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Eagan Heath is a Truman Scholar

Summary: Eagan Heath, UMM junior from Idaho, is among 65 Truman Scholars named this year. Heath will be awarded a \$30,000 scholarship for graduate or professional school tuition to prepare for a career in public service.

(March 28, 2007)-From high school “truant” turned history buff, from organic farmer to college dropout and, finally, to scholar and college newspaper editor-in-chief, Eagan Heath is proof that one can succeed along with a little help from one’s friends. A junior from Idaho at the University of Minnesota, Morris, Heath is among 65 Truman Scholars named this year. Heath will be awarded a \$30,000 scholarship for graduate or professional school tuition to prepare for a career in public service.

Heath is first to admit that there was more than a little help from his friends and is quick to thank those who helped him achieve this prestigious national award. “This is all about Paula (O’Loughlin, UMM political science faculty), Tom (McRoberts, director of continuing education and regional programs), Chris Butler (English faculty)” and Heath’s peers who assisted him with the arduous application. “I didn’t think of myself as a public service person,” said Heath, who said he wasn’t a good student in high school, dropped out of Idaho State University and worked awhile in the Twin Cities before coming to UMM. “I hated history until my senior year in high school,” said Heath, who is now a history major. “Mr. Francis (his high school history teacher) changed that by taking a critical thinking approach to history instead of reciting dates.”

His family is always supportive, said Heath, whose father teaches junior high students in Idaho.

Those who helped him through the application process return the kudos.

“We’re very proud of Eagan,” said O’Loughlin, who is an associate professor of political science at UMM and recent recipient of her own accolade, a Horace T. Morse—University of Minnesota Alumni Association Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education. “His success with the Truman illustrates what we who teach at UMM already know – our students are among the best in the country and they are and will be the leaders in making our world ever better.”

“Eagan is a very worthy recipient, an able and outstanding campus leader,” said McRoberts. “He had an excellent application we were confident that he would do well in the interview.”

The application process, begun in fall of 2006, included a five-page application, various essays “that needed to be concise and tight,” said Heath, a policy proposal, online research and rigorous interviews.

During his interview by a panel comprised of a law professor, an historian, the chief justice of the Colorado Supreme Court, a Truman Foundation representative and others, Heath was asked, for example, “Should President Bush pardon Scooter Libby?” or what the late President Truman would think of [Heath’s] policy proposal.

Heath, who, as a first-year student at UMM, wrote editorials for the campus student newspaper, became the newspaper's news editor as a sophomore and is this year its editor-in-chief. This helpful progression – learning how the college institution works via news interviews and “opining about things” – assisted him in learning how to debate and hold his own, said Heath. He writes a weekly editorial for the student paper as well as reads *The Nation* and *Harper's*, along with a number of other journals.

Heath hopes to explore other options prior to attending graduate school. After that he'll look at Columbia, Princeton or Yale.

“In some ways what makes me proudest though was not Eagan getting the award but the experience of watching helpful faculty and a group of other very busy student leaders making time in their schedules right before spring break to help Eagan prepare for the interviews. Such help would only come at UMM. It was very special and why I say, to paraphrase Hilary Clinton, ‘it takes a college,’” added O’Loughin.

To Heath there's another lesson learned as well: “UMM can compete with the best schools,” he said. “I encourage top students or even those who are uncertain about their accomplishments to apply. Take it seriously. Even if you don't win, the process is very valuable.” Had he not received a Truman award, he said, “I'd still have a much better sense of what I'm doing after college than before. The process is well worth it.”

The Truman Scholarship Foundation was established by Congress in 1975 as the federal memorial to the 33rd President. The Foundation awards scholarships for college students to attend graduate school in preparation for careers in government or elsewhere in public service. The activities of the Foundation are supported by a special trust fund in the U.S. Treasury.

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