

DS: Interviewer

NK: Subject

DS: Oral interview November 10, 2009. Subject is Nancy Kenok, Nancy tell me a little bit about yourself

NK: I am a senior at NMU, I'm from Homewood Plotsmore which is a suburb of Chicago, I graduated from high school in 2006. I am an international studies major and a Latin American studies minor.

DS: So what made you decide, I mean Chicago is a long way from here what made you decide to come to northern of all places.

NK: Well, initially, I had honestly never heard of Northern, and not until I went to a college fair and talked to one of the college recruiter and it seemed like a really interesting place. I saw pictures and immediately fell in love with the way it looked and then when I went to visit Northern and just fell in love with the place. I was initially a Nursing Major and NMU has a great nursing Program so I just decided to stick with northern after I visited here as well.

DS: All right so you graduated in 2006 then?

NK: I graduated High School in 2006, yes

DS: So what year did you change your major?

Interview with Nancy Kenok

NK: I changed it my sophomore year of college.

DS: And **Model UN, Study Abroad, and a Senior's Life at NMU**

NK: Actually no honestly, I had initially chosen the nursing program to make sure that I would have a career after I graduated, and it really wasn't what I was generally interested in. So when I switched to something that I was really interested in, I actually excelled in my academics. I've been really successful since I made the switch.

DS: Do you think you'll end up having to spend more time in school as a result of having done that?

NK: I got pretty lucky and I'll graduate in four years. I think that its because a lot of international studies classes are liberal studies, I took a lot of liberal studies classes that wound up double counting, but I do plan on getting my masters and hopefully my PhD one day. You can really do much in the field of international studies without at least a masters, so in that regard I will be in school for longer.

DS: And how did you find coming to Northern socially, because you lived in the dorms, right?

NK: uh huh

DS: So how did you find that, the whole social aspect of it? Making friends at others..

NK: Umm, I made a lot of good friends in the dorms, met my interviewer in the dorms, and you I don't know I made a lot of friends it helped really feel more connected to northern and made me feel like I was actually a part of campus and the community so I would definitely recommend living in the dorms

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DS: All right so you graduated in 2006 then?

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DS: So what year did you change your major

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DS: And did you find difficulty in changing your course of study at all?

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DS: And you've done some extracurricular activities right?

NK: Yep. The biggest thing that I'm involved in on campus is the model United Nations. I'm the president this year and it's pretty awesome.

DS: What kind of things do you do for that?

NK: The model UN we debate all kinds of international issues and we go to a conference, this year the conference was in Chicago, the American Model United Nations Conference. This year we represented the countries of Canada and Guatemala. And we just met with about a hundred and eighty schools and debated specific international issues, and basically we simulate the United Nations. It's really fun.

DS: Do you find it hard to balance the responsibilities of being president of an organization like that, and friends, and schoolwork all at once.

NK: It is a really really difficult task especially you know, having to work and having to go to class and trying to balance your social life, I mean I would say my grades aren't as good as they could be, but I'm trying. But you know, model UN has been really fulfilling and it's worth it. It's definitely helped me in the field of international affairs as well. It's definitely a great addition to my major, and I'm learning things that are pretty applicable to the real world. I wouldn't get it elsewhere in any organization, and also it relates to international studies pretty well, so.

DS: Yea that seems like it works pretty well with your major.

NK: Yep, pretty well

DS: And where is your work that you mentioned do you work at NMU to?

NK: I work at the Dean of Students office, on campus. And I've actually worked at the call center, I've actually worked at both call centers on campus. The call center where students call alumni and request donations, I worked there for .. less than a month it didn't work out too well, wasn't a fan to be quite honest. And over this past summer, I worked for the other call center, answering calls for Northern, for the financial aid office and the student services center and basically answer questions about students financial aid. I also worked as a summer orientation staff assistant, so I got to orienteer all of the incoming freshman, from 2008-2009, so there's a good amount of jobs that I've started at Northern, but my current job right now is at the dean of students office.

NK: So it sounds like you're pretty involved with the school as an institution, probably even more so than the average student in between organizations, working

DS: So what other programs have you been involved in that have enhanced your learning experience at NMU

NK: Last year I got to study abroad in Guadalajara, Mexico. I studied abroad for about six months, I stayed with a host family and studying abroad is required for all international studies majors, but I would have gone even if it wasn't a requirement because it is such a rewarding experience for the international studies majors. If you want to do anything in the international realm you are going to have to have living abroad experience and luckily you can do that here at Northern. And, I was able to get two scholarships

that covered my program costs, and I really owe it to all my organizations that I've been involved in on campus, otherwise I wouldn't have been able to afford it. But, the financial aid office, if you're studying abroad at NMU you have to go through the Financial Aid office, and Kenny Engels approves your budget and they do a really good job, everyone is really helpful and I would highly suggest it. And if you do study abroad make sure you do look at your financial aid options and your scholarship options because there is plenty out there.

DS: Did you have any problems, first going there and trying to assimilate in that culture, and then when you were through with that, the re-entry into our culture and trying to assimilate with that?

NK: Well, as far as culture shock, it was a little hard when I was there, I missed some of my friends and family, but once I got assimilated and adjusted to the Mexican way of life it pretty much became just like any other Mexican. I went to classes, hung out with my family and friends, I got re-adjusted pretty well better than a lot of other students. The only thing that made Mexico a little hard was that I was there for the swine flu outbreak. We were basically supposed to leave our program early, but a lot of students didn't want to. A lot of us weren't even ready. I wasn't ready to leave, and in fact I just kept postponing my return, and eventually I just postponed it so much that they just told me I could stay until the deadline. And that was nice, but it was hard because a lot of my friends had left, back to the states. That was hard, because there were barely any people left in any of my classes, but it definitely gave me a chance to speak a lot more Spanish and really really truly become essentially like a normal Mexican. But coming back to the US, I would say that it was actually almost harder for me coming back than arriving in Mexico. Getting adjusted to life in the states, which is a lot slower I feel like was difficult. And it was warm and sunny there and cold in Marquette. Marquette pretty slow paced too, especially being born and raised in the Chicago area. Life here is good to get used to though, especially when I can still see my family and friends. And studying abroad has really provided me with some interesting insight and perspectives on the world.

DS: So in between this studying abroad, international studies major, and model UN you will be pretty much, maybe not set but at least have a good head start on things – I mean what are your plans for graduation. Are you going to be able to use all of this experience and knowledge that you gained in college?

NK: yea definitely. Yea there are some issues with the international studies program here. And I think that the school has realize that and confronted these issues, especially with the roadmap to 2016, I think the school is really working on internationalizing and we were, or northern was awarded a grant to build up our international studies program. That's really good news for northern. I don't think that its really the place that defines it, its yourself and how much you put into your own experience. I think I pushed myself to learn a lot more about international affairs and I'm sure that it is going to be applicable once I graduate. Especially, through student organizations like model UN you learn things that other students who don't go that extra mile don't get anywhere. I am definitely planning on going to Thailand this summer. I have a program to go to a refugee camp on the Burmese-Thai border, and I am going to be teaching English to refugees. That will be more experience that I will gain, but I think that these experience s will build on the ones that I had through northern. I am also looking at going into the peace corps, and Americorps for at least a few years, and hopefully the experiences that I gained at northern will give me an edge so that I can be competitive in getting those jobs.

DS: This is.. what are you doing now? You are going to Thailand this summer? What program is this through?

NK: Yep. I am going through the U.S. campaign for Burma. They helped me find a camp in the area, around the Thai border

DS: And your parents are immigrants so you speak Thai fluently

NK: Yea, I speak Thai fluently, and I'm working on the Spanish. So both of those have really helped find careers. Hopefully after the Peace Corps and Americorps I'll be able to go into a masters program. I was going to lean towards more of an international psychology or anthropology field, maybe directed towards immigrant populations or refugee populations in the states or abroad, with adjusting to society modern ways of life.

DS: So if you were talking to a high school senior right now from your area who's trying to look at colleges and stuff, would you recommend them to throw caution to the winds and going to the school in the middle of nowhere in Northern Michigan?

NK: Yea I would definitely recommend Northern. I know some High school age kids right now who were interested in coming to Northern, and I was really excited for them to come here. Especially because its like not the place really, its just you really need to broaden your horizons. Its broadened my perspective on life, especially coming from Chicago. It's a big city filled with diverse people and diverse opinions and its culturally very diverse down there. Still coming here has really helped to broaden my horizons. One big thing was the fact that growing up I kind of just thought that everybody was really really liberal. There were things that I didn't realize were strange for some people. I grew up in the south suburbs of Chicago and it was really normal for me to go to restaurants that had bulletproof windows surrounding the cashier, and here that would never happen and I guess I'm not saying that where I grew up was really bad but it was really different, and no matter where your school is you will basically gain experience out of it and it will broaden your horizons I guess. Northern has definitely done that for me, made me see that the world is more diverse than I grew up believing, even if it isn't that diverse. I lived in a diverse place that everything was really diverse, and that everything was cultured and that there were different opinions all over, but here made me realize that not everywhere was like that and the world was less liberal than I thought it was. But that's been nice because its opened my eyes. And I'm not calling it monotonous and homogenous a lot of people here are more socially conservative than where I grew up. But at the same time every one is very very nice and smiling, I guess the Yooper ways. There is a slower lifestyle than where I grew up. It was actually very nice going from Mexico to northern Michigan rather than to Chicago because I feel like I would have had a harder time adjusting. But yea getting off track here, I would definitely recommend northern to someone looking at schools, not just for socially but academically. everyone is really nice here at northern. Also, the surrounding area is absolutely beautiful. I never had a chance where I'm from to go hiking and kayaking to random islands and things like that, but here you can do that and not a lot of people have that opportunity. After you get homework and classes taken care of you can go cliff jumping in the fall, and not many students at other colleges can say that. Theres just so much to do around here I hate it when people say that its boring around here because they haven't really been around if they say that!

DS: It sounds like you've been pretty wrapped up in the school since you've been here and Marquette and the UP is part of northern and vice versa, it is also separate from it. Have you interacted much with the locals and people from the area or has it been mostly college students?

NK: Well to be honest because I have been so wrapped up in the school that most of the people I met have been from other places. But a lot of people have pride in the fact that they were born and raised in the area and going to school in the area. I feel like northern and Marquette do a really good job of bringing the local community closer to the college. We do things to give better relations than other places, where the students are despised by the locals. The line between them is more blurred here than in other places. because we all interact and are all part of the same community. There are things like make a difference day, where we go to local homes and rake leaves and things, and northern does a really good job coordinating things like that

DS: So in conclusion, maybe going back to that last question about talking to someone who is going to college, just kind of wrap up your whole thing.

NK: Where to start? Northern is amazing. I was able to find myself here, and I've had so many great memories here. I'm a little sad to be leaving in May, I'll be graduating. Northern has really been a part of my journey. Not only did I excel academically, but I grew on a social and personal level. I don't think any place can make you do that, it's about how much you get involved with your school, more than your academics I guess. So it really has to do with the place, it has to do with you. It is up to you to assimilate yourself into your community. It also has a diverse amount of things to do and if you don't feel like going to class you can go out and experience nature, Going on hikes, kayaking, cliff jumping. There are festivals, skiing, movies, hockey and football games. Academically, it is all about how much you put into it. We have great professors here who encourage you to get out and get involved. I came to northern thinking I was going to be a nurse and I left thinking I was going into international relations. I found myself here, and it's been great.

DS: well that should do it thank you for your time Nancy