



The Torch

Honors College Newsletter

Dr. Christopher Wixson Receives 2012 Distinguished Honors Faculty Award

Dr. Christopher Wixson grew up among the snowdrifts in Buffalo, New York, and received his undergraduate degree in Comparative Literature from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. He went on to receive his M.A. and Ph.D. from Indiana University in Bloomington. Dr. Wixson then taught in upstate New York at SUNY Geneseo for two years. In 2002, Dr. Wixson came to Eastern Illinois University to teach in the English department, and he has been here since.

During his tenure at Eastern, Dr. Wixson has made numerous contributions on various dramatic playwrights and texts through scholarly articles; however, he states that the achievements he is most proud of are ones such as these:

"A first-year student feeling confident and excited about a specific piece of writing she produced. An upperclassman discovering a connection between the line of a poem and a sociological theory he is studying in another course. An Accounting major shocked that a passage from Shakespeare speaks to her family situation. A blissful professor in the midst of a class discussion so vibrant and insightful that a text I have taught twenty times before seems fresh and new. These kinds of "light bulb" moments are what sustain me and what determine whether a particular class session or assignment has been successful. Of course, these achievements are not "mine" --- they are the happy result of collaborative, integrative learning."

Dr. Wixson chose his career path because of the experiences he had with his professors when he was an undergraduate student at Hamilton College:

"They were patient, inspiring, generous, and encouraging. I felt incredibly lucky to have had that experience and wanted to "pay it forward" so to speak. As such, I am happy to work at an institution as committed to teaching as Eastern is. Those individuals productively disturbed my unexamined assumptions about myself and the world around me and encouraged extensive intellectual growth. As a teacher, I seek to provide my students with the same unsettling experiences yet simultaneously to offer them ways of organizing, understanding, and responding to challenges to their thinking."

Being the recipient of the 2012 Distinguished Honors Faculty Award, Dr. Wixson shared a few words on how he felt about the Honors College here at Eastern and the impact that it makes on our students:

"...the Honors College at EIU is a very special place. It is animated by the spirit of inquiry and the cultivation of intellectual curiosity, and both University and Departmental Honors programs provide crucial opportunities for growth by integrating personal maturation with academic preparation. Honors courses emphasize the value of wrangling with complex ideas and enables students to become more resourceful thinkers and more reflective, articulate speakers and writers ... the Honors experience is transformative in that it becomes a state of mind, not simply a line on a resume. It challenges graduates to make a sincere commitment to active intellectual, emotional, and spiritual stretching and to seek ways to work meaningfully and live deliberately."



Dr. Christopher Wixson is a notable English professor here on Eastern's campus, but something that many might not have guessed is his distant relation to the Wickham family, neighbors of Jane Austen in the late eighteenth-century. Dr. Wixson mentioned that the motto on the Wickham Crest, "Manners Maketh the Man," was thought to be clever by Austen, and was used on the cad of her novel *Pride and Prejudice*.

From the Dean's Desk



The end of this academic year marks a great change in the Honors College. It has been over twenty years since Dr. Messer has been associated with Honors at Eastern Illinois University. First, under the tutelage of Dr. Lasky, Director of the nascent Honors Program back in 1992, then Honors College in 2003. In 2005, Dr. Messer began working with Dr. Irwin, current Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities. In 2010, Dr. Messer started to break in her third Dean, Dr. John Stimac. While I have only had the pleasure to serve with Margaret a very short time, I know that she will be missed by all who have known her over the years.

During this past spring's Award Day I had the honor of recognizing Dr. Messer as the 2012 Friend of Honors. In my remarks I stated that while Dr. Lasky will always be known as the father of the Honors Program and Honors College at Eastern Illinois University, Dr. Messer will always be known as its mother. She has mothered faculty who have needed help getting their caps and gowns fitted properly during commencement; she has offered her motherly advice and wisdom to incoming freshmen who are nervous being in college the first time as well as to the departing seniors who are going on to graduate school and the beginning of their careers; she has mentored and counseled deans and directors (and not just at Eastern!) and is remarkably free with her time. Her retirement, while well deserved, is bitter sweet. She will be missed for her knowledge and intellect ... but mostly for her warm smile and caring nature to all who wished to excel and further their education.

2012 Friend of Honors - Dr. Margaret Messer

Because of her infinite commitment and support of the Honors College, Dr. Margaret K. Messer was recognized as the 2012 Friend of Honors at the 30th Annual Honors College Awards Day Ceremony that took place on April 1, 2012. She was pleasantly surprised to hear her name read after believing that Dr. Robert Augustine was this year's recipient.

Dr. Margaret Knapp Messer - Retiring

Dr. Messer, Director of Honors Student Affairs, announced her retirement earlier this academic year, and will retire effective July 1, 2012. Margaret has been working with EIU students associated with the Honors College since Dr. Herbert Lasky awarded her a practicum in the Honors Program in 1992. Dr. Messer was hired as a part-time Academic Advisor, and after several well-earned promotions, became the Director of Honors Student Affairs. She served with Dean Bonnie Irwin from 2004-2010 and currently assists Dean John Stimac. Throughout her time here at the Honors College, she has shown commitment and support to the campus community as well as the surrounding Charleston community, where she often represented the Honors College while also serving as a mentor to all Honors students at Eastern Illinois University. Dr. Messer has been the keystone to the success of the Honors College by providing generous and unstinting support for students to grow and learn. Margaret enjoys hearing from former students. Please email her at mkmesser@eiu.edu or add her as a friend on Facebook!





Dr. Thomas Spencer Named New Director of Honors Student Affairs

After several months of careful analysis of the over thirty applicants, Dean Stimac and the Honors College are pleased to announce that Dr. Thomas Spencer will become the new Director of Honors Student Affairs effective August 6, 2012. The Search Committee membership was made up of constituent groups from across campus including: Dean Mahyar Izadi, Lumpkin College of Business and Applied Science and Chair; Dr. Jeff Stowell, College of Sciences; Dr. Dawn VanGunten, College of Education and Professional Studies;

Dr. Jean Wolski, College of Arts and Humanities and Department Chair representative; Mrs. Adrienne Paladino, Honors College and staff representative; and Mr. Zach Samples, Honors College student representative. Dr. Spencer comes to Eastern after more than twenty years of higher education experience including his most recent appointment as professorship in history and Director of the Honors Program at Northwest Missouri State University. Please join us in welcoming Dr. Spencer to the EIU Honors College!

Mr. Jonathan Jones Recipient of a 2012 Goldwater Scholarship

Mr. Jonathan Jones, a Physics/Pre-Engineering major and student of both the University Honors Program and the Departmental Honors Program in Physics, was one of 282 students in the United States to be awarded a Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship. This award recognizes the academic excellence of future professional researchers in the areas of mathematics, the natural sciences, and engineering. It provides \$7500 per year toward expenses associated with the completion of the final year or two of undergraduate study.

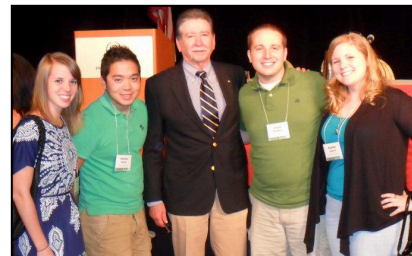


Jonathan participates in a cooperative degree program that will ultimately allow him to graduate with both a degree in engineering physics from EIU and a degree in electrical engineering from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. While at EIU, Jonathan undertook two years of quantum computing research under the supervision of Dr. Amitabh

Joshi, assistant professor of physics. Jonathan's research has been detailed in both his Goldwater application essay and a paper presented to the 2011 conference of the Illinois Section of the American Association of Physics Teachers. His conference paper, which has since been accepted for publication by *Nonlinear Optics and Quantum Optics*, is entitled "Entanglements of Two and Three Coupled Two-Level Systems in a Cavity QED Setup Including Inter Atomic Interactions." In addition to conducting local research, Jonathan has also completed a National Science Foundation Research Experience for Undergraduates, in terahertz spectroscopy, at Rice University. Jonathan's interests outside of research lay mainly in the area of community service. At EIU, he served as chairperson of The Haiti Connection, Vice-President of the Asian American Association, member of the Fair Trade Coalition, and volunteer for Habitat for Humanity. For many, Jonathan Jones stands out from the crowd as much for his desire to make the world a better place as for his research activity.

2011 National Collegiate Honors Council Conference

Miss Brianna Baker, Miss Kaylee Justice, Mr. Zach Samples, and Mr. Patrick Snyder, accompanied Dean Stimac, Dr. Messer, Ms. Schmidt, and Dr. Lisa New Freeland, from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, to the 2011 National Collegiate Honors Council conference (NCHC) in Phoenix, AZ in late October. The students attended sessions with fellow Honors students from across the nation. This proved to be a great experience for these honors students to both network with like-minded students and to bring back some fresh ideas for the Honors College. Pictured above are the students (Baker, Snyder, Samples, and



Justice) with Dr. Carlos Velez-Ibanez, plenary speaker and world renowned Anthropologist from Arizona State University. One student, Mr. Samples, enjoyed the experience so much that he recently applied for a position on the NCHC Board of Directors. Should he receive this position, he will be the next in a long line of EIU representation at NCHC. Former Honors College Deans Lasky and Irwin both served as NCHC Presidents and recent 2012 graduate Mr. Alex Cler served a two-year term on the NCHC Board of Directors. Furthermore, Dr. Stimac, Dr. Messer, and Dr. Spencer have served on a variety of different national committees within NCHC. In all, the Honors College at EIU has long been on the forefront of Honors programs in the nation as is evident by our representation on the National Collegiate Honors Council—something to be proud of for sure!

Honors College Introduces New Registration Process

Gone are the days of making appointments with Honors College staff, bringing your paper class schedules to Booth House, and then hoping your classes hadn't filled! Working with the Register, Ms. Sue Harvey, Dean Stimac was able to get online priority registration for all Honor Students beginning Spring 2012. Staff no longer spend a week registering students and trying to adjust schedules in order to accommodate filled classes, work or practice schedules; students can now register for classes as soon as seniors are eligible to register. For many, that means taking a break from studying at midnight that first Monday of registration, getting online and being done with registration in as little as 5 minutes. Students from now on will be able to register from any online location in the world. Those studying abroad or away from campus can even use their smart phones!

The Honors College Enters The Technological Era

In an effort to "Go Green", decrease clutter and storage issues, and increase security, Dean Stimac developed electronic versions of all Honors College scholarships, forms, and applications. As part of that process all student files kept in the basement, first and second floors, as well as in the attic of Booth House are being digitized and entered into a database. The records of current and former student records may now be quickly searched by any authorized user. This electronic revolution is partly in preparation for a move from Booth House to the second floor of a renovated Pemberton Hall Annex (the old Textbook Rental location). It is anticipated that the move will take place sometime during the spring 2013 semester. Keep in touch for updates on the move.

During this coming academic year Dean Stimac will be establishing an Honors College Student Advisory Board. Students from all areas of the university, as well as various co- and extra-curricular groups, will be represented on the board. Two members of the board will also serve on the Honors Council so that council members may understand student concerns. Also being considered will be an Honors College Peer Advising Group that will be composed of upper class students. Peer Advisors will help students discuss class options and will also act as ambassadors during tours, Open Houses, and orientation. A third board being established will be the Honors College Advisory Board, made up of alumni and friends of the Honors College. If you are interested in being a member of the Alumni Advisory Board, please contact Dean Stimac at jpstimac@eiu.edu.

Alumni News Items

Andy McGilliard '09

Andy McGilliard received his Doctor of Physical Therapy degree from Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis on May 18, 2012. Andy is a 2009 graduate of EIU with a B.S. in Biological Sciences with Teacher Certification and University Honors. He and his wife, Allysha, have moved to Richland, WA, where Andy has taken a position as physical therapist at Kadlec Regional Medical Center.





Amanda Veale '09

Amanda received a Master of Fine Arts-Creative Writing (Poetry) from Sarah Lawrence College. The degree was completed in December 2011, and officially conferred in May 2012.

Amanda has completed a book of poetry that she will submit for publication. She further plans to pursue an additional advanced degree in psychology or social work so that she can work as a therapist.

Lauren Keppler's '03 Honors Twins

Twin daughters were born to Lauren Keppler and her husband Luke on May 5, 2012. Lourdes, born twelve minutes after her sister, weighed 3 pounds, 15 ounces, and Leila weighed in at 3 pounds and 13 ounces.



We want to hear from you!

Submit Information for our Newsletter!

We want to hear from you. Tell us about your professional development, your children, or your fond memories at EIU as they relate to Honors. Please submit items for the Honors Alumni Newsletter by emailing Dr. Stimac, jpstimac@eiu.edu, or our editor, Ms. Angelica Bradley at ambradley2@eiu.edu.