



Truman Scholarship Application Guide

This application guide is provided by [FWD: Scholars](#) (FWD:S). FWD:S is a volunteer-led organization that seeks to pay forward our knowledge about competitive scholarship experiences. We aim to empower our peers through resources and support to pursue their academic and professional goals. Our ultimate aim is to better reflect the underrepresented identities among us.

To meet these goals, we work to increase the availability of scholarship application resources and match applicants to recent scholarship recipients for mentorship. We recognize that privilege of all kinds must be acknowledged and used to create a more equal and just world.

The FWD:S team is made up of students and alumni recipients of competitive scholarships—many of whom come from underrepresented backgrounds themselves—who are all eager to provide resources and support to prospective applicants. We want to use our privilege and insight to help students to chase their dreams at the undergraduate and graduate levels, both domestically and internationally.

Interested in mentorship? If you'd like to be paired with an alum of this scholarship to support your application process, fill out our [mentorship matching survey](#).

Interested in volunteering with us? If you'd like to help us support prospective applicants, take our [volunteer survey](#).

Partnerships: FWD:S is eager to form mutually beneficial relationships with organizations and individuals who share our commitment to diversifying higher education. If you're interested in partnering with FWD:S, please contact us at fwdscholars@gmail.com.

Have questions about FWD:S and its services? Send us an email at fwdscholars@gmail.com. You can also follow FWD:S on social media for updates on our program and more scholarship tips, tricks, and guides:

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MESSAGE FROM THE GUIDE CREATORS

Hey there! We are a group of alumni-scholars that want to help you apply for the Truman Scholarship. This guide is intended to help inform you about the Truman application process, from the perspective of those who have been through it. We're so excited you're considering applying - and we're rooting for you!

DISCLAIMER

We think the perspectives of students that have actually been through the application process are far too often left out of resources offered to scholarship applicants. However, because this guide is from the perspective of current scholars/alumni, it provides only a partial view of the application process. It's important to keep in mind that these were our experiences and the suggestions that we found helpful, but they are not universal truths about how the program selects scholars. Indeed, many of us had different opinions in certain areas: this shows how subjective the process is! By following our advice, we cannot guarantee that you will be successful. Also, while we do our best to keep this guide current, we can't guarantee that everything remains 100% accurate - please check the [Truman website](#) or reach out to the program staff if you have questions.

ABOUT THE SCHOLARSHIP

Description of the Program

The Truman Foundation is the nation's official living memorial to our thirty-third president and The Presidential Memorial to Public Service. Created by Congress in 1975, the Foundation was President Truman's idea.

President Truman did not want a brick and mortar monument. Instead, he encouraged a living memorial that would give life to the values of service that had animated his career. In that spirit, the Truman Foundation finds those dedicated to the call of public service and provides them a platform and community to become change agents in their communities.

Truman Scholars come from a variety of backgrounds, ideological perspectives, and disciplines. The one common trait is a scholar's commitment to public service in their field, whether that's through politics, medicine, mathematics, science, planning, or art. While many believe the Truman Scholarship to be for students who studied Political Science, plan to go to law school, and then work in government, and though many have taken that path, there are Truman Scholars from virtually every discipline. If, above all else, you know that you want to commit your career to being a public service leader (however you define that--and the definition is really up to you), this is the scholarship for you! From our experience, the Truman Foundation doesn't define

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public service in any one particular way, but does look for scholars to be change agents in their field.

Every foundation, organization, and company has its own unique culture. From our perspective, the Truman Foundation and its community is grounded, ambitious, and supportive. Indeed, many Trumans will tell you that some of their best friends in life were made through the scholarship community. President Truman's quote, "It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit" speaks strongly to the Truman ethos.

If you listened to Truman Scholars for a day, you'd likely hear them:

- Gush about how inspiring and supportive their fellow Trumans are
- Appreciative to be surrounded by peers who share their professional values for public service
- Use the phrase "Tru-Fam(ily)" or "Tru-manity"
- Joke about the unglamorosity of their public service job
- Starting an exciting organization, social enterprise, or project to improve the field they have been working in.

Based on a written application and personal interviews, the Truman Foundation identifies a diverse group of undergraduates with strong records of academic achievement and community service who are interested in a graduate program to apply in a public service career.

For over 45 years, Truman Scholars have become change agents in a variety of fields. You can watch videos including certain scholars [here](#).

Scholarship Benefits

Take some time to familiarize yourself with the scholar benefits, which can be found on the Truman Foundation website.

The Truman Scholarship is an award of up to \$30,000 towards graduate school, but it's also so much more than that. The Truman Scholar community is remarkably supportive, and some Scholars argue that the community is more valuable than the scholarship itself.

Listing "Truman Scholar" on your application to graduate school is sure to help, but there are other benefits while applying as well. Some schools explicitly offer Truman Scholars additional financial aid, application fee waivers, and other benefits. Learn more about these additional Scholar benefits here: <https://www.truman.gov/scholars/additional-scholar-benefits>.

Truman Scholars Leadership Week (TSLW) is hosted for each class the summer immediately after that year's Scholars are announced. All Scholars get together in Liberty, Missouri and spend

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a week getting to know each other. Scholars who won in previous years also come to TSLW and serve as Senior Scholars, offering advice and guidance to new Trumans.

Summer Institute (SI) is a program that takes place after a Truman class's college graduation. SI brings Truman Scholars to our nation's capital to deepen understanding of the national policymaking process and enhance community among the class. In addition to participating in an eight-week public service internship (fully funded by the Truman Foundation), SI participants also meet other Truman Scholars, attend seminars, and give presentations to their Truman classmates.

The Truman Foundation offers other [opportunities](#) to join conferences and programs that will help connect you to other professionals throughout your career in public service. The goal of these programs is to build interconnectedness amongst scholars, provide support, and advance careers. The programs won't be important to the application process, but they are good resources down the line should you become a Truman Scholar.

Scholarship Requirements

The best place to learn about the Truman Scholarship's requirements (they are fairly straightforward, and we don't want to lead anyone astray) are on its [website](#).

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Application Timeline

The first step to applying for the Truman Scholarship is being nominated by your institution, usually your university or college. Each campus has a faculty rep devoted to running the application process on your campus; you can find who yours is [here](#). Each institution has radically different processes, some host campus interviews to decide who to nominate, some have separate applications. Your best bet is to contact your faculty rep **as early as possible**, to make sure you don't miss any internal deadlines your school may have. And even if your campus process doesn't begin until well into the fall, you are of course welcome to start brainstorming in advance!

Once you've contacted your faculty rep and begun work on your application, your first deadline with the Truman Foundation is the submission deadline for your application. Usually in **early February**, you can find the current year's exact dates and deadlines [here](#). Be sure to double check the specific deadlines for your application year.

In **mid-February**, you'll receive a finalist confirmation, letting you know you've been chosen as a finalist and confirming you're still interested in being considered. After you confirm this, the finalists will be announced on the Truman website.

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The date of your regional review panel, or your interview, depends on the state you applied from. These panels run throughout **March and April**, and you'll be informed of your exact date and time in your finalist email.

Scholars are announced **mid-April**, and Truman Scholars Leadership Week takes place for a week **mid-May** in Liberty, MO.

Application Materials and Overview

There is no “formula” to winning the Truman. My best advice is just to be your genuine, authentic, wonderful self and let that shine through your application answers. The scholarship is not the “end-all-be-all” to you achieving career success in the public sector, but rather a helpful springboard for getting connected to similar-minded folks. Regardless of the turnout, the application process is extremely worthwhile. Use this application as a time to discern and clearly articulate your goals for the next few years.

When preparing your application materials, remember that the Foundation is trying to select your fit for crafting a compelling class of future change-makers, and NOT trying to grade you on all your achievements thus far in life. Generally, the Truman Foundation is less focused on GPA and is more interested in your record of service and leadership. They will assess your academics by transcript record and rigor of your classes rather than raw grades and scores.

The point of the application is to create a narrative of you as a **public servant**. Your application altogether should demonstrate a clear picture of who you are, your values, and your path to public service. While you may have multiple passions, it is usually better to focus on one to demonstrate your depth and experience and to create a strong cohesive application that ties together (preferably connected to your policy problem). Don't stress if you can't identify your life path for the next ~5-10 years! (And in fact, if you can, you probably don't need this scholarship). It's more important to demonstrate that you've thought deeply about what areas you feel most passionate about and can communicate at least one of those in a narrative to the interview panel. More specific advice for application questions can be found below:

The Truman Foundation also includes [effective and ineffective responses](#) on the application on their website.

Below, we break down each question on the application itself, and offer our own personal experiences and advice. Remember, your mileage may (and most certainly will) vary! Our initials are appended so that you may reach out with particular questions in a certain area.

Three most significant classes in college career:

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- Don't be afraid to get creative! One of the courses I included was a class called "Childhood Literature" where we went to a local elementary school and read books to kids after school for each class. This had nothing to do with my policy proposal, or really the rest of my application in general, but I felt I could speak to what I learned through the class in a unique way. - JA
- If there is a class code for the class, I was encouraged to include the code (ie, PLSC1013) and then also a short description of the class, and then dedicate a sentence to why the class was valuable to me. - RA
- Explain all aspects of the class that aren't known to the reader. For example, I took the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program Class where we took class with incarcerated students in a prison. Since it's non-traditional, be sure to define the class before noting how it was important to you/your development. - EH
- Describe how the class impacted you and your work, and/or use this as an opportunity to link a class to an activity that you weren't able to include in the résumé/activities portion of the application. - BB

Would you apply for the Truman Summer Institute? Where would you like to work? What issues would you like to address?

- I recommend answering that you would apply. It shows commitment to the program if selected. Plus, Summer Institute is a huge community building opportunity. - JA
- With that being said, if you truly feel your answer is NO, don't feel pressured into thinking you need to answer any question a particular way because there is a right answer. I really thought I would be spending my summer after graduation backpacking, and so felt pretty sure that I had no intention of going to SI, which I communicated honestly. - AP
- The [Truman SI site](#) has a list of places where scholars have historically been placed for SI which may be a good place to familiarize yourself with the types of internships scholars typically find. - JA
- I think this is yet another opportunity to demonstrate your commitment to a certain issue/advocacy area. I looked to my policy proposal and thought: what organizations are involved in this work and where do I have a chance to make this happen? - JA
- As someone coming from a traditionally non-public service discipline (architecture/art/planning) I used this space to point to the kinds of organizations that applied my interests to public service in the ways I wanted to do. I also framed my answer with what specifically I wanted to learn about my desired profession through working with those entities - LWS

Describe one specific example of your leadership

- The advice I received (and followed) was the more specific, the better. For example, rather than describing a particular role you already have reflected in your resume, describe a specific instance where you were called to lead in that role. Did you plan an event? Coordinate with other groups? Lead a day of service? How did it go, and what did you learn? - JA

- In addition, there's again no need to demonstrate the most impressive or grandiose thing you've done. The foundation is more interested in understanding something that matters to YOU, not something that you think matters to them. I used a very specific example of an instance where I was teaching a student as my example. - AP
- I know for a lot of people it feels hard or awkward to talk about themselves, but here it really is important to distinguish yourself as a leader and what YOU did. If you worked with others please include that and acknowledge them, but they want to see what you did in that leadership capacity. - KM
- Downplaying your successes might be admirable in a social setting, but it doesn't make an effective leadership essay, and the people who score applications aren't looking to hear how other people did better things than you. - RA
 - Below is the citation for an essay that the Deputy Executive Secretary for the Truman Foundation has written specifically about the leadership essay on the Truman Application. If you can, use your school's JSTOR access to get this article, as it defines the scope of what the Foundation considers leadership. - RA
 - YGLESIAS, TARA. "Non Ducor, Duco: Leadership and the Truman Scholarship Application." *Leading the Way: Student Engagement and Nationally Competitive Awards*
- What I've always tried to exemplify is that leadership doesn't have to be positional. That being said, if you weren't the president of a club or something similar, don't be afraid to get creative! What did you do that influenced others? How did you create change? - EH
- For this essay, and the other related essays, don't be afraid to tell stories. Talk about the meeting you had that changed the course of your work going forward, or how a certain experience underpins your advocacy. Start with a personal moment and work out from there to encompass the full picture of your mission and values. - BB

Describe a recent particularly satisfying public service activity.

- All I have to say here is please don't have a savior complex. -JA
 - ^Word. - AP
- Something doesn't have to be overall successful to be satisfying. For example, you can work on a campaign and talk about the personal successes and growth you were able to add to the campaign, even though the bid for office might have not been successful. (I might be projecting here, as there was a joke with my faculty rep that nothing i participated in or wrote about was actually successful at getting passed or elected.) - RA
- Be sure to know the definition of public service before working on this section. - EH

Describe the problem or needs of society you want to address when you enter public service.

- This is one of those questions that is intended to understand whether you've done the legwork of identifying a real problem, researching it thoroughly, and have spent time thinking through all the nuances of a realistic scenario. Again, don't be afraid in identifying THE problem--just one that you care about! My background is in AI research,

and I spoke about a particular question that I wished was taken more seriously by the tech community and why this was a problem. - AP

- Yes !!^^ Identify a problem that you not only care about, but have demonstrated interest in helping to solve, and then be able to imply through the statement why you *specifically* are suited to help solve this problem. - JO
- Also, don't be afraid to go local! You don't have to solve national criminal justice or health care reform. Pick an issue you care about (can be as small as local composting opportunities), demonstrate how it is important, and let your passion for the issue shine through. - DW
- For this section, I would suggest choosing something narrow. You won't solve world hunger in 500 words, so choose something that you know a lot about and that you're passionate about. - EH
- Your response to this question should be closely linked to your plans after graduation and your policy proposal. This point goes back to what was mentioned earlier about focusing on just one issue, but the website also directly says in the [notes to candidates](#), "Prepare a convincing Policy Proposal. You will have limited space to examine a significant policy issue or problem that is in your intended area of public service as described in Item 9..." (Item 9 is this question.) - MM
- I used this space to make the connected link of my early work with my future work that helped me make more sense as a person and not seem "undecided." My research and public service work in early college focused on incarceration, but I was writing my honors thesis on public housing. I structured the first paragraph like a mini literature review with each sentence as a (cited) statistic about incarceration, housing, poverty within my city, and then used the second paragraph to discuss the connectedness of the issues and how I wanted to address them. - LWS

Policy Problem Statement

- This is the closest question to an academic assignment you will have on this application. Again, try and align your policy problem with the needs/societal challenges you've already identified in the application (it's helpful context and background for your readers). Research, research, research :) - AP
- Make sure you highlight the level of government appropriate for the policy you are proposing (state, federal, an executive department, etc.) also while I wanted to go big, I found it too overwhelming to find an appropriate solution. I recommend thinking about smaller, more impactful ways to attack your problem as well. - KM
- You might find it helpful to look at some online guides (from reputable sources) for how to craft a policy proposal, just so you're hitting the right wickets! - JO

Proposed Solutions

- This is where you can kind of go wild in proposing the impeccably creative solutions you're capable of brainstorming of without actually having to implement it yourself! Put yourself in the shoes of [insert x official] and propose what you would do in their situation! - AP

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- The best advice I received while working on my application is that the solution doesn't have to be feasible, it just has to be a good idea. For example, if you propose an idea that you know your city council would never actually implement due to a variety of reasons, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't write about it. That can be a part of the challenges section if it's obviously not feasible due to political views, etc. - EH
- Think about opportunity for scale and improvement on existing systems. Your proposed solution might be a new iteration of a technology, structure, or policy. If so, you can use this section to point out the flaws of the existing structure and identify how your proposal will overcome those obstacles. Then, in the next question, you can move into any obstacles that your idea might encounter having already addressed the cracks at a foundational level. - BB

Major Obstacles

- Now is where you put yourselves in the shoes of [insert x funder] and tear your proposal apart :) It's important to demonstrate not only your capacity for problem-solving, but also your ability to recognize the clear shortcomings of such a proposal. - AP
- This section ignores the political makeup of Congress/the governing body that implements your policy as much as the actual implementation of your policy. For example, "insufficient funding/cost of the plan might be untenable" is considered more of a valid obstacle than, "my policy is widely supported by Democrats, and Republicans are in power right now, so they won't pass the policy." - RA
- When I originally wrote this section, I was under the impression that I needed to solve all of these obstacles in this section as well. My faculty rep advised against that. This is truly a time to only identify major obstacles, and if the interview panel wants to hear about how you'd address these obstacles, they'll ask. - MM

Describe the graduate education program you intend to pursue if you receive a Truman Scholarship.

- There is absolutely NO requirement that you end up doing what you put on your application for graduate school. In fact, I'd bet a small fraction actually do so. - JA
- I think what this question is really getting at is whether you understand the educational tools you will need in order to make the type of change to society you argue for in your application. Do you need to go to law school to start a non-profit, or run for office? Maybe, but explain why and how it will further you. Trumans receive a healthy amount of money toward grad school, so it makes sense that you should have at least a general idea of how best to use it. - JA
- In this section I picked one school and really went into depth in the programs they have and how that will help me reach my goal. I would recommend doing some research and finding a school or program that speaks to you. I think they want to see if you have researched and are actually committed to graduate school. But also I am not even remotely fulfilling what I wrote in my application nor did I even apply to that program. - KM

- Things to keep in mind include: does this school/program have a member of faculty that would be great to work with or who is really involved in the space you are interested in/working in? Do they have specific classes or offer hands-on experience that help you reach your post-grad goals? - RA
- ^The above point is particularly important if you're thinking of doing a research degree like a Ph.D. or a Masters program that would require a thesis. - MM
- Look up what Institutes or Centers are associated with the schools and departments you're in. Do they currently have a multi-year grant to research things you're interested in? Just because a school has a degree program you want to do, doesn't mean they're focus or approach aligns with what you're interested in. - LWS

What do you hope to do and what position do you hope to have upon completing your graduate studies?

- 100% of people do not end up in the position that they proposed when they were an undergrad. It's chill. Just make sure you know which jobs actually exist in the sectors you're proposing you want to work in and how people actually get there (i.e. don't put a job that needs a Ph.D. while having proposed attending law school up above instead). - AP
- ^^^ I would add that you need some basic understanding on what jobs are available to you once you graduate and what jobs you need work experience for. (Ex: you aren't going to graduate from law school and immediately become director of the ACLU) - KM
- You're also welcome to create positions for yourself or new organizations, just make sure you have the relevant experience to theoretically make that a possibility. - EH
- If you're in an emerging field (or proposing a field that doesn't exist yet), use this space to discuss the first steps in the route to get you where you want to go. If you're like me and struggled because entry level positions in your desired field doesn't exist, look up people whose work inspires you and see what route they took. - LWS
- If you're planning on working in a new administration, make sure you have an idea of what you will do if your candidate/party does not win. This might not need to be articulated in the application itself, but it's good to keep in mind if you go on to an interview. - BB

What do you hope to do and what position do you hope to have five to seven years after graduate school?

- Again, absolutely no pressure here. Run wild and free. - AP
- I would add that your 5-7 year goal should show an upward step from your "just graduated school" step and should reflect realistic upward movement.
 - ^RT - DW
- Also, if you want to run for office 5-7 years out of graduate school, include that! There is a stigma around wanting to run for office in some spaces, but certainly not in the Truman Foundation. You just should know the age requirements for the office you want to run for.
- Try to be as confident as possible! One comment my entire finalist group received was not dreaming, "big enough". Your panel wants to bring scholars into the community who

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want to address large problems and become big names within the public sector; if you've always dreamed of leading a government agency or well-known NGO, don't be afraid to put it in here.

- This is where to shine as a “visionary.” How do you want to be a leader in your field, not just a participant. I wrote about how I saw the work I wanted to do, and bridge the gaps in the field as it was. - LWS

Additional Information

- There is no requirement at all that you use this space, but it is there for you to add in details that may be missing from your application. I'd recommend preparing your application prior to thinking about this question, then afterwards review your entire document and think about if there's any crucial piece of you that appears to be missing. People often use this space to talk about life-changing challenges that have impacted them, or deeply personal struggles. - AP
- I heard that many people use this section as a personal statement, I used it as an opportunity to explain and highlight my honors thesis work. If there is anything you want to talk about or highlight that you felt the rest of the application missed, this is the best spot for it. - KM
- If you do decide to write about yourself, use it as a glimpse into your life. Unfortunately, it is not unique to talk about how you love school and study hard. It is, however, something that gives perspective to your application to talk about how you are a first generation college student and the imposter syndrome that might be affiliated with that. - RA
- The Truman Foundation does refer to this as a personal statement, and has listen tips for writing an effective statement at [this link](#). - RA
- This is not an optional section! This is where you get to give the zoom out version of who you are and what your purpose is and why. You're just explained a bunch of little nuggets about yourself, use this space to put it all on a pretty plate that helps the readers see you as a full person! (I honestly refer back to this statement still when applying for new things) - LWS

Transcripts:

You need to attach your transcripts for Truman BUT they do not have to be the official transcripts. I was able to take screenshots of my transcripts via my online university portal and paste it all together in a word document. You do not need to pay for an official transcript. You also need to include transcripts for any summer abroad or semester abroad program as well. Once again, these do not have to be the official transcript.

Letters of Rec:

The Truman requires three letters of recommendation AND that each letter reflect on three key criteria:

1. **Leadership Abilities and Potential:** This letter should confirm the experience described in Question 7 (specific example of your leadership). The letter writer need not have

witnessed the example first hand, but he or she should be able to discuss the example and how it fits within the context of the student's leadership.

2. **Commitment to a Career in Public Service:** This letter should confirm the experience described in Question 8 (recent, satisfying public service activity). The letter writer need not have witnessed the activity first hand, but he or she should be able to discuss the example and how it fits within the context of the student's commitment to a career in public service.
3. **Intellect and Prospects for Continuing Academic Success:** This letter should discuss the student's overall academic background in context of the student's future plans for career and graduate school (Questions 11 to 13). It is recommended, though not required, that the writer have taught the student at some point.

General advice on letters of rec:

- Something that I found very valuable for this step was to think about what I wanted each letter writer to reflect in their specific letter. There is nothing to stop you (and, in fact, I'd say it's quite worthwhile) from telling your letter writers what you want them to highlight about your experience. Feel free to give them suggestions too--i.e., a professor that is writing on your commitment to public service, but they might not know about the ways outside of school that you give back to the community. Teachers really appreciate it when you help them out and give them an (unobtrusive) road map for what you'd like them to highlight in their letters. - JO
- This can feel overwhelming and awkward to ask for three letters AND ask that the letters reflect specific criteria. I would start by considering which mentors, professors, advisors, etc. you have the best relationship with and who you feel like would write the best letters for you. Please do not consider whether the committee would find their titles prestigious. You want your best advocates writing letters for you. Then consider who knows your leadership abilities (an athletic coach; a club advisor; etc.); who knows your commitment to public service (community service mentor; internship manager; etc); and who knows your intellect and academic success (professor; etc). And ask them in a polite email. Reminder: they want to write letters for you, they want to demonstrate how awesome you are, and want you to succeed. It seems awkward and scary on your end but I am sure they are delighted to help you. - KM
- Don't be afraid to email a professor a second time if you haven't heard back within a reasonable amount of time. Just write that you wanted to make sure they saw your first email, etc. - LWS
- Consider having back-ups in mind as well. In most cases, people say yes to writing a letter, but for a variety of reasons, you might run across someone who says no. Brainstorming possibilities with your faculty rep or another mentor could be useful for creating a list of options for these letters. - MM
- It can also feel really awkward to ask someone if they've submitted their letter yet, but at least in my experience, people appreciate having periodic reminders. Fortunately, for Truman, I had a supportive faculty rep who did most of the bothering for me, but I have

since needed to bother people on my own for other applications. Politely sending an email or visiting someone's office to ask if they've submitted the letter to your faculty rep and (if not) when they're planning on submitting it is not only fine to do, but it might even provide that person with an opportunity to ask some clarifying questions if they had any or might be the reminder they needed. - MM

- If you are concerned about grades or the GPA reflected in your transcripts, have your recommenders directly address the matter. Your academic writer can speak to the type of student you are and your other recommenders can address any circumstances that might have impacted your academic record. - BB

Campus Nomination Process

Overall gist: You must be nominated by your campus to apply for the Truman at-large. There are typically 4 nominees from each school (not including transfer students), and the selection process takes place on variable timelines in the fall of your junior year.

- Our Advice
 - While each campus' nomination process will vary slightly, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with the questions on the actual Truman application. Some things to think about:
 - **Why are you passionate about public service/leadership? How have you demonstrated this in your extracurriculars/studies thus far?**
 - **What are some problems you would like to solve?**
 - **What is a policy that you would like to propose or change that would benefit society?**
 - **What would you do with a Truman scholarship? Where would you go for postgraduate studies, and what do you hope to do with it?**
 - For better or for worse, applicants will have to go through their faculty representatives to be nominated. If yours is not helpful or supportive, we strongly suggest reaching out to other mentors (i.e. those listed in the "contact" section here!)
 - Familiarize yourself with how the application process works. Be aware of the scholarship's stipulations/benefits in case there are campus nomination interviews as well.
 - For example, my campus had its own interview process that kicked off at the beginning of the fall semester, and I had to try to catch up with the dozens of other applicants. -JA
 - Take this opportunity as good practice! Even if it doesn't work out, the opportunity for reflection and introspection will always be good practice for the next application/experience down the line.
- This process can happen in various different ways. Each institution gets four nominees, and how those four get chosen can be very different from campus to campus, and year to

year. It might just be a matter of getting your application to a point that is good enough for the campus, and then a panel decides who should get the nomination. This also might involve a campus interview! The process varies. - RA

- Your campus interview is a good practice for the finalist interview. Just a heads up, the Truman Interview is only 20 minutes! Practice having concise answers and knowing when to stop. Let the interviewers decide if they want to know more about something. They will ask a follow up question if they want to! - LWS

Finalist Interviews

General Description of the Finalist Process

- If you are selected as a Finalist, you will interview at a regional panel composed of former scholars and leaders at the Foundation. Thus, while not every applicant will interview, it is still an important aspect of your application.
- Unlike some other scholarships, you will not learn who from your finalist group will be selected until a later date. Depending on the date of your region, this could be weeks, days, or months. All Scholars are announced once all the interview panels have convened.
- Most important thing I can say for this part is that there is a *huge* amount of variation in what a finalist interview looks like. Don't let that intimidate you! Be prepared for detailed questions on your policy proposal
- You do not find out the interview order until you arrive on the day-of your interview. They interview by state, and each interview is generally 20 to 30 minutes. If the panel has any additional questions, they will call finalists back for a supplemental interview after all of the interviews have been finished.
- At the end of the day, the panel will decide who receives the scholarship from which state and institution, but the names are announced at a later date.

General Interview Prep/Research Info: (mostly written by RA)

- Congratulations! It is an incredible accomplishment to be a Truman Finalist, and you should be proud!
- The Foundation is very big on not over-preparing for the finalist interviews. You want to give yourself room to improvise and not sound too rehearsed.
 - Consider the experience less of an interview, and more of a conversation with equally passionate colleagues. - DW
 - BUT do practice! It is weird speaking with so many people at once. Do a practice interview like the real one at least once just to see how it feels. - EH
 - If your faculty reps don't already, ask them to put together a mock interview. Have them ask 3-4 faculty members/local experts related to your interests to sit on a panel for a 20 minute interview, and then offer feedback. - LWS
 - If you are a verbose speaker, practice practice practice speaking concisely! Practice speaking slower so you can actually stop your thoughts at the end of one

or two sentences. I practiced while talking with friends, answering questions in class, etc. (this has also been the best practice for my life in general, so well worth the time). The interview is 20 minutes. You want to let them have as MUCH time to learn the things about you that they want. - LWS

- Have the people you're practicing with count the times you use filler words (um, well, like) so that you can break that verbal habit. - BB
- It will be listed on the website who serves on your finalist panel. It is good to have a general idea of who they are and note if any one of them has expertise on anything you write about. For example, if you talk about education access and one of the panelists works in education, they might take you to task on any particular position you take on your application.
 - Note: just because they are clearly an expert in the field you work in (say, someone who works high up in a think tank that focuses on climate change and alternative energy sources), do not assume that they will only ask you questions that relate to their personal positions on the subjects you are talking about. You will be asked to defend your stances from various positions, both right and left.
 - ^emphasis on *general* knowledge about the panel. Don't get so far into the resume; it's not helpful, and it might come off as creepy if you show you know more about the panelists than your own application.
- I found it most helpful to go through my application and highlight any particular names of organizations, laws, court decisions/rulings, and be ready to talk about and defend the positions that I take on those things.
 - I talked in my application about how I believe that the *Citizens United v. FEC* ruling was bad, and so I read all of the briefs and writings in relation to that case to defend my stance on that ruling.
- You also need to know the members of your congressional delegation, names of your US Senators, and depending on the issues you write about in your application (ie, talking about women holding office, or Indigenous Rights, fair and proportionate representation of Black persons in government, etc.) , the demographic breakdowns of your federal office holders and your state's legislature.
 - For me, I was a Truman Finalist for the state of Oklahoma, but all of my public service and political engagement was in the state of Arkansas, and so I prepared this information for both Oklahoma and Arkansas. If you are in a similar situation, I would recommend doing the same.
 - I was a finalist for Washington State, but went to school/worked in New Orleans. I was very nervous about not being so up-to-date on my WA knowledge, but was very clear that I was dedicated to New Orleans. Some of my issues were relevant to Seattle so I read up on those, but if you're between places, don't be afraid to say, my work isn't focused [in my hometown], but based on what I know from [my current location], I would approach it this way..." I think the key thing is to make sure you're knowledgeable about YOUR place, whether that's your old home or new home. - LWS

- I mentioned this in the application portion, but again: if you said that you would be working in a certain administration and that candidate or party did not win their election, be prepared to answer what you will do (either instead or regardless of who is in power). This came up for many of the scholars that applied before the November 2016 election and interviewed that following February. -BB
- Research Harry Truman's life, his successes, and in particular, his stance on any issue that you might mention in your application. For example, if you talk about healthcare, you will definitely need to know about President Truman's work on MediCare. Most University Libraries, public libraries, or the like should have a copy of David McCullough's biography on Harry Truman, and you can always use the index to find and locate what information you're looking for.
 - As someone who worked on politics in Arkansas, my school's rep was adamant about me knowing the nature of J William Fulbright's relationship with President Truman. I also worked in Democratic politics, so I researched the Dixiecrat movement and how it affected Truman's reelection and political bids.
 - If you are a member of the Armed Forces, becoming acquainted with the fact that Truman desegregated the military could be useful information for your interview. You truly never know if they will ask you a question on Truman's life!
 - You may or may not get a question about Truman (I didn't). But if you can work a mention about him into one of your responses, that is an excellent touch. DW
 - I would just caution against pure flattery here. Don't go overboard and try to flex all your Truman knowledge because that will not impress your panel. - JA
- **Choosing your attire for the interview:** my school told me that I needed a suit for the interview and I had to get my outfit approved by my school's rep, but most situations are not that intense. The goal is for the panel to forget what you were wearing after you walk out of the room. However, if you are a member of the Armed Forces and wear your uniform, choose a particular lapel pin that reflects your sass/personality/experiences (say, that of your chosen political affiliation), it might come up in the interview and you might have to talk about why you made the decision to wear that uniform/pin/whatever, etc.
 - I know that the veterans I interviewed with were questioned about why they decided to wear their uniforms. - RA
 - I'm in the armed forces and chose not to wear my uniform. When asked, I said I didn't want it to be a barrier to the panel in assessing my individuality and felt that I could speak more freely without being in uniform. - JA
 - There are also horror stories of years' past where finalists had to sit on a couch that sank further and further down as the interview progressed, or had to sit at uncomfortable tables or, with the sun in their face, or other things like that.
 - Who knows how much of this is intentional or even true, though. - JA
 - I was given the advice that you should look like you just won your election to the US House or Senate, in both style and demeanor (and whatever that means to you personally). I found it very empowering to walk in with a blazer on, feeling like I already accomplished something. - BB

- It is possible that they will ask you to comment on current events in your interview. If you don't already read the news every day, add it to your routine. Read news highlights or listen to the NYT's The Daily so that you are familiar with current events in the weeks/months preceding your interview.
- Ending the interview, you will be asked to give a final statement. This will be one minute long and it is yours to say whatever you want. It is not ideal to end this on a joke or to touch base on a question you would like to re-answer. It would be good prep to give some thought to how you are going to make your final case.
 - I, personally, talked about my experience working in politics and the people I had met and interacted with, and ended by thanking the panel for the opportunity to interview. - RA
 - I also think it is entirely appropriate to simply thank the panel for a lively, engaging conversation (if that was the case) and for taking the time to speak with you. (That's what I did - DW)
 - I told them of my internship plans for the upcoming summer that wasn't mentioned in my application. - EH

Pre-Interview Dinner (mostly written by RA)

- The evening prior to the interview, you will likely be invited to an informal dinner alongside other finalists and members of the Truman community (who will not be present at the actual interview!). Whether or not you go is entirely up to you and will have no effect on your application. Some people are travelling, and others just don't want to get into that headspace. It's your call.
- Unlike the Rhodes or Marshall scholarships, this is not a part of the interview process and the people from the Truman Scholars Association have not seen your applications, nor do they have any sway in whether or not you get the scholarship. There are rumors that if anything particularly weird happens at the dinner, it does get reported back to the foundation. - RA
 - I did go to the finalist dinner and it went fine. There was definitely a bit of posturing taking place, and it was hard to tell if the feeling that everyone was low-key sizing each other up was just in my head, but it was overall collegial. - JA
 - I had someone at the finalist dinner hear me introduce myself and turned to me saying "Oh, you must be Ryann. I looked you up on Facebook." and it was the first interaction i had with this person, who clearly viewed me as "competition" and not as someone else interested in public service. - RA
 - Without saying, this other finalist kept trying to size me and the other finalists up instead of taking the time to just talk to us. It made the space very weird. Rule number one in life and the finalist interviews is "Don't Be That Guy." - RA
 - I am still in contact with some of the finalists and scholars I chatted with at the dinner. This is an amazing opportunity to learn about very cool people that will undoubtedly do interesting work, regardless of whether they're selected. Enjoy it! - LWS

On the day of the interview: (written by RA)

- Wake up early, make sure you know the location of your interview, and are able to get there not only on time, but early. Often, if the interview is not on a college campus, they take place in federal buildings with security screenings, so allocate time for that.
- If you are staying in a hotel for the interview (which, in my experience, most finalists are), the hotel will offer a free/complimentary newspaper to its guests. Read this paper! It is often the same one that other finalists are reading and also, if Truman panelists are traveling, as well, they will be reading the same paper.
- If you are not a regular coffee drinker: do not drink caffeine the morning of your interview. If you have a morning interview, you do not want to be jittery.
- 10-15 minutes before your interview, go for a walk or do some jumping jacks. This will help you get rid of the feeling of your nerves, or at least channel it in a different way.
 - Short person hack: If normally your feet don't touch the ground in your chair, reposition and sit at the edge of your seat for a little bit and slow your breathing. Dangling legs are shaky legs and grounding your feet will help your nerves. - LWS
- Yes, you are going to be in a room all day with the other finalists for this scholarship. Please just try to relax and be respectful. I was in a room with someone who was trying to intimidate us all day, and it killed the environment. It is an honorable and good thing to be in a room with other people who also want to work in public service, and you can use this time to bond and share information.
 - The world of public service can be small. That is to say, if you posture and act terrible to others, chances are that will come back to haunt you.
 - I still keep up with folks from my regional interview that didn't go on to win the scholarship! - JA
 - Bring activities for yourself or groups. Perhaps it was our west coast vibes, but the Seattle Regional interview was a lot of card games and chilling. - LWS

The Interview (mostly from RA)

- I don't say this to be frightening, but the interview is very intense and is meant to be a combative experience. They are wanting you to defend the stances that you are taking in your application.
- If you talk about your identity in your application, they will ask you questions about that, and they might be combative. Again, this is because they want you to take a stance and defend your position. You can always talk about your personal experience or specifics, that is great and encouraged!
- They will interrupt you or cut you off. It is not a long interview and they will want to move on or want you to get to the specifics of your answer.
- If you don't know something, that is okay! You can say "I don't know," and that won't hurt you. They will move on to another question from there.
- If you are pushed into a corner or asked to defend a statement you don't agree with, admit that you are backed into a corner or disagree with the statement.

- Don't toss a question back to the panel. That is, don't ask them "well, what do you think about that question?" because they aren't the ones that are being interviewed, and again, you have a very short amount of time to make an impression.
- In my experience, I was asked questions that were related to what I wrote about in my application but not directly about the contents of my application. For example, I wrote about vote by mail in my policy proposal (based on what the state of Oregon does,) and was asked about voting access and other voting and election related policy. I wrote my personal statement about my experiences with gender discrimination and how it made me want to get engaged with politics, so I was asked about sexism and women winning public office.
- Specifics help! If you have experience working with a particular campaign, on specific research, have studied a certain issue relevant to a question, mention that work and what it taught you in relation to the question you are asked.
 - None of my panelist had experience in my line of work, so having concrete examples of my kind of work was very helpful. It also allowed concise and easy answers when they asked if XYZ was possible. - LWS
 - Tell stories! Keep a list of stories from your experience working in policy, advocacy, etc, to tell in response to questions. It helps the panelists get to know you better and it can be an effective way of reaching and making your point. -BB

Interview Questions

Some example interview questions are below. These are NOT intended to frighten you, nor are they a recitation of horror stories. We decided to include them to give you an idea of not only the content, but the style of questions. Again, these will vary WIDELY based on a number of factors: you, your panel, the content of your application, etc. Generally, I don't think your literal answers to the questions themselves matter as much as your ability to take them in stride and discuss the issues from your application in a nuanced way:

- "What makes you so special?" asked in the context of why a college junior thinks he can overhaul the absentee voting system. - JA
- "Who is the undersecretary/deputy ____ officer at the ____ department office of ____?" I don't remember the actual person, but they were trying to see if I knew the people involved in the issue area. I didn't, because I didn't have every person in DC memorized, and still don't. I don't remember how I actually answered, but clearly the fact that I didn't know wasn't a problem. - JA
- "If you could tell Angela Merkel to tell one thing to President Trump during her meeting with him today, what would it be and why?" - RA
 - Note: I think they asked this question because my application was very, very US-politics and policy focused. They wanted to "test" me on my knowledge of international politics.
- "You wrote about vote by mail for your policy proposal, what would you say are the pros and cons of mandatory voting?" - RA
- "You say you want to run for office. How are you going to stay away from the lobbyists?" - RA

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- “Other than sexism, what is preventing women from winning elected office?” - RA
- “Do you have any interest in coming back to live in (home state)?” - DW
- “Who is going to win the US Senate seat for your state’s upcoming election? Why?” - EH
- “What makes you qualified to do any of this? Why you?” - EH
- Before my interview, it had recently come to light that my university (Georgetown) had, effectively, survived near-bankruptcy in the 19th century by selling 272 slaves in 1838. The first question I received during my interview was, “If you were President of Georgetown, how would you honor the lives of the 272 people sold by your university?”
 - More generally, if your university has recently made news, be prepared to talk about it.
 - And I am sure you will be reminded to look at who is on your interview panel. I happened to have one of the former presidents of my university on my panel and he asked questions about current events on campus. - JE
- How did [religious identity] shape my beliefs and childhood - LWS
- What is an example of good design and crippling design (my application was about public space and equitable urban design) - LWS
- I spoke about creating “value shift” through art and design, as well as direct service versus systems changed, they asked me to elaborate more on both of those concepts - LWS
- What did I learn from past work on a construction site and at a conservative think tank (as a liberal) - LWS
- “Do you think we’re at a turning point?” in relation to racism and equity - LWS

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- Can offer support/perspectives on: emerging fields/non traditional public service career

Have questions about the Truman Scholarship in general? Fill out the survey on [this page](#) of the FWD:S website, and we can try to connect you with a current scholar or alum who can answer them!

Have questions about the specific contents of this document? Reach out to us at fwdscholars@gmail.com.

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