

## **George Cooper Scholarship**

I am honoured to be the recipient of the 2026 George Cooper Scholarship. Receiving this award will have a profound impact on my academic journey and strengthen my ability to contribute meaningfully to Ottawa's Jewish community.

Growing up in Ottawa's Jewish community has shaped my identity in the most fundamental ways. It instilled in me a deep appreciation for Jewish culture, tradition, and values, while fostering a strong sense of belonging that continues to guide both my personal and professional life.

I have been fortunate to spend my life immersed in this community, from attending Hillel Academy/OJCS and Yitzhak Rabin High School to working and volunteering with organizations such as the Soloway Jewish Community Centre (SJCC), Jewish Family Services (JFS), Temple Israel Religious School (TIRS), and Hillel Ottawa. The time I spent learning, working, and volunteering within these institutions shaped the person I am today.

Throughout my undergraduate degree, I remained actively involved in Jewish campus life by attending weekly Shabbat dinners hosted by Hillel and Chabad. These gatherings provided a sense of community, allowed me to reconnect with old friends, build new friendships, and deepen my connection to Jewish life.

One experience that was particularly meaningful was developing and participating in the 2024 L'Dor V'Dor Intergenerational Dialogues project, which brought together Jewish college and university students with Jewish seniors to discuss topics ranging from aging and family to identity and relationships. The conversations reinforced the importance of preserving and strengthening intergenerational connections within our community while reminding me of the value of listening to and learning from others' experiences.

Developing this program also demonstrated the incredible strength of our community. From the moment I pitched the idea, I was met with encouragement and support from leaders across Ottawa's Jewish community, whose guidance and contributions made the project possible. Their willingness to invest in a student's vision inspired me to continue finding new ways to contribute while supporting others in bringing their own ideas to life.

Today, that same commitment is reflected in both my academic and professional aspirations. As a graduate student in the Clinical Psychology MA–PhD program at the University of Ottawa, I have dedicated my career to understanding prejudice and promoting mental health. My research focuses on antisemitism and the psychological processes that sustain it, with the goal of developing evidence-based approaches to reduce prejudice and improve the well-being and

safety of Jewish communities in Canada. It is especially meaningful to me that I can dedicate my research to understanding and addressing an issue that directly affects the community that has shaped my life.

In the 2026–2027 academic year, I am honoured to serve as the incoming Graduate Representative for Hillel Ottawa. In this role, I hope to strengthen connections among Jewish graduate students and support Hillel's mission of fostering a vibrant, welcoming, and resilient Jewish community on campus.

Thank you once again for selecting me as the recipient of the 2026 George Cooper Scholarship. Your generosity is an investment not only in my education but also in the work I hope to continue doing in service of our community. I am sincerely grateful for your support.

Sincerely,

Aidan Kaplan