

**Masters Candidate Winner:** Cynthia Perez  
**Sponsor:** Amy McNulty (Board of Directors)  
**The Diane Flores Korwin Scholarship**

### The Truth Behind FOIA

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is a federal law that was established in 1967. This law allows the public the right to request for and access records they are seeking from any federal agency. To be honest, I knew little to nothing about the FOIA prior to starting my internship with the Division of Executive Secretariat at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). As I began working closely with HRSA's FOIA Office I was becoming exposed and familiarized with the importance and process of the FOIA, and what is expected from the government.

I was assigned my first task, which was to assist in coordinating the FOIA's Office records management project. All individuals of HRSA's FOIA team contributed to my knowledge of learning about the openness of government and its responsibility of ensuring transparency. People of the public request access to certain information, based on the questions, concerns, or general interest they may have. It is the individuals right to know how the government operates, and its responsibilities. Of course certain records are and must be protected either under one of the nine exemptions or one of the three exclusions. Nonetheless, we live in a democracy and the government must work with its people.

A year has passed, quickly I must add, that I have been working with the FOIA Office. I have found that each FOIA case is unique within its own. In all trainings I attended, communication is always a highlighted topic. Communication between the agencies and the people of their community is important and it may also determine the direction of completing the FOIA case. It is our responsibility to ensure that we are effectively communicating with the requesters, even if it seems as if we are over-communicating. We rather have the requesters believe that we care about completing their request instead of them believing that they are being ignored.

Becoming a part of the FOIA team I continuously learn new things on a day-to-day basis. Each team member brings a quality that contributes to the office and I'm not sure if they see this, but I see a strong team. All of my co-workers come together to guarantee the roles of FOIA are being met each and every day. As a young individual I have found myself to be lucky to begin my career working with the FOIA Office. It is important for individuals to know about the FOIA and their right in access to government information. To see more outreach on FOIA education is a great start and I believe the openness and transparency of our government will continue to grow.

**Undergraduate Winner:** Jordan Stearns  
**Sponsor:** Karen Finnegan Meyers  
**The Diane Flores Korwin Scholarship**

### The Information Superhighway: Benefit or Burden?

“Lickety split,” access to information is at my fingertips. Through my smart phone, tablet, or some other handheld device, the ability to access the Internet has always been organic to my daily life. Whether I am listening to music, doing my homework, communicating with people, or just playing computer games, the Internet enables me to connect to information in an instant.

Although my parents taught me that for every benefit in life there is a burden, as a college junior and a child who grew up with the Internet, rarely do I contemplate the privacy burdens associated with using my modern devices to get information in an expeditious manner. However, with every new article in the media discussing hacking, I understand that doing so, is not without privacy risks.

Through my Internet interfaces, my personal preferences are regularly shared as a consumer of information, products, and services. In once such instance, I was preparing to return to school for the start of the fall semester, I reviewed my college course schedule and the required textbooks. For the past three years, I have ordered my text books through the Internet because it is convenient and cost-efficient. Since then, my email account continues to be inundated with advertisements for similar textbooks that might be of interest to me. While I have ordered science textbooks for my pre-med classes, I am not that much of a science geek that I wish to read science textbooks in my leisure time.

Clearly, my proclivity for reading books or other consumer products and services is shared each time I place an order through the Internet. Still, for me, the efficiency benefit of online ordering outweighs my privacy concerns. Beyond my simple likes and dislikes, the privacy burden shifts when applied to other areas such as the medical field.

As a future doctor, I understand the sensitive nature of medical records, which not only contain personal privacy information, but an individual’s health background and treatment blue print. While the sharing of personal health information is protected by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, today, the medical professional utilizes the Internet to share tests and treatment methods in an expeditious manner. In practice and in theory, the Internet has revolutionized the way the medical profession shares information. One of the downsides however, is that periodically an Internet breach occurs and gives third parties unauthorized access to individuals’ private health information, who do not have a need to know. Under these circumstances, the invasion or sharing of my medical information would negate the benefit of the information sharing.

From my purchasing habits, to my current location through global positioning system tracking devices, and my medical history, my privacy or lack thereof is intertwined in every aspect of my life. Privacy resonates with me. Thus, I have to be cognizant of the types of private information that is and can be shared about me and whether the benefit of convenience outweighs the burden.