



American Osler Society

## **The Bernadett Family International Medical Student Scholarship Award Committee Report for 2026**

### **Bernadett Family International Medical Student Scholarship Award**

The American Osler Society International Medical Student Scholarship Award was established in 2024. The Tino and Martha Bernadett Family have made a significant contribution to establish an endowment to help fund this program and the award is named in their honor. This award supports medical student research in the medical humanities. It supports two medical students matriculated in medical schools in the United States and Canada to research topics in the medical humanities using the rich collections in Institutions in the United Kingdom including rare books, archives and artifacts as well as other resources available in private and public collections in these locations.

### **Medical Humanities Research Areas Supported by This Scholarship Award**

The medical humanities is an interdisciplinary field of medicine, proposals involving the history of medicine, the application of the arts including literature, visual arts, theater, film, music along with philosophy, medical anthropology and medical sociology to medical education and practice.

### **The 2026 International Medical Student Scholarship Award**

The second year of the award excited interest from three universities resulting in three applications: one from the Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania; another from the Sheffield John Sealy School of Medicine, University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston; and the third from McGill University, Montreal.

### **The Bernadett Family International Medical Student Scholarship Award Committee**

The Committee especially thanks the Bernadett Family for their continued support of this program. For the 2025 awards the American Osler Society Award Committee consisted of Rolando Del Maestro (chair), Graham Kyle (Osler Club of London), Mario Molina, Brendan Ross and David Wolf. The Committee thanks all the applicants, mentors, writers of reference and other individuals who assisted applicants with their proposals.

### **2025 Awardee (Delayed Award)**

One of the two winners of the International Medical Student Scholarship Award, Katherine "Nikki" Sheffield from the John Sealy School of Medicine, University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston was unable to carry out her award in the summer of 2025. The Award Committee decided that if the John Sealy School of Medicine allowed Nikki Sheffield time off her medical studies to complete her project in the summer of 2026 that she would be provided with the award to do so. This was agreeable to the John Sealy School of Medicine. Nikki Sheffield informed the committee that she would like to complete her scholarship in 2026 by carrying out the same project in England as previously awarded. The Bernadett Family International Medical Student Scholarship Award Committee thanks Dr. Joan Richardson and the John Sealy School of Medicine for agreeing to fund her scholarship.

**The three recipients of the Bernadett Family International Medical Student Scholarship Award for 2026 are:**

**KATHERINE "NIKKI" SHEFFIELD, 3<sup>RD</sup> YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT, JOHN SEALY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MEDICAL BRANCH, GALVESTON**



*"I am overjoyed to be chosen for this amazing opportunity! Not only will this scholarship enable me to immerse myself in a location and culture very central to my heritage, it will also allow me to add tremendous depth to my history project on the mental health of Florence Nightingale as a revolutionary figure in health care. Furthermore, the opportunity to explore preserved archives that are 100+ years old will both strengthen my commitment to studying the history of medicine as a future physician AND satisfy nostalgia from my childhood as a confirmed bibliophile who used to search for treasures in family memorabilia in the attic. Thank you so much to the American Osler Society!"*

**Project Title: A Review of the Undigitized Personal Diary and Letters of Florence Nightingale and her Family**

**Project Goals and Objectives:**

The main goal of this project is to review otherwise unavailable primary sources of Nightingale's personal life with a specific lens toward her intrapersonal mental, emotional, and physical health and any associated external factors (for example, family dynamics). A secondary goal will be to summarize Nightingale's personal writings of specific time periods to give context to her noted breakdowns of 1850, 1856, and 1857.

**Project Abstract:** Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) was an inexhaustible author; however, digitization of her full collection is incomplete and many personal correspondence items are not available online. This project proposes to travel to Wellcome Collection, a library in London, England, to review cataloged, undigitized personal correspondence and diaries to supplement a previous AOS conference presentation on her mental and emotional breakdowns in 1850 (with suicidal ideation), 1856 (with Crimean fever), and 1857. Previous review of these breakdowns was based on two biographies written in 1942 and 1951, one of which was noted to have left out personal correspondence, potentially due to family request, and both of which were written during eras characterized by stigma against mental health conditions. It is therefore prudent to review primary sources available at Wellcome Collection to give a non-judgmental updated account of Nightingale's mental state given the current movement to destigmatize mental health problems. The main goal of this project is to review primary sources of Nightingale's personal life with a specific lens toward her intrapersonal mental, emotional, and physical health to assess for any psychiatric vulnerabilities as part of a larger project on relating historical "nervous breakdowns" to contemporary health care burnout. The secondary goal of this project is to summarize Nightingale's personal writings around the time of her noted breakdowns of 1850, 1856, and 1857 to provide additional context. Review will be of the Nightingale Collection (MSS.5471-5484, 6930 and 8991-9109), specifically personal family correspondence, childhood writings, and personal diaries categorized as "Materials held at Claydon House." (MSS.8991-9082). These sources will be assessed for Nightingale's intrapersonal vulnerabilities, and data will be categorized as "physical symptoms," "mental/emotional

symptoms,” and “associated external factors.” Data will then be integrated into previously collected data to give a full accounting of Nightingale’s psychiatric vulnerabilities based on five main chapters of her life: childhood (1820-1837), her call to nursing (1837-1851), her training (1851-1854), and her time during the Crimean War (1854-1856), and her return home (1856-onward).

**Mentor:** The overall project is being overseen by Dr. Michael Malloy, Emeritus John P. McGovern Chair in Oslerian Education at University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, TX.

**SAMIA CHERKAOUI: 2ND YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT, MCGILL UNIVERSITY**



*“I am quietly and deeply grateful to the American Osler Society for granting me the Bernadett Family International Medical Student Scholarship. This opportunity means more than I can easily express. It affirms a vision of medicine that has always guided me, where history, memory, and care are inseparable. Working in archives across the United Kingdom will allow me to engage with the lives that shaped early neurosurgical reform. These encounters will influence how I research and write, and how I will one day teach and practice. I carry this trust with care, and I will honor it through the kind of physician I am becoming.”*

**Project Title: From Skull Fracture to Safety Protocols: Sir Hugh Cairns, Neurosurgical Reform, and the Modern Legacy of Trauma Care**

**Goals of the Project**

The primary goal is to map the historical pathway linking Cairns’s clinical observations to institutional and public-health reform. Secondary goals include identifying underused archival material, reconstructing the process by which patterns of injury were conceptualized, and situating Cairns’s work within broader military and public-health contexts.

**Research Questions**

**Primary question:** How did Cairns translate clinical patterns of wartime skull fractures into neurosurgical reform and national safety protocols in the United Kingdom?

**Secondary questions:** What clinical, institutional, and governmental mechanisms enabled helmet adoption and trauma-care reorganization?

How did wartime neurosurgical experience inform the early development of trauma systems?  
Which elements of Cairns’s strategy remain relevant to modern head-injury prevention?

**Project Abstract:** During the Second World War, British military hospitals documented increasing numbers of severe head injuries among motorcycle dispatch riders. Sir Hugh Cairns, who was responsible for organising wartime neurosurgical services, quickly recognized that these injuries displayed patterned skull fractures that suggested both systematic causes and preventable mortality. Although Cairns is widely associated with promoting motorcycle helmet adoption, the historical process by which he transformed bedside observations into neurosurgical reform, trauma-care reorganisation, and national safety protocols has not been reconstructed from primary archival materials. This project proposes a four-week archival investigation in the United Kingdom to examine how Cairns generated, interpreted, and circulated wartime neurosurgical knowledge. The primary goal of this project is to map the clinical-to-policy pathway through which Cairns's observations of skull fractures informed institutional change. To achieve this, the study will review helmet-policy correspondence, unpublished wartime case summaries, neurosurgical unit reports, military memoranda, and personal papers across several UK repositories. Sources will be consulted at the Wellcome Collection, including helmet advocacy files and wartime neurosurgery notes; at the Royal College of Surgeons Archives, which hold neurosurgical training and administrative materials; at the Bodleian Libraries, containing Cairns's personal papers, notebooks, and lecture manuscripts; and at The National Archives, which preserve governmental and military documents related to trauma systems and helmet legislation. Data will be organised into thematic categories including clinical patterns, military administration, safety advocacy, and institutional reform, using the analytical framework developed in pre-departure planning. By synthesising these materials, this project will clarify how wartime neurosurgical evidence travelled between hospitals, neurosurgical centres, and military bodies, and provide a detailed reconstruction of the early development of British trauma systems. The findings will also illuminate how individual clinicians used bedside experience to influence broader public health and military structures during a period of rapid medical and institutional change.

**Mentor:** This project is developed under the guidance of an international multidisciplinary mentorship team. In the United Kingdom, Dr Jonathan Attwood (University of Oxford) provides supervision on the medical-historical dimensions of the project. In North America, I am mentored by Dr Delia Gavrus (University of Winnipeg) and Dr Thomas Schlich (McGill University), who offer historiographical and methodological support. Together, their combined expertise ensures a rigorous, well-grounded, and globally contextualized approach to the research.

**TOVA TACHAU, 1ST YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT, PERELMAN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA**



*"I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the American Osler Society for the incredible opportunity provided by the Bernadett Family International Medical Student Scholarship. This award will allow me to engage critically with the uniquely rich archives held at the Wellcome Collection, The Royal College of Surgeons of England, and the archives surrounding London to elucidate the ethical and emotional responses of medical students to cadaveric dissection in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I devoted my undergraduate and graduate education to the humanities, and I am beyond grateful to the Osler Society for continuing to support the invaluable work of humanists and historians in the field of medicine. The Bernadett Scholarship, in particular, will empower me to continue conducting literary and historical research not only in the coming summer but also throughout my medical education, as I plan to continue this project throughout the coming years. I hope to one day serve as*

*faculty at a medical school where I can incorporate the humanities and social sciences into curriculum, and this award is a crucial step in my path of further enforcing the importance of humanities research in medicine and medical education. Therefore, I must express my sincerest gratitude to the American Osler Society for funding this scholarship and supporting the future of the humanities in medicine."*

**Project Title: Behind the Doors of the Dissection Room and Between the Pages of Student Diaries: Exploring the Affective Responses of Medical Students to Dissection in 19th-Century England**

**Goals of the Project**

The goals of this project are three-fold: 1) perform a textual analysis of sixteen undigitized letters and diaries supplemented by notes of anatomy lecturers, composed across the nineteenth century in England, 2) synthesize the findings from each letter to trace the evolution in the affective responses of students to human dissection alongside three major acts of legislation—the Apothecaries Act of 1815, which standardized dissection syllabi across the country, the Anatomy Act of 1832, which solidified a legal and adequate supply of cadavers for medical schools, and the Medical Act of 1858, which codified a requirement of two years of anatomical study for a medical degree and 3) compare the reflections of nineteenth-century medical students to those analyzed by medical sociologists in the twentieth century to trace a broader evolution of emotional responses to human dissection.

**Project Abstract:** A photograph from the University of Pennsylvania in 1895 depicts a busy, windowless room, perhaps with a peculiar odor of rotting flesh mixed with cigar smoke. Seven medical students in street clothes, bowler hats, and aprons stand behind a wooden table with their hands immersed in the work of dissection. On the table lies an outstretched entanglement of muscle and bones—what was once a living human now lies exposed with skin peeled off to elucidate the complex anatomy underneath (Warner 44). Cadaveric dissection has long marked a transformative moment in the development of medical students' knowledge and authority, signaling a rite of passage that separates these trainees from the rest of society. Though such illuminating photographs were not possible in the early nineteenth century, another genre of document—student diaries and letters—provides an equally fascinating window into the emotional development of medical students in

response to the moral challenges of human dissection. This project aims to uncover the affective responses of medical students to human dissection, otherwise hidden in photographs, through a textual analysis of sixteen undigitized diaries, letters, and notes written by medical students across the nineteenth century, an era that saw significant legal reform in the institutionalization of cadaveric dissection in England. Did students develop emotional indifference to overcome the moral complexities of human dissection, as modern medical sociologists hypothesized in the twentieth century? Or did some cultivate respect for the human body through this tactile training? Did students respond to the emotional demands of dissection by practicing religion, writing to family, thinking about their future patients, or engaging in camaraderie with their fellow trainees? While existing literature has thoroughly probed the historical and archeological evidence surrounding the nineteenth-century practice of dissection, researchers have yet to explore in full these questions on the evolving effect of the medical student throughout this century when dissection grew both in importance and prevalence. As the anatomy laboratory continues to be a lynchpin of medical education today, this project aims to fill a gap in nineteenth-century research on cadaveric dissection in England and uncover the emotional transformations of medical students through the hidden stories behind the doors of the anatomy lab and between the pages of students' diaries.

**Mentor:** Dr. D. Brian Kim, Perelman School of Medicine University of Pennsylvania

### Summary

**Applications:** Over the last two years there has been 9 applications from three North American Universities, four of which were awarded. Four of the applications were from John Sealy School of Medicine, University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, four from McGill University, Montreal and one from the Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania.

**Awardees:** Two awardee winners were from McGill University and one each from the John Sealy School of Medicine, University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, and one from the Perelman School of Medicine.

**Completed Awards:** Reda Hessi completed his award in the summer of 2025 and is presently completing a manuscript to be submitted.

**Applicants per year:** There were six applications for 2025 and three for 2026. The possible reason for this decrease is the extra requirement on the 2026 application form which involved a signed statement from the applicant that no AI tutoring system was used to complete the application.

Rolando Del Maestro

Chairperson, Bernadett Family International Medical Student Scholarship Award Committee