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Honors College conducts research in Britain

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Students from HC 201, The Art of Slavery **Honors College** course, recently completed a one-week study-abroad trip to England to examine how black slavery in the West has been represented through 18th and 19th century art and artifacts. Faculty sponsors who accompanied the group of nine undergraduates were Jude Nixon, HC 201 instructor and director of The Honors College, and Natalie Cole, associate professor of English.

The group visited several museums in London and Liverpool, including the **National Maritime Museum** in Greenwich, London, which has the most extensive collection of arts and artifacts ever assembled pertaining to slavery. The collection numbers nearly 450 items and will commemorate the upcoming 200th anniversary of the abolition of slave trade in the British colonies in 2007.

"The purpose of the trip was to have each of the students isolate a particular art form and conduct as much research on it as possible," Nixon said. "For example, one student is writing a paper about quilts produced by slaves, another is focusing on equipment used to bind or restrain slaves. We also went to the Merseyside Maritime Museum in Liverpool. They have some important holdings because Liverpool was once a major port for slave traffic."

Thanks to an introductory letter provided by Beth Kramer, assistant professor at Kresge Library, the students were able to obtain a reader's card from the **British Library**, one of the world's major research libraries.

"The trip was valuable on many levels," Nixon said. "For the students who had never left the country, the trip itself broadened their experience. They learned that we are all part of a global community. Our museum visits exposed the students to research and how it's done. They needed to ask themselves how to obtain more information when visiting an exhibition, how to request books and journals at a research library."

Freshman finance major David DeCew narrowed his research interests down to the artistic depictions of slaves on maps of West Africa and the East Indies used by seamen. The holdings of the **Merseyside Maritime Museum** and British Library were invaluable to his research.

"The trip was a completely new experience for me. I've done some research in the past, but never carried it to such lengths," DeCew said. "The British Library experience was very interesting. To get the reader's card, you had to demonstrate serious interest in your subject. You were required to fill out an online questionnaire and sit down with one of their librarians for an interview. You have to show them that you were there for serious research, not just to browse."

The students also will visit several other museums and important sites regarding slavery this semester. In January, the class traveled to Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, to see "**Confederate Currency: The Color of Money**," an exhibit of depictions of slavery on southern currency. The class also will travel to Ferris State University in Big Rapids to visit the **Jim Crow Museum**. In Detroit, the class will visit the **Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit Institute of Arts, Second Baptist Church** and the "**Gateway to Freedom**" sculpture commemorating the Underground Railroad, located in Hart Plaza. Directly across the Detroit River in Windsor, Ontario, the class will see its companion sculpture, "**Tower of Freedom**."

"I hope our research trips whet the students' appetites for more," Nixon said. "They are the kind of experiences and exposure we want to give to all Oakland University students."

The university community will have an opportunity to hear selected papers developed from the students' research at an Honors College Colloquium Thursday, March 18, at noon in the Oakland Center Oakland Room. Food and refreshments will be available.

SUMMARY

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