

## Osler Medal Essay Contest Guidelines

### Advice about preparing papers:

1. Choose someone knowledgeable in the history of medicine or science to guide you while you select your topic, conduct your research, and write your paper. Your advisor should be giving you input during all stages of the process. The AAHM can assist you in choosing an appropriate advisor at your own school or another school.
2. Start thinking about your project early. Your freshman or sophomore year in medical school is a good time to begin. At that point you could identify an advisor and meet with him or her to discuss undertaking a project.
3. Choose an original research question. The question should be narrow enough to be able to answer within the page limit imposed and broad enough to be historically relevant. Possible topics might include the history of a particular disease, a medical controversy within medicine, the development of a medical specialty, the impact of a particular individual or body of research within medicine, or the development of a public health problem and the response to it. You must do a search of the historical literature to see if other papers have been written previously on the same subject. An historical literature search can be done electronically on HISTLINE, which is available for use on the National Library of Medicine website at <http://igm.nlm.nih.gov>. For a search of historical articles that may have been published in medical journals, use the MEDLINE database, also available on the same site. An historical or medical librarian would be helpful with this type of search.
4. Consider beginning your paper during a humanities course in medical school, during the summer months after the first or second years of medical school, or during an elective month. For those who might be interested, there are funds available to conduct research at various history of medicine libraries in the United States, including the New York Academy of Medicine, the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, the Archives and Special Collections on Women in Medicine in Philadelphia, the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, and the Countway Library in Boston, although you need not have funding to use these libraries. A good medical librarian would again be helpful in identifying collections locally that might be of particular use to you in your research project.
5. When writing your paper, here are some general guidelines:
  - State your research question clearly at the beginning of your paper and cite any previous studies that have been done on that particular question;
  - Organize your paper so that it moves logically from one section to another;
  - Answer the question with the best evidence you have gathered and analyze;
  - Avoid making generalizations or drawing conclusions about the evidence that cannot be adequately supported;

- Interpret the evidence without using present medical criteria to critique past medical practices (historians are less interested in whether a particular practice was "right" or "wrong" and more interested in analyzing those practices in the context of a particular time and place and in reconstructing a previous medical world and seeing it on its own terms);
- Place your subject within its historical context (for example, if your paper focuses on an individual's research on a particular disease, you would want to examine how that research fit within the medical context of the time; was it different?; was it similar?; if so, why?; was it influenced or constrained by a certain philosophical approach, by economic or institutional factors, by religion?); be careful not to see each individual as a person working in isolation to achieve a certain result;
- Your conclusion should not only state what you discovered but also discuss weaknesses in your evidence and propose new areas for investigation

### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

**What is "original research"?** Original research means scholarly investigation based on primary sources, e.g., manuscripts, correspondence, diaries, patient records, documents, as well as contemporary printed texts such as books, medical journals, and newspapers. Original research goes beyond reliance on secondary accounts of other scholars. Unusually perceptive critiques or analysis of key secondary literature, however, may be of sufficient depth and creativity as to qualify as "original research." Specifically, an elaborate "book report" or "essay review" is unlikely to be evaluated highly as original research.

**Can I use a paper written for a course or other purpose?** Yes, so long as the paper was written while you were a candidate for the M.D. or D.O. degree. The paper cannot have been published elsewhere, nor be accepted for publication in whole or in part. The paper, of course, must be your own work, with only the usual input (see below) from teachers or advisors. Work started as an undergraduate, e.g., a Senior Essay or Term Paper, must be substantially extended and revised in order to qualify.

**How will my essay be evaluated?** Your essay will be sent to the five members of the Osler Medal Essay Committee who will each evaluate it without knowing your name or your school affiliation. Each reviewer will rate your essay with a numerical score. The Committee will then discuss all the essays and develop consensus as to the winning essay and the honorable mention essay. The Committee represents the diverse interests and expertise of the AAHM membership.

### **Eligibility**

Students currently enrolled in a school of medicine or of osteopathy in the United States or Canada are eligible. However, students who are currently enrolled or have been enrolled in graduate studies of history, history of science or medicine, or of humanities or the social sciences are not eligible to compete, nor are previous recipients of the Osler Medal award.

Essays must be the exclusive work of the contestant submitting the entry. No outside help may be accepted, other than the usual advice given by teachers and the ordinary courtesies extended to all investigators by libraries, museums, archives, and similar institutions. No essay is eligible for this award if it has been published or accepted for publication anywhere, in whole or in part.

### **Judges' Criteria**

The award is given for an outstanding unpublished essay on a medico-historical topic. It may pertain either to the historical development of a contemporary medical subject or to a topic within the health sciences of a discrete period in the past. The essay must be the result of original research or show an unusual appreciation and understanding of historical problems.

### **Author's Personal Information**

Personal information must be provided on a sheet separate from the essay because judging is anonymous. This sheet should contain:

- Your full name
- The title of the essay
- The name of your medical school
- The name and address of the instructor if the essay was written as part of a course, or the name and address of an advisor or professor familiar with your work
- Address(es), phone number(s), and/or e-mail address at which you may be reached from February through April
- A copy of your current university ID or other evidence of student status. If you were awarded the M.D. or D.O. in the previous spring, please provide evidence of your graduation and a copy of your last year's university ID or other evidence of your student status at that time

### **Format and Presentation**

The essay must be typewritten or printed on a word processor, double-spaced, and with a maximum length of 9,000 including reasonable endnotes/footnotes. You must submit a word count along with your paper.

The first page of the essay must contain its title but not your name. Do not right justify; do not include your name in the headers.

### **Results**

The author of the winning essay is usually informed in late March.

Public announcement and presentation of the medal takes place at the annual meeting of the Association. The winner will be provided reasonable travel expenses to attend the meeting as well as a two-year membership in the AAHM.

Winners are encouraged to submit their essays for consideration for publication in the AAHM's official journal, the Bulletin of the History of Medicine.

One or two honorable mention awards (consisting of two-year memberships in the AAHM) may, on occasion, be awarded to authors of other outstanding essays.