

G. J. COOPER SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY

Hannah Srour

I am greatly honoured to have been chosen as the 2019 recipient of the G. J. Cooper Scholarship, and would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the scholarship committee and the Ottawa Jewish Community Foundation.

The Ottawa Jewish community holds a special place in my heart. My formative Jewish experiences are all closely tied to our community in Ottawa, where I was born and raised. From partaking from a young age in weekly Shabbat services at the Ottawa Torah Centre, summers spent at Camp Gan Israel of Ottawa, three days a week at the Ottawa Talmud Torah Afternoon School, and, later, to my high school years at the Ottawa Jewish Community School, I have been instilled with a love of Jewish community.

When I began my Bachelor's degree at McGill University in 2015, my Ottawa Jewish education equipped me with the confidence to face the challenges that Jewish students regularly meet on campus. As a first-year university student, the task of integrating into a new Jewish community was at first daunting. I nevertheless made efforts to attend weekly Shabbat programming, at both Hillel and Chabad on Campus, and other ongoing Jewish events. By the end of my first year, when the time came to select an area of study, the decision to pursue majors in English and Jewish Studies seemed the natural choice.

Like many universities across North America, a number of McGill's student organizations have faced accusations of anti-Semitism. In my second year of studies, it came to my attention that the Jewish Studies department did not have an active student association; I believed a specifically Jewish voice should have a place within the frameworks of student government. I thus set in motion the re-establishment of the Jewish Studies Students' Association, of which I served as President for two years.

During this time, I also had the opportunity to participate in the Jewish Studies aca-

demic community. In February 2018, I was invited to present a paper entitled “Jewish Women and Personal Prayer in Eastern Europe: A Case Study on Jewish Reading Experiences” at the Undergraduate Judaic Studies Conference at Yale University. The research I conducted was a material study of a set of *machzorim* that belonged to my great-grandmother. I was invited once again in February 2019, this time to present a paper on the poetic works in Leonard Cohen’s *Book of Mercy*. Undertaking these initiatives has immeasurably reaffirmed my commitment to the Jewish community.

I cannot even begin to express the positive impact the G. J. Cooper Scholarship has already had in furthering my studies and academic pursuits since beginning my Master of Information at the University of Toronto this September. In providing me with invaluable aid in pursuing my studies, the Scholarship has granted me the time to continue building community in conjunction with my academic interests. I have recently begun volunteering my time at the Ekstein Holocaust Resource Library, which maintains an extensive collection of published materials pertaining to the Holocaust. Moreover, in my coursework I have sought out opportunities to incorporate my background in Jewish Studies by pursuing research on Jewish libraries and archives.

I would like to extend, once again, my gratitude to the scholarship committee, the Ottawa Jewish Community Foundation, and the Ottawa Jewish community more broadly for providing me with opportunities and for investing in my future.

Hannah Srour
2019 G. J. Cooper Scholarship Recipient