

George Joseph Cooper Scholarship Essay

Jordan Geist

I am honoured to have been chosen as the 2022 recipient of the George Joseph Cooper Scholarship and would like to sincerely thank the scholarship committee and Ottawa Jewish Community Foundation.

I am grateful to have been raised as an active participant in the Ottawa Jewish community, attending OJCS, CBB of Ottawa, and Torah High. which instilled in me in strong Jewish and leadership values. My leadership journey began after participating in March of the Living with the Ottawa Jewish community in 2014. The trip sparked a decade of community involvement and Holocaust education advocacy. Following my return from the trip, I served as a member of Ottawa's March of the Living Board of Directors and contributed to Holocaust education programming throughout the community.

When I went to the University of Waterloo to study engineering, I was determined to continue my Holocaust education work and joined the Holocaust Education Week committee adjacent to Hillel. I chaired the committee the following year as part of my increasing involvement in Hillel. I led a team of students from both Waterloo and Wilfred Laurier, planned walkthrough exhibits at both schools, hosted speakers and arranged a multi-faith dinner. The week was a huge success. Our headlining event, a talk by a Holocaust survivor, attracted over 250 students who attended the talk, most of whom were not Jewish. This reflects my consistent commitment to bringing Holocaust education to the broader non-Jewish community.

One of the things that surprised me when I first arrived at Waterloo was the growing presence of Jewish students. The on-campus Hillel became a second home for me, where I made a strong group of friends. In my third year, I took on the challenge of overseeing Hillel Waterloo and Laurier at large to give back to the Waterloo Jewish community. This was incredibly challenging as most of the previous members had graduated, there was a newly appointed director, and we had no dedicated space on either campus. I worked to recruit a team of 12 students and increase engagement on campus. The initiative was a success as our Shabbat dinners went from 50 students to 200, and we held a Bar Mitzvah Bash event that attracted over 300 students.

One of my most important and gratifying initiatives as the leader of Hillel was the launch of multi-faith Shabbat dinners. This was incredibly rewarding since it increased my community engagement and enabled me to share my faith with my non-Jewish peers. Further, I am ecstatic that my work towards building a Jewish student space on campus continues at Waterloo.

This year, I returned to Ottawa to continue my studies in law school. I joined the Jewish Law Student Association (JLSA) and pitched a Holocaust education-related event. Partnering with Osgoode's JLSA, I planned an International Holocaust Remembrance Day event which featured participants from every Ontario law school as well as multiple deans, Toronto Mayor John Tory, Professor Irwin Cotler and Eva Meisels, a holocaust survivor.

I am thankful for the generous George Cooper Scholarship Award, which will help me continue pursuing my legal education and grant me the time to continue giving back to the Ottawa Jewish community. Next year, I will continue my leadership within the JLSA, serving as its VP External, and I plan to continue my involvement within the broader Jewish community.

Todah Rabah,
Jordan Geist