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## Honors College director receives 'First Citizen' honors

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

As director of Oakland University's **Honors College**, Jude Nixon oversees a high-quality, challenging educational environment that places a high value on cultivating a rich and diverse group of students and scholars. He also works to extend those values beyond OU's boundaries and instill them into his community.

In recognition of his civic involvement, Nixon recently was named "First Citizen of Birmingham" by the "Birmingham Eccentric" newspaper and the Birmingham Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce. The award is presented annually to a person who has demonstrated outstanding service in a voluntary capacity that benefits the community.

"Jude Nixon demonstrates so much interest in the community in so many ways," said Greg Kowalski, editor of the Eccentric. "He truly represents the kind of strength an individual can bring to the community."

Nixon, a professor of English, volunteers his time to co-chairing the **Race Relations and Diversity Task Force** for the Birmingham Bloomfield area, serving as chairman of the board for the First Baptist Church of Birmingham, and serving on the board of directors for Birmingham's **Community House**.

"I think the award really acknowledges the things I've done for the city and the type of work I've been involved in," said Nixon, who moved to Birmingham in 1999. "It also indicates the way in which things are changing in the city. It shows a new direction the city wants to embrace."

Nixon admitted that when he first moved to the Detroit area from Texas, he expected the northern suburbs to have a more diverse population. But he found the polarization in Birmingham "shocking."

"I could not believe how much the city lacked in diversity," Nixon said. "It propelled me to start serving on different initiatives as a volunteer. What I found was the city is much more receptive to change than I previously thought. The task force really presents an educational process. I want to address different issues of diversity that make Birmingham more livable and attractive."

"It's also been important for me to be involved in the community beyond the university. It's important not just to represent my position at The Honors College and OU as a whole, but show how we can extend community involvement outside the university. Sometimes people tend to become insular. It's very important for me to improve life in this area."

Though his term as task force co-chair and board chair at his church soon will end, Nixon said he'll continue to be active in those organizations and in different endeavors.

"I'm also addressing ways in which Birmingham can integrate diversity as part of Governor Granholm's 'cool cities' initiative," Nixon said. "The new city commission has asked for my help in ways we can position the city as more diverse, not just tolerant, but accepting."

Nixon joined Oakland in 1999 as an associate professor of English. He was awarded the 2002 Oakland University Teaching Excellence Award. He previously was a faculty member at Baylor University and the Philadelphia College of Bible.

For more information on Nixon and other Honors College faculty, its curriculum, research opportunities, activities and events, visit **The Honors College** Web site.

### SUMMARY

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