

Maria Barrette
MDCM Candidate, Class of 2019

Reflective Paper of the Osler Essay Contest

Writing this essay was a valuable learning experience which helped me appreciate McGill's exceptional library resources. The resources I used most throughout my research were the online archives. Thanks to some guidance from Christopher Lyons, I was directed to the Montreal Health Archives, which gave me access to digitized copies of several editions of *The Birth Control Handbook*. In addition, I was able to access McGill yearbooks and copies of *The McGill Daily* from the 1960s through the McGill library archives. Having access to these resources allowed me to refer back to the secondary sources I was using with a richer understanding of the events being described. I enjoyed looking through these archives of publications which are staples of student life to this day. Moreover, I was thrilled to learn that both the Osler library and the Schulich Library of Science and Engineering held hard copies of several editions of *The Birth Control Handbook*.

As a researcher, I learned most from two major challenges encountered throughout the writing process. The first related to research scope. This is the first historical essay I have written, and in the beginning of my research I felt flooded with a vast amounts of interesting information. It was difficult to sift through all of the information, and to keep my attention focused on what was relevant to my main area of interest. I also struggled with keeping track of all the documents I was reading and the notes taken from these sources. I have learned that taking detailed and organized notes is crucial right from the beginning stages of research.

Overall, I had a great experience writing this essay and will take away valuable lessons in research and writing and a newly inspired perspective on women's health.