

# Cracking the Code

## How to bag the big awards

By Michael Gale

Michael Gale, two-time Florida College Student of the Year finalist, is no stranger to the awards podium. Over the last year, in addition to his kudos in the Student of the Year competition, Gale was one of only five students in the country to win both the Morris K. Udall award—a national award earmarked for students dedicated to a career in the environmental sector—and the Harry S. Truman award—one that focuses on students dedicated to public service. But Gale has cracked the code for achieving big. “The challenge with these applications is communication,” he says. “Many are extremely qualified for these awards. The challenge is to communicate that qualification.” Listen up for Gale’s wisdom about how to score in the big awards programs.

The first step to winning is to get over any anxiety you have about applying for these awards. Yes, 600 to 800 people apply for the Truman and only 75 win, and 500 apply for the Rhodes and they only accept 32, but someone has to win these awards, and it could be you.

My life goal was to win a Morris K. Udall scholarship. One day, while working in the Student Government office at the University of Florida, a friend asked, “How is your Truman application coming?” Five months later, I won both the Morris K. Udall and the Harry S. Truman scholarships. No one would have thought that an extremely flawed, TV-addicted zoology student from West Virginia could have won either of these awards, but again, someone has to win them.

Use the advisors, faculty, and resources available at your institution to research

these awards and find which one is right for you. Most international fellowships are available to any area of study, while domestic programs usually have specific focuses. Each program has a faculty representative that you need to meet. You can get their contact information from the scholarships’ web sites or



from your honors program or advising office. The advisor will help you decide if a program is right for you, and the process itself will be more successful if you have a positive and open relationship with the faculty representative.

After picking a program, thoroughly research their web site to learn about the application process before you start the essays. The scholarship institutions give a ridiculous amount of information about what they’re looking for in applicants. Understanding this

will help you shape your responses to communicate that you are what these panels are looking for. Now that you have gone through the grueling research process (trust me... the boring hours at the computer in the FAQ section will be worthwhile), start working on the application.

I spent a significant part of winter vacation on the Truman application. I turned it in on my first day back, and it was terrible. First drafts always are. It eventually got better. Read over the application and think back to what criteria these selection panels are using. Copy down the questions on a separate sheet of paper and begin editing! Be sure to have a copy of your resume handy and maybe some personal statements from other applications as reference.

The selection panels are interested in the passions that drive you to serve and the energy that fuels you to learn. If you don’t know what these are, then you have no chance of answering the questions.

Have your professors and advisors read over it. Find students or alumni at your school who may have won these awards, and use them as proofreaders and as a support system throughout the process. Don’t be frustrated if no one from your school has ever won or applied. These programs select scholars from an array of public institutions. The Rhodes Commission is very up front about selecting from institutions that have never had a Rhodes Scholar before.

If you’re selected for an interview, then congratulations! Keep working on your personal development agenda and practice

interviewing. Regularly read a good newspaper (e.g., *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, etc.) to keep up on current events and issues. Also, make sure you know the issues within your particular field. A passionate knowledge of your field will take you far in the interview.

Once you get an interview, your school will become excited about your existence, so use that to your advantage. Arrange mock interviews through the faculty representative or honors program. I suggest finding someone with a communication background to serve on the mock panel to provide communication-specific critiques.

Even if you aren’t selected, you’ll have had an amazing personal experience that will help shape your lifestyle and goals forever. Don’t ever beat yourself up over not winning, even if you made it to the interview.

Most of these programs are in the name of some fantastic individual. Be inspired by the living legacies that these programs were designed to carry on. Good luck. 🍀

### Are You Up for the Hunt?

These awards also are big game in the scholarship hunt. Following Gale’s tips can help you take one or more home.

**Barry Goldwater:** up to \$7,500 awarded to sophomores or juniors in math and all sciences and engineering.

[www.act.org/goldwater](http://www.act.org/goldwater)

**Gates Cambridge Scholarship:** for graduate study in any field at the University of Cambridge, England.

[www.gates.scholarships.cam.ac.uk](http://www.gates.scholarships.cam.ac.uk)

**George J. Mitchell:** award for American post-graduates to pursue on year of study at institutions of higher learning in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Open to all fields of study.

[www.us-irelandalliance.org/scholarships.html](http://www.us-irelandalliance.org/scholarships.html)

**Marshall:** open to all fields for study at any university in the United Kingdom. Students must be under age 26, preferably single.

[www.marshallscholarship.org](http://www.marshallscholarship.org)

**Rotary:** for upperclassmen who plan to study abroad and possess the qualities to be a strong “ambassador of goodwill.” Academic year and short-term ambassadorial scholarships available.

Contact your local Rotary Club for more information



See more of Gale’s tips and scholarship suggestions at [www.floridaleader.com](http://www.floridaleader.com)