



# Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRA)

## Guidelines for Undergraduate Student Research Awards Liaison Officers

### Competition 2021/22

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## 1. Competition Deadlines

USRA to be held in:	Applications Saved as A list (submitted to NSERC no later than*)	Confirmation of Payments (Submitted to NSERC no later than 1 month after the end of the awards)
Summer 2021 (May to August)	May 1, 2021	By September 30, 2021
Fall 2021 (September to December)	October 1, 2021	By January 31, 2022
Winter 2022 (January to April)	January 15, 2022	By May 31, 2022

\* Once applications have been submitted, no substitutions will be accepted.

Applications must be submitted to NSERC by 8:00 p.m. (ET) on the deadline date. If the deadline falls on a weekend or federal holiday, applications must be submitted by the following business day.

## 2. Liaison Officer (LO) Tasks in the Administration of the USRA Program

### New LOs or other administrative staff

- Register for access to the [Grants and Scholarships Administrative Portal](#) (GSAP). The *Guidelines for USRA Liaison Officers*, your university's application quota, and competition results are posted on GSAP.
- Register to [NSERC's On-line Services](#) for access to our on-line application system.
- Submit the [Registration Form for Authorized Institutional Representatives](#) to [institution@nserc-crsng.gc.ca](mailto:institution@nserc-crsng.gc.ca) to be granted access to the USRA LO Portfolio. Once you have been given access, *Liaison Officer (Master)* will appear on the eConsole screen under *Institution Services* the next time you log on to the on-line application system.
- Assign roles to other university staff to use the USRA LO Portfolio: Master LO, LO, and LO Assistant. (See *NSERC LO Portfolio Instructions* on GSAP (General > NSERC Scholarships) for a definition of these roles.)
- Notify NSERC USRA program staff by e-mail at [usra-brpc@nserc-crsng.gc.ca](mailto:usra-brpc@nserc-crsng.gc.ca) of any changes in USRA LO staff at your institution. Provide names of previous LOs to be removed from the NSERC e-mail and contact lists and provide new LO contact information.
- Decide how your university's internal processes will work in connection with NSERC's processes.

### Pre-competition tasks

- Obtain your institution's regular quota from your university library folder in GSAP (university name > NSERC > Scholarships). This number is the guaranteed total of summer, fall, and winter awards at your institution for the competition year (April to March). Unused regular quota may be carried over to the fall and/or winter terms. Supplementary quotas for use ONLY in the fall or winter terms may be made available during the competition year. In such cases, details will be provided by e-mail.
- Set university competition deadlines. Awards may be held in the summer, fall, or winter terms. Determine if your university holds one competition for all three terms or one competition per term.
- Publicize the program, the internal deadlines, and the application procedures by referring to the NSERC website: [Resource Videos](#), the [Undergraduate Student Research Awards, Form 202](#)



(must be logged in to NSERC On-Line system), and the [Instructions for Completing an Application – Form 202](#). If your university has added requirements for applicants that are more stringent than NSERC's basic requirements, include them in all advertising material and selection committee documentation.

- Appoint members to the University USRA Selection Committee(s) and set the date(s) for the meeting(s) to select the applicants to be recommended to NSERC for a USRA.

### In-competition tasks

- Submit requests for any awards less than 16 weeks in duration to NSERC well ahead of the deadline for submitting applications. NSERC expects universities to make all efforts to offer USRAs to qualified applicants able to hold the awards for 16 consecutive weeks, full-time. Exceptions will be made for shortened work terms only in exceptional cases where the situation is beyond the control of the award holder, and where the appropriately justified request is received at NSERC before the beginning of the work term. These awards will be prorated.
  - **Temporary change for 2021/22:** Because of the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, awards will not be pro-rated this competition year. Anyone awarded a USRA will receive the full \$6,000 from NSERC and the minimum 25% top-up from the university. Universities do not need to submit requests for shortened work terms.
- If a university wishes to submit an application that does not meet the minimum GPA, they can provide a justification letter outlining why the candidate is deemed meritorious. NSERC does not reject applications based on GPA.

### End of competition tasks

- Verify eligibility of applications (refer to the Applicant Eligibility section).
- Submit applications to the USRA Selection Committee(s) using the LO Portfolio. The LO Portfolio has sorting capabilities in most columns so you may sort the applications according to your needs. You will be able to view the applications and provide read access to the University USRA Selection Committee(s). **Applications only appear in the LO Portfolio after the transcripts are attached and Part I is linked to a supervisor's Part II.**
  - Clicking on the applicant's name in the LO Portfolio will provide a PDF version of the application.
  - Save each PDF to a local system directory or memory stick and/or print it for distribution.
  - There is no capacity to download information from the LO Portfolio in Excel format.
  - **NOTE:** if a student makes a change to the form after it has been submitted to the LO by the supervisor, that data will not be reflected in the version received. To receive an up-to-date application you must return the form and ask the supervisor to re-submit.
- Hold the meeting with the University USRA Selection Committee(s). The university will assess the merit of each application the basis of the following three criteria:
  - Academic record,
  - Research aptitude, and
  - Expected quality of the training to be received.

The Selection Committee can evaluate the suitability of the supervision as part of the third criterion. As of calendar year 2020, supervisors no longer need to be NSERC grant holders.

- Use the USRA LO Portfolio in the NSERC On-line System to track progress and status of applications from your university. Refer to the *NSERC LO Portfolio Instructions*, available on [GSAP](#), for more information. **Verify that the correct start date of the award is entered in Form 202, Part II and that applicants have uploaded up-to-date transcripts.**

A candidate's status can be set according to the following list:



- List A = Approved by university, to be submitted to NSERC
- List B = Not forwarded to NSERC. Could be changed to either the A or C List before the deadline date
- List C = Not forwarded to NSERC (Not recommended, unsuccessful) and cannot be changed to either List A or B in the future.

Once you save your A list applications, the status on the applicant's portfolio and the LO Portfolio will be updated to "**Approved**" within 24 to 48 hours. If an application does not update to "Approved" after 48 hours, send an email to [schol-slo@nserc-crsng.gc.ca](mailto:schol-slo@nserc-crsng.gc.ca).

If you save an application as A list by mistake, contact [schol-slo@nserc-crsng.gc.ca](mailto:schol-slo@nserc-crsng.gc.ca).

- Complete the *2021 Recommended USRA Applicants* form (A list applications), following the recommendations made by the University USRA Selection Committee(s). Use the *2021 Recommended USRA Applicants* form found on the [GSAP](#) (General > NSERC Scholarships). NSERC requires an unranked, alphabetical list of recommended candidates on which the university will identify all Indigenous candidates. **Verify that the Indigenous applicants are identified correctly in the *Recommended Indigenous Applicants* section of the list.** Once completed, submit the form by email to [schol-slo@nserc-crsng.gc.ca](mailto:schol-slo@nserc-crsng.gc.ca).
  - *Optional:* Either in the e-mail or on the form, LOs can indicate which applications should be considered for the **Canadian Forest Sector Workforce Diversity undergraduate supplement**. Applications that list one of the targeted research subject codes or that have one of the targeted key words in the title will be considered automatically.
- Ensure that you do not exceed your university's quota. Any Indigenous applicant recommended should **not** be counted as part of your university's application quota. Substitutions for ineligible or rejected applications will **not** be permitted. If any applications have to be withdrawn after they have been submitted, substitutes will not be accepted in the same term.
- Inform all applicants of the outcome of the university's internal selection process (including those on the B and C lists).

#### Post-award tasks

- Complete the *Confirmation of Payments* form, found on GSAP in your university's library folder. These are posted approximately one month before the end of each session. The form **must indicate**:
  - the actual start and end dates for each work term,
  - the total number of weeks completed for each work term, and
  - the university portion (gross amount) of the total payment issued.
- Submit the *Confirmation of Payments* form no later than one month after the completion of each work term to NSERC's Finance and Awards Administration Division by e-mail at [scholarshipsadministration@nserc-crsng.gc.ca](mailto:scholarshipsadministration@nserc-crsng.gc.ca).

### 3. Role of NSERC in the administration of the USRA program

#### Before receipt of applications

- Reply to inquiries regarding the eligibility of the applicant and the proposed research.
- Evaluate requests to pre-approve work terms shorter than 16 weeks. **(Not required in 2021/22.)**
- Respond to inquiries regarding other program matters.



### After receipt of applications

- Verify that applications meet all requirements of the program particularly that the recipient and the research proposal are eligible, and the transcript is correct.
- Verify that the *Recommended USRA Applicants* list matches the applications received through the on-line system.
- Verify that applications received do not exceed the quota.
- Request missing information.
- Approve applications.
- Notify USRA Liaison Officers of any rejected applications (replacements for rejected candidates will **not** be accepted in the same term) and of any applications selected for the **Canadian Forest Sector Workforce Diversity undergraduate supplement**.
- Send award letters directly to award recipients (in July for the summer term, and approximately one month after the submission deadline for the fall and winter terms).
- Post *Confirmation of Payments* forms for each university on [GSAP](#).
- Issue payments to universities.
- Receive final *Confirmation of Payments* forms from universities, reconcile funds, and request reimbursement from university if applicable.

**Note: Award recipients will start working on their USRA before awards can be confirmed by NSERC. The university must start payments to students to whom they have offered positions without waiting for approval of the awards from NSERC. They must also continue to employ any students whose applications are rejected by NSERC for the remainder of the work term.**

## 4. General Guidelines for the Verification of the USRA Applications

### Applicant Eligibility

Ensure that the applicant:

- provided a complete application;
- is registered at the time of the university's internal deadline, in a bachelor's degree program at an eligible university;
- has not held a previous USRA in this fiscal year, or more than 2 previous USRA awards in total;
- has completed all the course requirements of at least the first year of the bachelor's degree (or two academic terms);
- is a Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada as of the deadline set by the university;
- has obtained, over the previous years of study, a cumulative average of at least second class (a grade of "B" or "B-," if applicable) as defined by the university;
- indicated a start date after April 1<sup>st</sup> (for summer competition only);
- meets all eligibility criteria as described in the [Undergraduate Student Research Awards](#);
- has proposed research that is in an area of natural sciences or engineering supported by NSERC. The eligibility guidelines in the [Selecting the Appropriate Federal Granting Agency](#) document have been updated to provide greater clarity in determining the eligibility of applicants' proposed research. Additionally, an [Addendum to the guidelines for the eligibility of applications related to health](#), which contains examples of eligible and ineligible research topics, has been added to the NSERC website;



- will, at the time of holding the award, have been registered in at least **one** of the two immediately preceding terms in a bachelor's degree program at an eligible university\*\*;

\*\*For the purposes of this eligibility criterion, the terms of an academic year are:

- Summer: May to August
- Fall: September to December
- Winter: January to April.

If the university subdivides any of those periods into 2 separate sessions, registration in either one will count as registration in that term.

**A note on the eligibility criteria:** The eligibility criteria to **apply for** and to **hold** a USRA are known to cause confusion. To be eligible to **apply**, the student must be currently registered in a bachelor's program. To then be eligible to **hold** the award, the student must have been registered in at least one of the two preceding terms. This allows students who have graduated to hold a USRA in one of the two terms immediately following their graduation. Students who have completed their degree requirements by the application deadline are **not** eligible to apply.

### Implicit or unconscious biases

NSERC expects university selection committee members to consistently guard against the possibility of unconscious bias influencing the decision-making process, whether these biases are based on a school of thought, fundamental versus applied research, certain sub-disciplines, areas of research or approaches (including emerging ones), size or reputation of an institution, age, gender, and/or other personal factors of the applicant. NSERC cautions members against any judgment of an application based on such factors.

NSERC is acting on the evidence that equity, diversity, and inclusion strengthen the scientific and engineering communities and the quality, social relevance, and impact of research. For reference, see NSERC's [Policy Statement on Equity, Diversity and Excellence in Natural Sciences and Engineering Research](#).

Committee members are encouraged to complete the following training modules: [Bias in Peer Review](#), produced by the Tri-Councils, and one of the [Sex and Gender](#) training modules, produced by CIHR.

### Collection of Self-Identification Data

Equity, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) strengthen research communities and the quality, social relevance and impact of research. Self-identification data provides information on the diversity of the population applying for and receiving agency funds. This data is important for monitoring the fairness of our programs and informing future measures to increase equity, diversity and inclusion among all those involved in the research enterprise.

NSERC is now asking all applicants to self-identify with information on age, gender, Indigenous identity, disability, visible minority status and diverse gender identities. Completing the new self-identification form is mandatory for applicants but for each category there is an option "I prefer not to answer".

### Indigenous Applicants

A column exists in the USRA LO Portfolio which will show who self-identified as Indigenous. In order to nominate Indigenous applicants above the quota, applicants must self-identify and provide consent within the application form. Applications submitted by Indigenous applicants will not be counted as part of the university quota. The university must indicate this information on the *2021 Recommended USRA Applicants* form provided on [GSAP](#). If an Indigenous candidate is not identified in the List of recommended Indigenous applicants section of the form, they will be counted as part of your quota. NSERC will not accept a replacement application.

**LOs are not required to verify self-declared Indigenous status unless they believe a student has self-declared in error (for example, a student who is a Permanent Resident of Canada).**



As a guideline, you may use the following definition of Indigenous: *“Aboriginal peoples are defined as the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Constitution Act, 1982 recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people: Indians, Métis people and Inuit. Eligibility may be established through official documentation (certificate of Indian status, band/treaty number, or enrolment as a beneficiary of a land claim agreement). Indigenous peoples without official documentation can establish their eligibility by demonstrating their involvement within the Indigenous community or their acceptance as people of Indigenous ancestry within the existing Indigenous community.”*

### **USRA Location of tenure / Supervision**

The USRA can be held at any eligible Canadian university. NSERC encourages mobility of students at the undergraduate level. USRAs can be used to allow students to expand their background training at other institutions, as well as to provide your university with the opportunity to offer a similar experience to students from elsewhere. Moreover, universities may use the program as a recruitment tool for graduate studies.

Students must apply to the institution where they would like to hold the USRA. They must comply with the internal selection criteria of that institution and be selected by that university to hold one of their quota of awards. Quotas are not transferable from one university to another. The proposed supervisor must be affiliated with the university and must be approved by the university where the student will hold the USRA.

**Because of the uncertainty resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021/22, remote supervision of USRA students is possible. Should local public health recommendations allow, the preference is for USRAs to be held in person, but remote supervision will be allowed in all cases without additional justification to NSERC. Should the project allow, students who prefer to work remotely should not be penalized in the selection process.**

USRA recipients may spend a maximum of 25% of their time at a company or government location during the term of the award if they are not in the company of their supervisor.

Supervisors may choose to send the award recipients to work with their collaborators at labs elsewhere in Canada or outside the country or to conduct field work. Supervisors are responsible for the costs (travel expenses etc.). These extra costs are in addition to the required university contribution to the award.

If supervisors choose to send the award recipients elsewhere to do research, they are still responsible for their supervision. It is expected that they should do so in person for the majority of the award (i.e. at least eight weeks), and make appropriate arrangements for colleagues and/or postdoctoral fellows, or doctoral students to fill in the remainder of the time. Students are not generally permitted to spend the entire period of their award away from their host university if not in the company of their supervisor. This means that it would be acceptable, for example, for a student to do fieldwork abroad *with their supervisor* but not for a student to be sent to a different lab abroad *without their supervisor*.

### **Adjunct Faculty Members**

The awards are meant to be held in an academic setting, however, a university may choose to authorize its adjunct faculty members to supervise USRA students, including outside of the academic setting. In order to do so, the supplemented funds for the award must come from university sources or a Tri-Agency research grant where this expense is eligible (e.g. NSERC Discovery Grant). The student should not be an employee of the supervisor's non-university institution as it relates to the USRA. All such arrangements described above must be approved by the university. The USRA is not an industrial internship.

### **Transcripts**

Consult the [Instructions for Completing an Application - Form 202](#) for further details about transcripts. The instructions state that the legend on the back of the transcript is required but it is needed only for transcripts from other institutions. NSERC may ask for one copy of the legend from your institution if needed.



It is the responsibility of the LO to ensure the presence and authenticity of transcripts that are submitted to NSERC for selected candidates. Universities may choose to accept unofficial transcripts from their applicants. In this case NSERC will accept unofficial transcripts if sent from the university.

NSERC may require that official or updated documents be provided after the completed application has been submitted to NSERC for verification purposes.

## 5. General guidelines for post award administration

### Academic Credits

Students should not receive academic credits for the work done during the term of a USRA. Therefore, holders of these awards are not generally permitted to take courses during working hours throughout the term of their award. Award holders may take one course if special arrangements to make up the time under supervision have been made with the supervisor. In particular, USRA holders are not permitted to do thesis research during the term of the award.

For the purposes of the USRA program, the credits assigned to co-op placements are not considered academic credits.

### Exchange Students

Students who are registered at an eligible Canadian university but have studied abroad for one semester during an exchange program may be eligible for a USRA provided they were registered at the Canadian university during the exchange and their studies abroad are credited towards their Canadian degree program.

### Other sources of income

NSERC does not place restrictions on outside sources of funding or employment that award holders may have while holding the award providing the following regulations are adhered to:

- When considering other sources of income, any institutional regulations must be followed.
- Award holders must devote full-time hours to the USRA research.
  - Full-time hours may vary depending on the institution at which award holders are completing their award.

### Sick leave/vacation

The program makes no provision for sick or vacation leave, or for other type of interruptions. Should a USRA be interrupted or terminated early for any reason, you must inform NSERC immediately, and complete the Confirmation of Payments form. Awards may not be deferred.

### Use of USRA

Award recipients must not be expected to contribute to the costs of research, (equipment and supplies or travel) from their award.

### Working hours of USRA holders

NSERC expects USRA holders to work approximately the same hours on average and have the same working conditions as university employees, within the limitations of the type of research they are doing, and in consultation with their supervisor. If staff at the university in that department work 40 hour weeks on average, then the USRA holder should too. The standard work week is 35h or more.

### Supervisor's rights and responsibilities

The supervisor has the responsibility to ensure that the award holder is properly supervised at all times (especially during field work) and appropriately trained in research techniques and safety methods. The supervisor also has the right to set working hours and assign tasks.





### **Changing supervisors**

Award recipients may change supervisors at the discretion of the university before the award starts. After it has started, the award recipient is expected to stay with that supervisor to ensure continuity of training.

### **Co-supervision**

NSERC allows USRA recipients to work under the supervision of two people as long as they work on a genuine research project allowing them to be exposed to all aspects of the research process. One supervisor has to be designated as the official supervisor.

## **6. Financial Matters**

### **Scholarship or employment**

Both NSERC's contribution and the university's 25% contribution towards the USRA may be considered a scholarship for tax purposes or employment at the university's discretion. If your university pays USRAs as employment, the university may have to contribute more to the award than the minimum amount required by NSERC in order to meet minimum wage or other legal requirements.

### **Travel Claim payments**

NSERC no longer provides travel allowances.

### **Shortened work terms (Not applicable in 2021/22 due to COVID-19 accommodations)**

When work terms are less than 16 weeks long, NSERC calculates the compensation on a weekly basis. For example, the award value for a 15-week work term would be \$5,625 ( $\$6,000/16 \text{ weeks} \times 15 \text{ weeks}$ ).

### **Transfer of funds**

For summer awards, payments will be issued in the first or second week of July. For fall or winter awards, payments are normally issued within four to six weeks after the submission deadline for the term.

### **Reconciliation of funds**

After receiving the *Confirmation of Payments* form, NSERC's Finance and Awards Administration Division will review it, make the necessary calculations and, if applicable, contact the university for reimbursement of any portions of awards not used by award holders.

## **7. Privacy issues**

The information you and the applicants are asked to provide is collected under the authority of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Act. Information on applications received by NSERC is stored in a series of NSERC data banks described in the federal publication Info Source. You can find details on how this information may be used in [The Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act \(ATIP\)](#).

You must use the information provided by the applicant only to help you complete the university's evaluation of the application and not for any other purposes.

NSERC is obliged by Federal legislation to protect the personal information about applicants associated with applications to its programs. NSERC expects universities to store such information in a secure manner, not to use or disclose it for any other purpose, and to destroy, in a secure manner within a short interval after it is no longer required, any information which has not been forwarded to NSERC.



## 8. NSERC’s Obligations under the *Official Languages Act*

Under the *Official Languages Act*, federal institutions, including NSERC, must ensure respect for the rights of individual Canadians to receive services from federal institutions and organizations that provide services on their behalf, in the official language of their choice.

NSERC is committed to promoting equitable access by:

- Ensuring that its funding opportunities enable the participation of both official language communities;
- Providing applicants with equitable access to the information and resources in the official language of their choice;
- Monitoring and promoting the participation of Official Language Minority Institutions (OLMI), researchers and students in its programs.

As partners in the co-delivery of NSERC’s funding opportunities, universities must respect the Act in the management of their internal selection processes. Therefore applicants are able to submit their application in the official language of their choice. Institutions must have mechanisms in place to review both English and French applications.

## 9. Where to get help

Contact List	Telephone	Email
USRA Program	613-947-0428	<a href="mailto:usra-brpc@nserc-crsng.gc.ca">usra-brpc@nserc-crsng.gc.ca</a>
Lists of Recommended Applicants		<a href="mailto:schol-slo@nserc-crsng.gc.ca">schol-slo@nserc-crsng.gc.ca</a>
USRA financial matters	613-995-2694	<a href="mailto:scholarshipsadministration@nserc-crsng.gc.ca">scholarshipsadministration@nserc-crsng.gc.ca</a>
Online Services Helpdesk	613-995-4273	<a href="mailto:webapp@nserc-crsng.gc.ca">webapp@nserc-crsng.gc.ca</a>