

Truman Scholarship

<http://www.truman.gov/>

Deadline: national deadline: February 2, 2010; preliminary campus deadline: January 8, 2010

Fields of Study

Open to juniors planning to study any field that leads to a career in “public service.”

Description

The mission of the Truman Scholarship Foundation is to find and recognize college juniors with exceptional leadership potential who are committed to careers in government, the nonprofit or advocacy sectors, education or elsewhere in the public service; and to provide them with financial support for graduate study, leadership training, and fellowship with other students who are committed to making a difference through public service. The Foundation awards merit-based \$30,000 scholarships to college juniors who plan to pursue careers in government or the public service and attend graduate school. Truman Scholars participate in leadership development programs and opportunities for special internships and employment with the federal government in the summer before their senior year. Scholars are required to work in public service for three of the seven years following completion of a Foundation funded graduate degree program.

The Truman Foundation seeks future "change agents" who aspire to leadership positions in federal, state, or local governments or in the not-for-profit and education sectors where they can influence public policies and change public programs. Truman Scholars must have extensive records of public and community service, are committed to careers in public service, and have outstanding leadership potential and communication skills.

Criteria for Selection

Truman Scholars are selected regional selection panels on the basis of leadership potential, intellectual ability, and likelihood of “making a difference.” The criteria for selecting Truman Scholars are:

- Extensive record of public and community service. Scholars have a record of sustained participation (at least two years) in campus service, community service, politics, government, or non-profit organizations.
- Commitment to a career in government or elsewhere in the public sector. The nominee's proposed program of graduate study should be suitable for a career in public service.
- Demonstrated record of leadership and communication skills. Potential leadership is not enough. Scholars need to have had meaningful and substantial leadership experiences.

- Academic performance, intellectual strength, and writing and analytical skills. The competition is not GPA-driven, yet students are chosen as Scholars because they are likely to be admitted the best graduate schools. Each year students win with lower GPAs if they are exceptional in other areas.
- Heart, compassion, and a desire to influence public policy or education programs. Nominees are evaluated on the likelihood of "making a difference" in public service.

The Truman Scholarship program looks for assurances that the candidate would perform well at his or her intended graduate program. Specifically they look for:

- Strong grades in the fall of the junior year;
- Ambitious curriculum and, preferably, at least one course in political science, government, American history, or public policy;
- One or more courses related to the proposed career field.

Truman Scholars, like Rhodes Scholars, are expected to be more than “mere bookworms,” and they should be able to talk about areas outside their areas of study and expertise.

Application Procedure

The application form includes a series of detailed questions regarding your activities, values, interests, leadership experience, and motivation for a career in public service, as well as a detailed plan of study for graduate school. In addition, the application must include a one-page Policy Proposal that examines a significant policy issue or problem in your area of intended public service. The Policy Proposal should take the form of a memo to a government official who has the most direct authority to resolve the issue.

WPI may nominate up to four students for the Truman Scholarship through an on-campus selection process. Interested students should speak to the Truman Faculty Representative, Prof. Hansen. To be considered for nomination, please submit a preliminary application that includes the following:

1. Complete application from available from the [Truman website](#);
2. Outline of a memo on a public policy issue concerning a significant issue confronting our society. The topic must directly relate to the career goals defined by the applicant in the application form. The outline should define the problem, lay out your proposed solution, and identify major obstacles to the implementation of your solution. Applicants selected as nominees will complete the full memo.
3. Unofficial WPI transcript (an official transcript will be required of nominees);
4. Names and email addresses of three people who have agreed to write recommendation letters if you should be nominated. One letter should be from someone able to comment on the example of your leadership mentioned in item 7 in the application, another should address your commitment to public service, and a third letter may focus on your academic and intellectual abilities and prospects for success in graduate school.

These materials should be submitted to Prof. Peter Hansen, Dept. of Humanities and Arts, (phansen@wpi.edu) by January 8, 2010. Nominees should expect to revise their applications and

obtain the additional letters of recommendation before the final application is submitted to the national competition in early February.

The national competition screens applications to identify several finalists from each state who are invited to regional interviews throughout the country in March. Each regional selection panel interviews finalists from a 3 - 4 state region and generally elect one Scholar from each state and one or two at-large Scholars from the region. Each panel typically included a university president, a federal judge, a distinguished public servant, and a past Truman Scholarship winner.

After these interviews, the winners are announced at the end of March or beginning of April.

Additional Information

Public Service: The Truman Foundation defines public service as employment in government at any level, uniformed services, public-interest organizations, non-governmental research and/or educational organizations, public and private schools, and public service-oriented nonprofit organizations such as those whose primary purposes are to help needy or disadvantaged persons or to protect the environment.

Public service could be almost anything in the public or private sector if you want to make a change for the public good. Research in a government-sponsored lab could be public service. Teaching or education could qualify as public service, but candidates with such interests should to articulate how they want to effect change. Students considering law school or medical school also need to make a case to justify how they will use their training to become an agent of change and influence public policy and public programs.

As evidence of a record of public service, the Truman Foundation considers the types of activities, extent of campus and community involvement, and the extent of government or political involvement. An outstanding record of public service includes sustained participation (at least two years) in three of the following activities while a good record includes sustained participation in two of the following activities:

- Campus service
- Community service
- Government service or political involvement either through helping on a person's campaign for elected office or participation with political advocacy groups
- Employment in a government agency or nonprofit organization in the candidate's intended field

What ticks you off? If you do not have an answer for that question, then you are probably not a good candidate as a Truman Scholar. What are you going to do about it? What is the public response to the issue you raise? The Truman Scholarship wants to identify agents of change and provide training and support for further study.

Leadership: Significant leadership experience is essential. Good leadership involves the following: a significant problem, a defined and unique role as leader, the participation of others,

and concrete outcome. A typical pitfall is to think too narrowly about what constitutes good leadership, which could be shown in a variety of fields of endeavor.

Academic Achievement: The Truman Scholarship is not an academic award. Scholars should be in the top quartile of their class, but the Foundation reports that 37% of Truman Scholars had GPAs 3.7 or below and 14% of Scholars had GPAs 3.5 or below. Most nominees have high GPAs, but this data should confirm that exceptional leadership, service and potential as a change agent are far more important among the selection criteria.

Graduate Study

The scholarship provides \$30,000 for graduate study. Scholars also receive priority admission and supplemental financial aid at some premier graduate institutions, leadership training, career and graduate school counseling, and special internship opportunities within the federal government. Recipients must be US citizens, have outstanding leadership potential and communication skills, be in the top quarter of their class, and be committed to careers in government or the not-for-profit sector.

The Foundation has supported Truman Scholars in many fields of study, including agriculture, biology, engineering, environmental management, physical and social sciences, and technology policy, as well as traditional fields such as economics, education, government, history, international relations, law, political science, public administration, nonprofit management, public health, and public policy. See the Truman Scholarship website. <http://www.truman.gov>

Priority is given to candidates proposing to enroll in graduate and professional programs specifically oriented to careers in public service. These include law programs and master's and doctorate programs in public administration, public policy analysis, public health, international relations, government, economics, social services delivery, education and human resource development, and conservation and environmental protection. Scholars may make program changes before beginning graduate studies if the changes are consistent with preparation for a career in public service.

Former Truman Scholars serve as managers of government programs, legislators and aides for legislative bodies, Foreign Service officers, school teachers, staff members in policy analysis and research organizations, attorneys for government agencies, public defenders, professors, and professional staff in advocacy organizations and not-for-profit institutions. Truman Scholars have also been very successful in later competitions for other prestigious fellowships, such as the Rhodes and Marshall Scholarships. Indeed, the special Truman Leadership Week attempts to groom Truman Scholars for these competitions.

Previous Truman Scholars from WPI:

Marion S. Keeler '84