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Graduating seniors receive top honors

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

During **commencement** exercises Saturday, May 1, three of Oakland University's top graduating seniors will be honored with the university's highest student honors. Rhonda Hanna (B.A. English and philosophy) and Brad Whitmer (B.A. biology) each will receive the Alfred G. Wilson and Matilda R. Wilson Award, and Gena Hintz (B.A. history) will receive the Human Relations Award.

The Wilson Awards are presented annually to an OU senior man and woman who have contributed as scholars, leaders and responsible citizens to the university community. They recognize students for outstanding academic achievement, commitment to improving campus life and interest in the social problems of the community and society in general. Whitmer and Hanna will be presented with a bronze plaque and \$1,000. Their names also will be added to a bronze plaque on campus.

The Human Relations Award is presented annually to a graduating senior who has contributed significantly to the improvement of intergroup relations on OU's campus. Hintz will receive a \$500 stipend.

Rhonda Hanna

The ink will hardly be dry on Hanna's diploma before she begins law school this June at the University of Michigan.

"I think OU has definitely made a difference for me, and receiving this honor means I've had an impact on OU as well, so it's been a two-way street," said Hanna, who is an **OU Board of Trustees** student liaison. "I've really enjoyed being involved in what's happening on campus. For me, one of the highlights from the past four years was being a member of the Oakland Center Expansion Committee. I think every student who wants to make a difference on our campus can do so because the administration is very open to our ideas and it's a very friendly campus environment."

Adding to her student leadership role, Hanna is co-president of the **Golden Key International Honour Society** and has served as a member of **OU Student Congress**, the Pre-Law Society and Sigma Tau Delta-English Honor Society. She also was a peer mentor and diversity ambassador with the **Center for Multicultural Initiatives**, a French tutor in the **Academic Skills Center** and a WOCO student chair. Hanna also was a 2002 Keeper of the Dream scholarship recipient.

"I'm very proud of Rhonda and all that she's accomplished," said Associate Professor of English Kathleen Pfeiffer, who taught Hanna in several classes. "She demonstrates genuine intellectual curiosity and is very sincere. She has a very nice way of creating dialogue with other students in the classroom and gets them all very interested in the material."

Brad Whitmer

Whitmer also will continue his studies after graduating by attending Michigan State's College of Osteopathic Medicine this fall.

"My education at Oakland has been great and the professors have been fantastic," Whitmer said. "I feel that I learned a lot and am very prepared for medical school. With my education, I feel I have an advantage over the other students who will be going to medical school.

"As far as receiving the Wilson Award, I am deeply honored. It's great to be recognized for my academic work and campus leadership, and it's a very special way to go out."

Whitmer is involved with **Golden Key International Honour Society** and serves as its executive vice president. He also has served as a biology teacher assistant; tutor of biology, organic chemistry and anatomy in the **Academic**

Skills Center; and demonstrated strong leadership skills as a member of the Pre-Medical Society and volunteer with Troy Beaumont's oncology hospice program, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Meadowbrook Nursing Center.

Many of the fond memories he's developed during his college career involve living in Oakland's residence halls, where he worked as a nightwatch supervisor for the past two years.

"Living in the residence halls has been great," Whitmer said. "The community and staff have just been wonderful. I've made a ton of friends and know everybody."

Gena Hintz

After graduation, Hintz plans to complete a student teaching internship at Chippewa Valley High School in Clinton Township. She also will do some volunteering for organizations such as Green Michigan.

"I'm extremely honored to receive this award," said Hintz, who works as a student assistant in OU's **Student Affairs Office**. "It's a unique honor, because it symbolizes a person who has reached out to many students in the university community to make OU a better place."

Hintz is president of Pi Sigma Alpha Political Science Honor Society and a member of the OU chapter of the **Golden Key International Honour Society**.

A turning point in her academic career came when she became a teaching assistant for Distinguished Professor of Political Science Shelly Appleton.

"Working with Professor Appleton was a jumping off point for me," said Hintz, who is currently pursuing secondary education certification. "Being a TA with him allowed me to work on some issues with regard to my teaching skills.

"I have tons of memories involving Oakland, but I'm most proud of two things. First, I was able to help organize a trip to Washington, D.C., with other OU students and was honored with the support I received from across campus, particularly the Political Science Department. Second, as a member of the **Future Alumni Network**, we were able to bring back the celebrations for (OU founder) Matilda Wilson's birthday to coincide with WOCOU (Week of Champions at Oakland University). I loved being involved with that program and think students need to be aware of how important Matilda Wilson is to Oakland."

Commencement for winter and spring 2004 semester graduates is Saturday, May 1. Ceremonies take place at Baldwin Pavilion on the Meadow Brook Music Festival Grounds at 9 a.m. for the School of Education and Human Services and School of Nursing; 1 p.m. for the College of Arts and Sciences, School of Health Sciences, and General Studies; and 5 p.m. for the School of Business Administration and School of Engineering and Computer Science. More information is available on the **Commencement** Web site.

SUMMARY

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