



Lyons

## BSC student named 2005 Truman Scholar

Birmingham-Southern student Webb Lyons of Centre is a 2005 Harry S. Truman Scholar.

The announcement was made March 29 by the Truman Scholarship Foundation of Washington, D.C.

Lyons, a junior political science major, was one of only 75 students from 65 U.S. colleges and universities selected for the prestigious honor.

Truman Scholars receive \$30,000 awards—up to \$15,000 each year for the first two years of graduate study. Scholars also receive priority admission and supplemental financial aid at several graduate institutions nationwide, in addition to leadership training, career and graduate school counseling, and special internship opportunities with federal agencies.

The scholarships are awarded on the basis of merit to junior-level students at four-year colleges and universities who have extensive records of public and community service, are committed to careers in government or elsewhere in public service, and have outstanding leadership potential and communication skills.

Lyons plans to pursue a public service career as an advocate against social injustice after completing a doctorate in government and social policy. At Birmingham-Southern, he is active in the Leadership Studies and Service Learning programs and Young Democrats.

“My goal is to work for a city or government agency or administration that advocates against social injustice and one day possibly run for public office,” said Lyons of his future plans.

More than 600 students from 299 colleges and universities were nominated for 2005 Truman Scholarships. Some 237 finalists from 152 institutions were interviewed in early March by regional selection panels, which typically included a university president, a federal judge, a distinguished public servant, and a past Truman Scholarship winner, among others.

Lyons interviewed in Nashville, Tenn., on March 11, along with 11 other finalists from Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Among his panel of interviewers was the president of the University of Memphis, the deputy governor of Tennessee, two federal judges, and a representative from the Stennis Center for Public Service at

Mississippi State University.

Truman officials commented that they were “blown away” by Lyons’ interview.

“I had several mock interviews with faculty to prepare, as well as did all I could on my own, such as understanding current events, knowing all I could about my policy project, and being articulate about my goals,” said Lyons.

“I knew it would be a challenging and intense interview, but felt I was prepared. I don’t think our faculty could have prepared me any better than they did.”

Following the 20-minute interview, Lyons tried to do what he could to help future Truman Scholar finalists from Birmingham-Southern.

“I was the last one to interview,” he explained. “As I left, I tried to remember what I was asked, but I couldn’t. About 30 minutes later, it came back to me. I knew that it would benefit future finalists, even though no two interviews are the same. So I went to a coffee shop and sat down and wrote out as much as I could remember, and, interestingly, most of it came back to me.”

A committee of BSC faculty picked the college’s Truman Scholar nominees based on those students who were interested in a Truman Scholarship and whose life goals matched those set out by the Truman Foundation. The students selected worked throughout the fall semester on the application, which consisted of 15 questions, including several essay questions; three letters of recommendation; and a policy proposal.

“This has been the biggest part of my life since the end of last September,” noted Lyons. “The most difficult and arduous part of the process was putting together the application. It really was a group effort with the faculty involved and with Jeanne Jackson (director of BSC’s Leadership Studies Program in the Hess Center for Leadership and Service and the college’s faculty advisor for the Truman Scholars program).

“The application process also requires that you come up with your own policy. The policy must have a legitimate opposing side and address a good number of individuals.”

Lyons’ policy dealt with developing a living wage ordinance for Birmingham, which proposes raising the minimum wage in the city to \$8.15 an hour so that no working individual would have to pay more than 30 percent of his or her income on housing.

“I found it would affect more than 10,000 people in Birmingham,” he said. “The benefits far outweigh the negatives.”

The Truman Scholarship Foundation was established in 1975 by Congress as the official memorial to the nation’s 33rd president.