.

Airing from Dec. 20 to Jan. 30, the first season covers the events of the first book in the series, *The Lightning Thief*. In the story, 12-year-old Percy Jackson discovers the truth of his world — that the Greek gods and monsters of legend are real, and he himself is the demigod son of Poseidon, god of the seas. He stands accused of stealing the Master Bolt belonging to Zeus, God of skies and storms, and must embark on a quest to prove his innocence and prevent his divine family from going to war against one another. While the story of the show follows the basic beats of the novel, the minor differences and errors bring the show down to a far inferior version of the story.

Firstly, the inconsistent and often extremely short episode length results in lots of important character moments and exposition that fleshed out the book being left on the cutting room floor, occasionally replaced by new scenes which lack the depth of the original. Sometimes, entire chapters are radically changed, usually into less interesting versions which remove the characters agency in deducing their situations or solving the problems within by having the setups and answers given to them. Each episode could have seriously benefited from an extra 10 to 20 minutes of runtime.

Second, the acting in the show falls flat. I can't be too hard, as the show's protagonists are children depicted by child actors, but their line delivery and moments of heightened emotion tend to come across as phony, stilted, and amateurish. Again, it is difficult to fault child actors for not being professionals, but their performance frequently takes me out of the show.

Overall, the first season is fairly underwhelming compared to the novel it attempts to adapt. It would seem that despite being a fantastic novel author, Riordan has much to learn when it comes to screenwriting. Feel free to watch it if you were a fan of the books, but don't go in expecting the depth or quality of the novels.



Another Delicious Masterpiece from Trigger



Delicious in Dungeon by Ryoko Kui is easily one of the best pieces of literature I consumed in 2023. Serialized in Japanese magazine *Harta* from Feb. 2014 to Sep. 2023, *Dungeon* follows a group of adventurers delving into a dungeon to rescue a fallen comrade from the bowels of a dragon, a fight they should have won were they not hungry at the time. Without the money to purchase food and supplies on the surface, the party learns to cook and eat the monsters of the dungeon in a heartwarming adventure-comedy. While the premise is deceptively simple and early chapters are fairly lighthearted, over the course of nearly 100 chapters the cast of adventurers and world they inhabit are explored with such depth, complexity, and care that I can confidently say Kui has created one of the decade's best pieces of media.

Dungeon would go on to receive an animated adaptation on Netflix, beginning Jan 4 and expected to run for 24 episodes, covering about half of the story. At the time of writing, six episodes have been released, and I have nothing but praise for this adaptation.

Production of the series was handed off to studio Trigger, famous for their hyper-violent, hyper-competent productions like 2007's *Gurren Lagann*, 2015's *Kill la Kill*, and 2022's *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners*. Trigger carries a distinctive energy in their animation, with vibrant colors and beautifully expressive movement tracking wonderfully onto the distinct, carefully constructed designs of Kui's world and characters. Visually, the series is an absolute treat.

Where anime has traditionally fallen short has been English dubs. When Japanese dialogue is translated to English voices, it easily and often feels jarring, awkward, and wrong, so the general consensus among anime fans is that series should be viewed in original Japanese audio with English subtitles. *Dungeon*, however, has a pretty good English cast compared to other anime. The two standout roles are SungWon Cho and Damien Haas as Senshi, the experienced dungeon dweller and monster chef, and Laios, de facto party leader and monster enthusiast, respectively. No notes on these two outstanding performances. However, the other two protagonists leave a bit to be desired in English. Casey Mongillo provides a serviceable, even good, voice for Chilchuck, the jaded halfling lockpick, but their previous work as the iconic Shinji Ikari in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* overshadows their role in *Dungeon*. Emily Rudd plays Marcille, the elf mage who puts up the most resistance to Laios' fascination with monsters and their consumption, and is unfortunately the weakest vocal link. She portrays Marcille's humorous tantrums and overreactions to monster food well, but outside of that, her dialogue is easily the most stilted and awkward of the group. For Marcille alone I recommend the Japanese over English audio, but by no means does *Dungeon* have a bad dub.

So far, Trigger has faithfully brought my favorite manga of 2023 to life in vivid color and motion, and I cannot recommend this delightful, deep, delicious experience enough.

NMC News in Brief**NMC Magazine Wins Awards**

NMC's creative arts magazine is racking up awards for the 2023-2024 school year. The magazine's spring 2024 edition, *Futurology*, was recently awarded a designation of "Excellent" and "Superior" from the Recognizing Excellence in Art and Literary Magazines program (National Council of Teachers of English), as well as a design award from American Advertising Awards Northern Michigan. Students also collected individual awards from the Community College Humanities Association: NMC alumnus and former NMC Magazine editor Lizzie Brown won 2nd place in the creative nonfiction category for her 2023 piece, "Florescent Lights of Society's Dressing Room." Julia Belden won 1st place in the script category for her one-act play "Family Systems Therapy." Copies of the magazine's most recent issue, *LOL, JK*, are available around campus (to obtain past issues, email nmcmag@mail.nmc.edu).

Board of Trustees Looking to Fill Vacancy

NMC is working to fill a spot on the Board of Trustees. Rachel Johnson, Vice Chair of the Board, resigned in January for personal reasons. Six candidates are being considered for the role: Jamie Gallagher of Williamsburg, Pamela Horne of Interlochen, and Mark Keely, Bill Marsh, Merek Roman, and Jordan Ascione-Broad, all of Traverse City. The Board of Trustees will interview the applicants at 3pm on Feb. 19th, after which they will appoint the final candidate. The new trustee will serve out the remainder of the year. The seat will be up for general election this November.

Open Gym Mondays and Thursdays from 7-10pm

The Rajkovich Physical Education Building is now hosting open gym hours on Mondays and Thursdays from 7-10pm. There is space and a variety of equipment available for basketball, volleyball, pickleball, cornhole, and more! All NMC students, faculty, and staff are welcome. Questions? Contact Marcus Bennett at mbennett@nmc.edu, C.J. Schneider at cschneider@nmc.edu or Isaac Dedenbach at idedebanch@nmc.edu.

