NIU’s Student Lincoln Laureate has sights set on public service

DeKalb, Ill. — Samie Chaudhry is a walking advertisement for a daily planner.

The Northern Illinois University senior is scheduled to graduate in May with a bachelor of science degree with a double major in political science and geography. His grade point average in rigorous honors courses is 3.97. And throughout college he has juggled a dizzying array of extracurricular activities—from tutoring high school students to serving as the undergraduate representative on a search committee for a new NIU dean.

The 22-year-old from west-suburban Bartlett also has been working for months on an honors thesis analyzing the role of U.S. domestic politics in F-16 fighter jet sales to Pakistan over a 30-year span.

How does he manage his time? “The key is keeping a planner,” laughs Chaudhry, “and actually using it.”

The hard work, dedication and organization have generated numerous awards and honors, but none more prestigious than the most recent. Chaudhry has been named as the 2007 Student Lincoln Laureate at NIU.

The Student Lincoln Laureate is an annual honor reserved for the top senior from each of the state’s public and private four-year colleges and universities. The award recognizes excellence in both curricular and extracurricular activities.

“Samie is an extraordinary young man, who through his work within and beyond the classroom has demonstrated academic excellence, diligence, leadership, concern for others and strong character,” says NIU Political Science Chair Christopher Jones, who nominated Chaudhry for the honor.

“He possesses outstanding writing, research, analytical and oral communication skills,” adds Jones, a leading national security scholar and award-winning teacher. The professor is so impressed with his student that he plans to involve him in an upcoming research project.

“In my 17 years of teaching at Binghamton University, Syracuse University, Whittier College and NIU, Samie is among the top five undergraduates that I have encountered,” Jones says.

The oldest son of Shamshad and Salim Chaudhry, immigrants who left Pakistan in the late 1970s to make a new life in the United States, Samie originally planned to become a high school history teacher. But during his freshman year, he became fascinated with political science and geography after taking courses in those subject areas.

Following graduation next spring, he plans to attend graduate school, seeking a master’s in political science with an emphasis on South Asia. Eventually he wants to work in public service, either in a governmental post or with a non-profit organization.

“I’m fascinated with what’s happening in such countries as India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Afghanistan,” says Chaudhry, who speaks the languages of Punjabi and Urdu, the latter being the official language of Pakistan. “It’s an important region of the world that has been largely overlooked in the past but will be very important in the future.”

His professors see no limits to what Chaudhry can accomplish.

“Samie is able to quickly understand complicated ideas and phenomena and analyze and assess their merits against a broad knowledge base,” says History Professor Eric Jones, who has helped Chaudhry shape his post-graduation plans.
He’s also very witty, engaging and positive,” he adds. “It is easy to see why students look up to him, why he deserves this award and how much potential he possesses.”

Chaudhry and his fellow Lincoln Laureates will gather in Springfield on Saturday, Oct. 28, for a recognition ceremony in the House of Representatives of the Old State Capitol. Chaudhry used one of his tickets for the ceremony to invite a friend, Michael Celis of Chicago, a political science major who finished as first finalist for the NIU Lincoln Laureate this year.

Other finalists for the NIU Student Lincoln Laureate were:

- Rebecca Edwards of Aledo (political science and philosophy)
- Reena Greene of Bloomingdale (elementary education)
- Joseph Park of Winfield (physical therapy)
- Michael Piccinelli of Henry (political science)
- Robin Rockey of Rockford (journalism)
- Kathryn Rosellini of Oak Lawn (mathematics education)
- Jericho Winter of Prophetstown (geography)
- Jody Yednock of West Chicago (probability and statistics)
- Marie Zidek of Orland Park (kinesiology)

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