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Three OU students recognized for volunteer efforts

By **Rebecca Wyatt Thomas**, OU Web Writer

Michigan Campus Compact (MCC) honored 159 students from 23 campuses with awards for their commitment to service learning and civic engagement. Among them were three Oakland University students. OU Senior Jameelah Muhammad received the Commitment to Service Award and Amanda Rymiszewski and Mathew Sawicki received the Heart and Soul Award. The students were recognized during the Outstanding Student Service Awards on April 5 in Lansing, Mich.

The Commitment of Service Award is given to one student per member campus in the state of Michigan and it recognizes the students' dedication to community service. Muhammad, who received the award for OU, has been involved in a number of community service projects including volunteering for The Greening of Detroit, a tree planting and city beautification effort, working with the Environmental Coalition on campus to promote a recycling program and green lifestyles on campus.

"What I like about volunteering is that it is my time when I can completely immerse myself in an activity that I know is helping someone else or contributing to making the world a better place. It helps keep me centered, because as a college student it is sometimes really difficult to focus on other things besides classes and work. Volunteering really allows me to do the things I am extremely passionate about and I am unable to express in class or on the job," Muhammad said.

Muhammad began volunteering in middle school and continued in high school. While at OU, Muhammad volunteered her time on weekends and during breaks. This February, Muhammad participated in the Alternative Spring Break and went to New York where she worked in soup kitchens and food pantries and learned about hunger and homelessness.

"I've never traveled for spring break so this was very exciting and I don't think I would have wanted it any other way. Volunteering was an excellent way to spend my break," Muhammad said.

Muhammad said planting trees with the Greening of Detroit was one of her most memorable volunteering experiences, and one that she hopes makes a lasting contribution to the area.

"Hopefully I can come back years from now and look at how tall the tree has grown," Muhammad said. "I think what was so memorable about this experience is that I was able to find a group of OU students to come with me on the tree planting. I felt like I really helped open their minds to environmental issues, and gave them insight about volunteering activities that they may not have considered doing before."

Amanda Rymiszewski and Mathew Sawicki will receive the Heart and Soul Award. This award is given to students to recognize their time, effort and personal commitment through service.

Amanda Rymiszewski serves as the president of OU's Panhellenic Council, which oversees OU's Greek organizations, and she has worked with OUCARES. She also serves as the executive director of Up 'til Dawn.

"One of my most memorable volunteering experiences was fundraising with Up 'til Dawn. I was able to go to the hospital and meet some of the patients and their families. It was amazing to see how thankful they were for our work," Rymiszewski said.

Rymiszewski's volunteering experience began when she was eight years old. Her younger brother didn't want to go to Sunday School alone, so Rymiszewski volunteered to help out in his classroom.

"When I came to OU, I knew I wanted to be involved and active. The first thing I did was join Alpha Delta Pi. From there I was able to get to know people on campus and get involved in other activities," Rymiszewski said.

This year alone, Rymiszewski volunteered 80 hours.

Rymiszewski was nominated for the Compact award by Jean Ann Miller, director for the Center for Student Activities and Leadership Development. At first, Rymiszewski thought the notification was fake, but she soon learned it was real and was honored that she is being recognized for the volunteer work she does.

A marketing major, Rymiszewski hopes to work for a non-profit in the future and continue to serve others. In the immediate future, Rymiszewski plans to expose more student organizations to programming and volunteering opportunities that are available to OU students.

Mathew Sawicki began volunteering during his sophomore year after seeing a table in the Oakland Center for OU's Habitat for Humanity chapter. Sawicki volunteered for a number of Habitat for Humanity builds, including two out of state. In 2006, he traveled with a group of students to Slidell, La., to help with a Hurricane Katrina recovery build project as part of Habitat for Humanity's Collegiate Challenge. He also coordinated the OU Collegiate Challenge trip to a build site in Miami, Fla. in 2007. Sawicki has also participated in a number of Habitat for Humanity build projects in Oakland County, including the Youth United build in Pontiac.

"One of the biggest projects for me was the Youth United house. That was a home that was built and fund raised for extensively by students. OU's Habitat chapter partnered with local high schools and received funding from outside corporations such as Daimler Chrysler Financial. We started working on the house in November 2006 and worked many Saturdays and completed the house in April 2007," Sawicki said.

Sawicki also volunteered as a ticket-taker for the Super Bowl held in Detroit in 2006 and helped organize a group to write letters for the Up 'til Dawn letter writing campaign.

"I like making a difference. I feel like there's a lot of despair in the world and it doesn't matter where you go. Even 15 minutes from campus there are a lot of neighborhoods in need of revitalization," said Sawicki.

Sawicki said he has met so many people working on the different Habitat for Humanity builds, including a doctor who traveled to Louisiana with his son to build houses and make a difference. Sawicki was impressed with the man's desire to put his life on hold to help others.

Sawicki, a graduating human resource development senior, hopes to devote more of his life to helping people. He is considering a career in the United States Navy or possibly as a police officer.

"Volunteering is always going to be a part of me," Sawicki said. "No matter where I am, or what I'm doing, I'll always try to volunteer."



Jameelah Muhammad (far right) received the Commitment to Service Award for her volunteer efforts. (Photo courtesy of Jameelah Muhammad)

SUMMARY

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