

GJ Cooper Essay

By Lindsay Cogan

It is with utmost gratitude that I accept the George Joseph Cooper Scholarship for the 2024 year. Ottawa became the most amazing home to me as I completed my undergraduate degree at Carleton. The Ottawa Jewish community is truly a special one, and I am so fortunate to have been so welcomed here.

Having grown up going to Jewish day school in Winnipeg, the importance of the Jewish community has always been central to my identity and the values I hold. It is because of the Winnipeg community, my family, and my parents that I am such a proud Jewish woman and determined to keep advocating for Jews wherever I go.

As soon as I started at Carleton, I was beyond excited to get involved with Hillel and the Chabad Student Network in order to find new roots, because I moved to Ottawa knowing nobody. Four years later I am confident to say I have met lifelong friends because of the Jewish student organizations here.

The community I found through Hillel has been essential to my success in advocacy. I faced several instances of antisemitism in my first year of university, which was particularly difficult as my entire first year of university was online. However, I was able to turn this frustration into action, and I ended up publishing an article in Carleton's student newspaper on the need for a more comprehensive antisemitism policy at the school. Following this, I worked closely with the Vice President Equity and Diversity in the Carleton University Student Association (CUSA) to make sure in their documents concerned with antisemitism, that the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition was used, which is the same definition used by the Government of Canada.

In a very classic public policy student fashion, I took just about every opportunity to engage with Jewish advocacy during my time at Carleton. I served in the positions of VP Social for Israel on Campus Ottawa and then President of Hillel Ottawa, I was a StandWithUs Fellow where I was awarded the Roberta Seid Award for Courage and Leadership, I also participated in the CJPAC Fellowship in my second and third years of university respectively.

I very quickly realized that I was seen as a leader in the Jewish student community, and I made a consistent effort to be present at events, so that new event attendees would know at least one person and feel welcomed into the community.

Through these various positions, I engaged with many of my peers both Jewish and non-Jewish on topics ranging from middle eastern geopolitics to Jewish cultural and religious practices. Some advocacy responsibilities were tougher than others, particularly speaking at the CUSA board meeting about BDS this past April. While it wasn't always fun, it was always important for me to be vocal about preserving a safe and welcoming environment for Jewish students on campus.

I am currently spending my summer working as a Junior Policy Analyst for Canada's Special Envoy for Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism, and being able to continue working in a Jewish space, from a policy angle is incredibly rewarding. Campus is certainly not the easiest place to be as a Jewish student right now. I am hopeful that my efforts, whether they have been through the various organizations I affiliated with, my involvement at Carleton, or working in the Special Envoy's office, have had some positive contribution to the welfare of Jewish students in Canada.

In the 2024-2025 school year, I will be attending the University of Cambridge to pursue an MPhil in Environmental Policy. The funds from this scholarship have been incredibly helpful in reducing the financial burden of my tuition and living expenses for next year. Being able to attend Cambridge is honestly a dream come true for me, and it is not lost on me what a privilege it is to be able to do so.

I could not have accomplished everything I have during my time at Carleton without the continued support of Ottawa's Jewish community, and its student institutions. I would once again like to offer my most sincere thanks to the scholarship committee, it is truly humbling to be recognized for my involvement and academic success over these past four years. I am going to miss Ottawa very much, but I have no doubt that I will be back!