

**Office of Research Services, University of Victoria
2020-21 NSERC USRA GUIDELINES FOR DEPARTMENTS**

1. Program Details

The complete USRA program guidelines are available in the Program Guide for Students and Fellows on the NSERC website at http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/UG-PC/USRA-BRPC_eng.asp.

USRA objective

The objective of the USRA program is to provide research **work experience** that complements the degree program in order to encourage students to consider graduate studies and/or a research career. **When selecting students for awards, the university will assess the merit of each application on the basis of the student's academic record and research aptitude.** A USRA is intended to be over and above the academic credits needed for the degree, similar to a co-op placement. The award may be held concurrently with a co-op placement.

Value and duration of the award

Awards are valued at **\$4,500 for a term of 16 consecutive weeks on a full-time basis.** Departments are required to supplement the NSERC portion of the award with a **top-up amount of at least 25% or \$1,125.** Exceptions to the 16-week, full-time requirement will be made only in truly exceptional cases where the situation is beyond the control of the student, and where the appropriately justified request is received at NSERC before the beginning of the work term. These awards will be prorated.

Coursework during USRA term

Students should not receive academic credit for the work done during the term of a USRA. Therefore, holders of these awards are generally **not** permitted to take courses during working hours throughout the term of their award unless special arrangements to make up the time have been made with the supervisor. In particular, students are not permitted to do thesis research during the term of the award. Students are permitted to take **one** course with the consent of their supervisor. **Please ask the student's supervisor to contact Deb Anderson at orsfince@uvic.ca for approval.**

No full-time enrolment

Students do not have to be enrolled full-time in their program to be eligible to apply for a USRA, although NSERC expects that most awards will still be held by full-time students. While part-time students are eligible to apply, **all awards must be held full time.**

Sick leave/vacation

The USRA program makes no provision for sick leave or other interruptions of awards. Should a work term be interrupted or terminated early for any reason, universities must inform NSERC immediately. Awards may not be deferred.

Incentive for Aboriginal students

NSERC continues to encourage Aboriginal students to pursue university studies in the natural sciences and engineering. Any Aboriginal student who meets all the program's eligibility criteria and is recommended by an eligible Canadian university for a USRA will not be counted in that university's USRA quota.

As a guideline, you may use the following definition of Aboriginal:

Aboriginal peoples are defined as the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Constitution Act of 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). Aboriginal peoples without official documentation can establish their eligibility by demonstrating their involvement within the Aboriginal community or their acceptance as people of Aboriginal ancestry within the existing Aboriginal community.

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Please note that it is the students' choice to identify themselves as Aboriginal people. If they so identify themselves, they should be able to provide proof. Institutions can be flexible about the proof and should not insist on a card if a student does not have one, as mentioned in the paragraph above (for example, Métis people have no card number). As long as students have a way of identifying themselves, their self-identification should be accepted.

USRA location of tenure and working hours

a) USRAs held away from “home” university

Students can hold a USRA at any eligible Canadian university, not only the one they are registered at. NSERC encourages mobility of students at the undergraduate level. USRAs can be used to allow your students to expand their 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 potential graduate students.

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 a faculty member at the university where the student will hold the USRA.

NEW: As of 2020-21, NSERC no longer reimburses travel expenses related to USRA tenure at another institution.

b) Industrial USRA

The USRA program offers students the opportunity to work on a challenging research project in either a university or an industrial environment. **Industrial USRAs are not counted as part of your university’s USRA quota.** The program overview can be found at http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/UG-PC/USRAI-BRPCI_eng.asp. A student may hold only one USRA per fiscal year; either at a university or an organization, and a maximum of three awards over the course of their career, including both university and industry placements.

Please encourage your students to consider applying for an Industrial USRA, particularly those in engineering or other applied science programs or those who are not chosen for your institution’s quota of USRAs at the university.

c) Work site of USRA holders

Students holding university USRAs may spend a maximum of 25% of their time at a company location during the term of the award.

d) Working hours of USRA holders

NSERC expects USRA holders to work approximately the same hours on average and have the same working conditions, etc. as other university employees, within the limitations of the type of research they are doing, and in consultation with their supervisor.

An average workweek is considered to be a minimum of 35 hours.

Supervision of USRA holders

a) Supervisor eligibility

NEW: As of 2020-21, NSERC no longer requires professors to hold an active NSERC grant when applying to supervise a USRA student. NSERC considers anyone who is authorized by their university to independently supervise students to be an eligible supervisor.

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b) Supervisor rights and responsibilities

The supervisor has the responsibility to ensure that the student is properly supervised at all times (especially during field work) and appropriately trained in research techniques and safety methods. He/she also has the right to set working hours and assign tasks. Should the student's performance not match expectations, the supervisor is expected to take appropriate steps to explain matters and retrain the student. If, after a reasonable time period, the student's performance has not improved, the supervisor may, in consultation with other university administration, decide to terminate the work term. NSERC must be informed and the award will be pro-rated.

c) Co-supervision

NSERC allows for co-supervision of USRA students, as long as they do not move between laboratories to work on different projects over the 16-week period, since this would dilute the value of the experience. A primary/official supervisor must be designated.

d) Maximum number of students a supervisor can supervise

At the University of Victoria, a supervisor may supervise a maximum of **two** USRA students per year.

e) Field work expenses

Any additional costs related to field work (e.g., travel expenses and equipment) must be covered by the supervisor or the university. The USRA funds are for the student's personal use.

2. USRA Application Process

- Only applications prepared using the NSERC online system will be accepted.
- To submit an application, go to NSERC's on-line application system at https://ebiz.nserc.ca/nserc_web/nserc_login_e.htm and select Login or Register as a New User.
- Complete Form 202 Parts I and II. Form 202 and its instructions are available in pdf format at http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/OnlineServices-ServicesEnLigne/instructions/202/USRAExperience-BRPCExperience_eng.asp

Part I of Form 202: Completed by the student

- Students must register or log onto the NSERC on-line system and select Form 202 Part 1 under *For Students and Fellows*.
- Students can only create one Part 1 of Form 202. If they applied for a USRA in a previous year, they must update the form for use in the current year.
- Students must complete all the modules shown on the left hand side of the screen, and then verify the form on the My Portfolio screen until the report shows that it is complete.
- Students then forward the reference number generated by the system to their potential supervisor(s).
- Students must attach a copy of their current transcript (an **unofficial**, administrative version **verified by the student's home department** is acceptable for UVic students; students from another institution must attach an official version).

This form is available for update any time. If a student makes a change to the Form 202 Part I after the supervisor has pressed submit on the application, the data will not be reflected in the application. The student's supervisor will have to contact Deb Anderson (orsfince@uvic.ca) to release the application back to the applicant. Once the changes have been made, the supervisor will then need to again verify and resubmit the application.

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Part II of Form 202: Completed by the supervisor

- Supervisors must log on to the on-line site with the same password and username they use to apply for their NSERC grant. If they cannot remember their access information, supervisors should contact the NSERC On-line Services Helpdesk at 613-995-4273.
- Enter the reference number for the student with whom they wish to work, and complete all the modules necessary to create a Form 202 Part II for that student.
- Verify the form using the button on the *My Portfolio* screen until the report states it is complete.
- Press the Submit to LO (Liaison Officer) button to make the application available to the Office of Research Services.
- If the supervisor does not verify the application, the “Submit to LO” button will not appear.
- If supervisors want to make changes after submitting the application, they need to contact Deb Anderson (orsfince@uvic.ca) and request the application be released back them.

USRA submission deadlines

USRA Term	Submission Deadline	Term Start Date
Summer (May-August)	March 15, 2020	May 1, 2020
Fall (September-December)	July 15, 2020	September 1, 2020
Winter (January-April)	November 15, 2020	January 1, 2021

3. Departmental responsibilities

Departments must select students for the USRA awards according to the USRA guidelines. Each application must be assessed on the basis of the student’s academic record **AND** research aptitude.

The department must submit their List of Recommended Applicants (see form attached at end of this document) and copies of the applications on their **A List – Recommended Applicants** to the Office of Research Services by the USRA submission deadlines:

- **A List – Recommended Applicants** – The names of the applicants (and their proposed supervisors **and** copies of the applications (Form 202 Part I and II **and** the transcripts) for each of the recommended applicants.
- **B List – Alternate Applicants** – The names of the applicants (and their proposed supervisors) who would be recommended for a USRA if an applicant from the A list withdraws or declines their award. Do not send copies of the applications at this point.
- **C List – Not Recommended** – Applicants that do not meet the criteria and are not recommended (not included on List of Recommended Applicants)

Upon confirmation from the Office of Research Services that the Recommended Applicants have been approved and will be submitted to NSERC, the department will:

- Notify their B List and C List applicants (and their supervisors) that they were not successful.
- Provide the Office of Research Services with a **copy** of the *Recommendation for Appointment* form used to pay each student their supervisor’s “Top-Up” portion to the award. When completing this form, please ensure that:
 - the start and end dates are accurate and within the appropriate USRA term;
 - the appointment is for a minimum of 16 consecutive weeks;
 - the top-up amount is a minimum of \$1,125 plus 4% vacation pay in lieu of time off.

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4. Initiatives and incentives in combination with the USRA program

NSERC encourages the exposure of undergraduate students to as many natural sciences and engineering-related experiences as possible. Universities are encouraged to explore innovative ways of using the USRA program in combination with other initiatives. Should your university be considering other mechanisms, please feel free to contact us, as soon as possible, to discuss them further. Below are examples of initiatives that can be combined with the USRA program:

a) Shad Valley Program

Unique among summer programs for youth, the Shad Valley program combines entrepreneurship with science and technology. USRA holders may interrupt their research project for the month of July to work as a Program Assistant (PA) at a Shad Valley campus. Information about Shad is available on its Web site at <http://www.shad.ca>.

The university will continue to pay the NSERC portion of the award to students during the time they are working for Shad. The research supervisor, who must pre-approve the interruption, is not expected to pay the 25 per cent top-up during the interruption. While the students are working as program assistants (PAs), Shad will pay them a \$1,500 top-up. Award holders may work as a PA for the Shad campus located at the university of tenure of their USRA or at another campus. NSERC will not, however, cover travel costs from one campus to another.

b) RISE Canada Program

RISE is a summer student exchange program for undergraduates in the chemical sciences who will have completed the equivalent of two or three full years of study by the end of the school year in which they apply. Successful applicants will be awarded summer employment in the research group of a RISE group member at one of the participating institutions (not their own), plus a small travel allowance. Further information on this program can be found at <http://www.risecanada.ca> (Students participating in this program at a Canadian university may concurrently hold an NSERC USRA).

c) Radian Biophysics Awards

Two qualified Aboriginal USRA holders will be selected each year by the Biophysical Society of Canada to attend the Herman R. Branson Summer Mini-Course in Biophysics (assuming program funding approved). For further information, please contact Cathy Morris at cmorris@ohri.ca or Jenifer Thewalt at jthewalt@sfu.ca.

d) NSERC - CMS Math in Moscow Scholarships

NSERC and the Canadian Mathematical Society (CMS) offer three scholarships each year to support Canadian undergraduate students registered in a mathematics or computer science program to attend a semester at the Math in Moscow program. Further information can be found at <http://cms.math.ca/Scholarships/Moscow/>

e) Environment Canada Atmospheric and Meteorological Undergraduate Supplements

These supplements provide financial support to high-calibre students working toward degrees in the atmospheric or meteorological sciences or related fields. They are available only to students awarded a USRA. Further information and application procedures can be found on NSERC's Web site at http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/UG-PC/Meteorological-Meteorologique_eng.asp

5. Contact Information

If you have any questions, please contact Deb Anderson, Manager, Research Finances in the Office of Research Services by email at orsfince@uvic.ca or by phone at 250-721-8079.