Peh H. Ng

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Peh H. Ng was “just a grad student” at Purdue when the University of Minnesota-Morris urgently needed to replace a faculty member in the math department. Wanting a full-time teaching experience, Ng took the temporary faculty position and completed her PhD while at Morris. When there was no tenure-track position available, she was off to a university in Georgia for a position. Two years later, there was an opening at UM-Morris and former colleagues emailed Ng urging her to apply. She did. And it was back to west central Minnesota where Ng has been since 1995.

In Ng’s view, she was a part of University governance from day one. Every faculty at UMM is a part of the campus assembly, the campus-wide governance body. And, Ng adds, “UM-Morris is a very egalitarian campus, and so technically, I became involved in shared governance when I started as a regular faculty.”

Ng says she was surprised - and at first, annoyed - at how long it can take for the University to implement a policy. She’s been on three committees, has served on the Faculty Senate since 2003, and is currently on the Senate Committee for Faculty Affairs. She now understands the complexities behind the process. “I grew up, and learned about being patient, governance-style!”

Ng admits that when she was a brand new faculty, she was very naïve. “I had some weird notion that college administrators made lousy professors,” she says. A few years years later, a chief administrator retired and there was some shuffling of campus leadership. Several faculty, including Ng, were asked to take on administrative duties as part of their appointments. Ng asked her then boss, “Why do you take all these award-winning and excellent teachers from the classroom and make them administrators?” The response was, “Would you rather I choose lousy teachers to lead academic affairs?” That, Ng says, changed her perspective - and stereotype - of administrators.

In turn, Ng says she has learned much by being on system-wide committees and considers herself lucky to be able to serve. “I am a better faculty and a more mindful academic administrator for having served on system-wide shared governance,” she says. Ng says when a solution presents itself or is arrived at, she asks if that solution solves more problems than it creates.
Ng’s academic background in applied mathematics has served her well in governance. She loves problem-solving and coming up with creative ways to address issues that arise. “Facilitating students’ learning is one of my passions,” she says. Having the opportunity to teach mathematics to undergraduates, and mentor and collaborate with students to conduct research over the past twenty years at UMM are among what she considers her most notable achievements.

An essential skill, Ng notes, and one that she continues to hone, is learning how to balance the “Big Picture” and the detailed ramifications of policies. She said, “Finding a healthy balance between being consultative and moving forward is also another key to how I usually approach governance.”

*Peh H. Ng is currently the chair of the Division of Science and Mathematics at UM-Morris, and is also a University of Minnesota Distinguished Teaching Professor of Mathematics at UM-Morris.*