

Henry Dyson, Director

## Truman Scholarship Letters of Recommendation

Thank you for writing a letter for one of U-M's applicants to the Truman Scholarship. This award is for future leaders in public service careers, understood broadly as working for the public good in a wide variety of career fields. The Truman Scholarship seeks outstanding applicants who will be leaders in their fields and "change-agents" for particular issues or causes. There are three primary selection criteria:

- intellectual/academic preparation,
- leadership potential,
- and commitment to service.

Applicants are asked to seek three letters of recommendation that each address one of these criteria, although they are admittedly intertwined and many letters will ultimately address more than one. Please review the advice below that pertains to the letter you have been asked to write. If you are uncertain which letter you are writing, please discuss this with the applicant.

### **The Intellectual and Academic Preparation Letter**

Question #9 on the Truman application asks what issues the applicant hopes to address in their public service career. Question #10 asks for the three most significant courses the applicant has taken so far to learn about these issues and to prepare to be a change-agent regarding them. Question #11 asks what graduate degree and specific graduate programs the applicant hopes to attend with the support of the Truman Scholarship to complete their training and begin working on these issues. The applicant should discuss with you their answers to these questions. ***As the intellectual/academic letter writer, your primary task is to discuss the applicant's preparation to flourish in their chosen graduate program and, more importantly, to be a thought-leader on these issues.*** You should support your prediction of their future success with specific examples, if possible, of the applicant's depth of understanding, appreciation for nuance, ability to see these issues from different perspectives, creativity of insights and/or problem-solving, specific technical aptitudes, and general academic skills.

### **The Leadership Potential Letter**

Questions #2-6 on the Truman application allow applicants to list their various curricular and co-curricular activities. In Question #7 the applicant is asked to tell a story from ***one*** of these activities that best illustrates their future leadership potential. Applicants should discuss this story with you and you should comment on it in your letter. This is, admittedly, a particular quirk of the Truman application and you may do so in either of two ways. If you have direct experience with the applicant in the activity discussed in their story, you may choose to make this the primary focus of your letter. If not, you may choose to focus first on the leadership skills and character-traits that you have ***directly observed*** in your interactions with the applicant and then comment on then comment on the story in their leadership essay as consistent with what you have directly observed. If you have questions or concerns about this, please feel free to contact me directly at [hdyson@umich.edu](mailto:hdyson@umich.edu) to discuss them. In either case, ***as the leadership letter writer your primary task is to contextualize the applicant's activities as evidence of their demonstrated leadership potential in their future field.*** The activity discussed in the leadership essay may or may not be directly related to the issues the applicant hopes to address in their future career. In

either case, you should support your prediction of their future impact with specific examples of transferrable skills and character-traits that will make them successful leaders.

### **The Commitment to Service Letter**

As with the leadership essay, Question #8 asks the applicant to describe a “recent, particularly satisfying community service activity.” The applicant should discuss this story with you and you should comment on it in your letter. This is, admittedly, a particular quirk of the Truman application and you may do so in either of two ways. If you have direct experience with the applicant in the activity discussed in their story, you may choose to make this the primary focus of your letter. If not, you may choose to focus first on the service activities you have *directly observed* in your interactions with the applicant and then comment on the story in their service essay as consistent with what you have directly observed. If you have questions or concerns about this, please feel free to contact me directly at [hdyson@umich.edu](mailto:hdyson@umich.edu) to discuss them. In either case, ***as the service letter writer your primary task is to provide the reader with an assessment of the applicant’s character, concern for others, and commitment to service.*** The activity discussed in the service essay may or may not be directly related to the issues the applicant hopes to address in their future career. In either case, you should support your prediction of their commitment with specific examples of their care and concern for others, their willingness to act upon or even sacrifice their own self-interest for the sake of their stated values or commitment to a community.

The applicant should notify you whether or not they have waived access to their letter under the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act and provide you with a link to submit your letter to ONSF. Letters will be used to select U-M’s four nominees for the Truman Scholarship – a highly competitive process and significant accomplishment in its own right. Applicants are allowed to submit more than three letters for this process. If the applicant is selected as a nominee, ONSF will include three letters with the University’s nomination packet while any additional recommendations will be referenced in the University’s nomination letter as reasons for the candidate’s selection as a nominee.

Again, we thank you for taking the time to write on behalf of this outstanding U-M student. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns about the letter writing process at [hdyson@umich.edu](mailto:hdyson@umich.edu). Any questions about the submission process can be sent to [onsf.applications@umich.edu](mailto:onsf.applications@umich.edu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henry Dyson', written in a cursive style.

Henry Dyson, PhD  
Director  
Office of National Scholarships and Fellowships