

**Board of Trustees, February 2021 Meeting**  
**Faculty Council Report**  
**Submitted by: Dr. David Ullman, Faculty Council President**

Dear Board of Trustees,

I hope that all of you are well and that the varied and protracted challenges of the past 12 months have brought you silver linings. For those of you connecting with us from afar, the North Country and Big Lake have reached their wintery prime. Piercing blue skies and reflective snow cover cast a blinding light into the frigid air. Typically, the extreme cold provides an opportunity to gather and connect, but this has been a challenging year in testing our ability to adapt to a variety of changing conditions.

In my short time at Northland, I have gotten to know and work with some of you, but for those of you I have not met, please call me Dave (I greatly prefer my first name over the unfortunate 'dullman' username of my Northland email address). As of January, I have stepped into the role of Faculty Council president following the end of Dr. Stroud's term. Let me be the first to thank Angela for the many ways in which she served us all through her advocacy, encouragement, and attention to the concerns and goals of the Northland community.

As we approach a full calendar year of the pandemic and its myriad of challenges, I would like to reflect on the one thing that is clear: this college has without a doubt been up to the test. We have been nimble in adapting to new health protocols and digital platforms, innovative in developing new educational opportunities, and committed to developing solutions to keep our community of learning healthy and happy. Last week I was meeting with a group of geoscience colleagues from other small colleges around the country, and they were amazed to know that we are still able to meet in-person, offering students the opportunity to learn among their peers, while also continuing to safely participate in other co-curricular activities such as athletics and clubs/organizations.

Such success in maintaining an in-person campus existence has been built on a foundation of collaboration from the very start. We all learned quickly that the new, unfamiliar, and uncertain challenges of COVID-19 were best addressed through collaboration across campus constituencies. For example, the shift in the academic calendar from a typical 15-week semester to the compressed 2-session format (in order to limit exposure through reduced class mixing) required campus-wide coordination between the faculty, the Academic Affairs office, Residential Life, and our students. Similarly, faculty have exhibited enormous flexibility in redesigning their courses and accommodating students who can only attend virtually. That we have seen no evidence of transmission of the virus in the classroom is a testament to an on-campus community of faculty, staff, and students who are committed to each other's safety, as affirmed in the [Northland Pledge](#).

This spirit of collaboration led to numerous instances of Northland shining in unique ways: Dr. Nick Robertson, Dr. Tom Fitz, and Dr. Jon Martin built outdoor class spaces to alleviate COVID-19 space constraints and provide students with "well-ventilated" classrooms. These spaces have provided an invigorating setting to teach and to learn encouraging us all to engage with the college's environmentally-focused mission in new ways. Similarly, with students returning to campus early for quarantine prior to the current winter semester, Dr. Evan Coulson, staff, and student leaders worked tirelessly to rapidly expand the SOEI Outdoor Pursuits program, with 44 distinct activities that served 121 students in those 2 weeks. Not only did these opportunities provide an outlet for safe, social, and enriching connections to the outdoors in January, but the program continues to grow with new offerings each week that provide some normalcy and balance to our students. In addition, the Outdoor Pursuits program is helping student facilitators build skills in leadership, organization, and group management that directly extend from the Outdoor Education academic program.

Behind the scenes of the classroom, Faculty have been riding an accelerated learning curve of digital platforms and hybrid teaching design in adapting to changing demands of various learning environments. Those with more experience using such tools and alternative pedagogical approaches immediately stepped up to serve the collective faculty. Dr. Danielle Sneyd, first-year Assistant Professor of Psychology, created numerous video tutorials helping all of us orient to a new digital communication platform of Microsoft Teams. Dr. Paula Anich also helped initiate a robust online discussion group on MS Teams that has allowed faculty to share every new digital trick and troubleshoot common technical issues with equipment and software. This resource has created a collaborative space for faculty to find quick solutions when we cannot be face-to-face. By incorporating these new digital communication tools into our classes, we are improving our own technical prowess, while modeling innovative practices for students as they acquire hands-on transferable skills that will provide invaluable preparation for the post-COVID workplace.

Even the research endeavors of our faculty have taken on a collaborative streak, as the [latest installment from the Blacklight Biologists](#) now draws upon the unique expertise of six Northland faculty across three different academic programs. Such collaborative energy continues to grow in novel directions as our next campus research seminar finds Drs. Sarah Johnson and Erica Hannickel sharing the virtual stage in a presentation that merges science with the humanities on the topic of orchids.

However bright these moments of the past year, they have not been without struggle. Many faculty tell me that they are exhausted. The increased demands of hybrid teaching cannot be separated from the challenges of pandemic life, with young children home from school, other family members needing additional care, and a sense of separation from our communities of support. Similarly, the current events of the past year, including the loss of life, political tension, racial injustice, economic uncertainty, and civil unrest all have compounded a sense of unease. These events strike contrary to important core principles of collaboration and kindness that are shared throughout the Northland faculty. Many of the faculty were particularly troubled by the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. Recently, 36 faculty voted to formally voice concern over this attack while pledging to continue our roles as educators who teach the importance of thinking critically across all disciplines (see attached statement).

While this year has and will continue to be challenging, many of us sense the words “post-COVID” will begin to shape our plans in the coming years. Preparations for the coming fall are already in the works as we plan for various contingencies surrounding testing, vaccinations, and the possible continued need for physical distancing. In addition, the faculty are particularly excited to engage with Board in the conversations surrounding Shared Governance this spring. Successful collaboration in pandemic planning has taught us that we make better decisions and are more successful at overcoming adversity when we allow more voices into conversation. To this end, we appreciate the wealth of unique perspectives, expertise, and responsibility that the Board brings to the college.

Compared with the nearly 130 years of Northland’s existence, this pandemic has been more than a passing inconvenience and a test of patience. To the contrary, it has provided us with the opportunity to demonstrate flexibility and creativity in our structures, to innovate in the classroom, and to recognize the value of this community in supporting the education of our students. The faculty looks forward to further collaboration with the Board, campus administration, staff, and students in realizing the potential of Northland College.

Sincerely,



Dr. David J. Ullman  
Assistant Professor of Geoscience  
Faculty Council President

## **Northland College Faculty Statement Concerning Sediton and Insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021**

The grievous attack on the United States Capitol on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, 2021, has left many Americans searching for a way to heal and reform national politics, and rededicate to our country's commitment to ensuring equality for all. Northland College was founded on the principle of justice, a search for truth, and a commitment to civic responsibility and engagement. As part of an institution of higher learning, the faculty remain unequivocal in the repudiation of untruths. We are also resolute in our confidence that a more just society is possible. We accept and reaffirm our civic responsibility to engage in the most pressing matters of the day. As members of an institution dedicated to the search for truth and justice, we feel compelled to denounce the actions of those involved in the attack of the U.S. Capitol and to use our collective voices to challenge the lies that served to provoke, and later attempt to excuse, the actions of those involved in the attack.

In addition to the attack on the foundations of our democratic republic, the inadequate preparation for possible violence and the delayed, tepid response exposes the systemic racism that continues to lie beneath the surface of our society. White nationalism, conspiracy theories, and racist organizations played an important role in the impetus and direction of the violent insurrection. As President Solibakke and Administrative Council articulated in an earlier public statement, *"The key purpose of education is to shine light in the dark...the work of justice requires that we continue to confront white supremacy and all of its intersecting forms of oppression."*

We the faculty of Northland College stand in solidarity with all those who are voicing their anguish, revulsion, and deep frustrations with the January 6 attack on the capital that was encouraged by lies, white supremacist ideology, and white nationalism. Therefore, we are devoted to continue teaching how to practice discernment and accountability in civic engagement; to demonstrating the connections between the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and public policy; and to challenging falsehoods by communicating the truth, especially when those falsehoods are used to promote actions that attempt to undermine the foundations of our democracy. Furthermore, we dedicate ourselves to understanding and pursuing progressive social change that leads us toward a more sustainable, just, and prosperous future for all.