

2024-25 USRA Guidelines

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRA) program supports more than 3,000 students annually and are opportunities for undergraduate students to consider graduate studies and/or a research career by providing research work experience that complements their studies in an academic setting.

These awards are administered by Canada's 3 research granting agencies:

1. Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC)*

**All undergraduate students who are Canadian Citizens or Permanent Residents can apply to this award.*

**For NSERC USRAs, unlimited number of self-identified Black student and Indigenous student researchers may be recommended, and it will not be counted as part of the total NSERC USRA allocation.*

2. Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)**

3. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)**

***CIHR and SSHRC USRA are exclusively offered to Canadian Black students only.*

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

Note: NSERC oversees the administration of the USRA program and the application process on behalf of the three agencies. Accordingly, applications must be submitted through NSERC's online system.

USRA OBJECTIVE

The objective of the USRA program is to provide research work experience that complements the degree program to encourage students to consider graduate studies and/or a research career in-health, natural sciences and engineering, or social sciences and humanities. When selecting students for awards, the university will assess the merit of each application based on the student's academic record and research aptitude. A USRA is intended to be over and above the academic credits needed for the degree and may be held as a co-op placement.

Students can hold a USRA at any eligible Canadian university, not only the one they are registered at. The agencies encourage mobility of students at the undergraduate level. USRAs can be used to allow students to expand their training at other institutions, as well as to provide the 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 allocated awards. **Allocations 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.



VALUE AND DURATION OF AWARD

USRAs have a value of **\$6,000**. Departments are required to supplement the NSERC/SSHRC/CHIRC portion of the award to comply with Employment Standards. The minimum supplement is outlined in the table below. The agency's contribution is paid directly to the host institution. The duration of the award is 14 to 16 consecutive weeks on a full-time basis. In some instances, the student may be hired for 18 weeks.

The USRA program makes no provision for sick leave or vacation, or for other types of interruptions. Should a USRA be interrupted or terminated early for any reason, the agencies must be informed immediately.

2024/25 Undergraduate Student Research Awards

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
No. of Weeks	14	16	18
Total hours at 35hrs/week	490	560	630
USRA Award	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 6,000.00
Effective Hourly Rate	\$ 12.24	\$ 10.71	\$ 9.52
BC Minimum Wage	\$ 17.40	\$ 17.40	\$ 17.40
Minimum vacation(4%)	\$ 0.70	\$ 0.70	\$ 0.70
Total Minimum Wage	\$ 18.10	\$ 18.10	\$ 18.10
Total Award (# of hrs x Total Minimum Wage)	\$ 8,867.04	\$ 10,133.76	\$ 11,400.48
Hourly Wage Top Up Required	\$ 5.85	\$ 7.38	\$ 8.57
Total Top Up Required*	\$ 2,867.04	\$ 4,133.76	\$ 5,400.48
Top Up Rounded:	\$ 2,900.00	\$ 4,150.00	\$ 5,400.00
Mandatory Employee Related Costs (7.5%)*	\$ 663.25	\$ 758.01	\$ 852.76
MERCS (rounded)	\$ 670.00	\$ 760.00	\$ 850.00
TOTAL	\$ 3,570.00	\$ 4,910.00	\$ 6,250.00

*** The department will need to fund the required top up to comply with minimum wage standards as well as mandatory employment related costs**

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

To Apply:

- Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada or a Protected Person under subsection 95(2) of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Canada)*, as of the deadline date for applications at the institution as of the deadline date for applications at the university.
- Registered in a bachelor's degree program as of the deadline date for applications at an eligible university.
- Obtained a minimum cumulative B- average over your previous years of study as defined by the university (minimum cumulative GPA of 4.0)
- Not currently enrolled in an undergraduate professional degree program in the health sciences (e.g., MD, DDS, BScN, PharmD). ***This does not apply for CIHR USRAs.***
- Have not started a program of graduate studies in the natural sciences or engineering at any time.
- Cannot have completed all degree requirements.
- Residing in British Columbia, Canada during your work term.
- If already hold a bachelor's degree and are studying toward a second bachelor's degree, may still apply for this award.
- May hold only one USRA per fiscal year (April 1 to March 31)
- May hold a maximum of three USRAs throughout your undergraduate career (regardless of the granting agency)

To hold an award:

- Must have completed all course requirements for at least the first year of study (or two academic terms) of bachelor's degree.
- Must have been registered in a bachelor's degree program at the time of application and in at least one of the two terms immediately before holding the award.
- Must be working full time in eligible research and development activities in your proposed field of research during tenure of the award.
- Cannot be registered in a graduate program.

Students do not have to be enrolled full-time in their program to be eligible to apply and hold a USRA award, although the Agencies 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.

The eligibility criteria to apply for and to hold a USRA are known to cause confusion. To be eligible to apply, a student must be registered in a bachelor's program, as of the deadline date for the application at the institution.

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.



APPLICATION DEADLINES

Individual departments and faculties may have their own application deadlines, please contact them directly.

All applications must be submitted through the NSERC portal and list of recommended applications submitted by the department to ORS (see Department Responsibilities) by the following dates:

USRA Term	Submission *	Term Start Date
Summer (May-August)	March 15, 2023	May 1, 2024
Fall (September-December)	March 15, 2023	September 1, 2024
Winter (January-April)	March 15, 2023	January 1, 2025

USRA APPLICATION PROCESS

- Only applications prepared using the NSERC online system will be accepted.
- To submit an application, go to the online application system and select Login or Register as a New User: https://ebiz.nserc.ca/nserc_web/nserc_login_e.htm
- Complete Form 202 Parts I and II. Form 202 and its instructions are available at https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/onlineservices-servicesenligne/instructions/202/USRA-BRPC_eng.asp

Help with the NSERC Online System

https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/OnlineServices-ServicesEnLigne/FAQ-FAQ_eng.asp

FORM 202 (PART I) – COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT

- Students must register or log onto the NSERC online 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/signed** 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 the UVic Liaison Officer (orsfinance@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.

FORM 202 (PART II) – 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 Online 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.

SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION

- 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 the UVic Liaison Officer (orsfinance@uvic.ca) and request the application be released back to them.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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 two courses with the consent of their supervisor. An email letter must be made available to the Liaison Officer orsfinance@uvic.ca from the Supervisor if a student is enrolled in a course.

USRA LOCATION OF TENURE AND WORKING HOURS

LOCATION:

The agencies permit USRA recipients to spend a portion of time away from their host institution, including outside of Canada. However, students are **not permitted to spend the entire period of their award away from their host institution if not in the company of their supervisor**. This means that it would be acceptable, for example, for a student to do field work abroad with their supervisor, but it would not be acceptable for a student to be sent to a different lab abroad without their supervisor.

- Supervisors may choose to send 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 travel expenses and other costs, which are in addition to the institution's required contribution to the award.
- If supervisors choose to send award recipients elsewhere to do research, they are still responsible for supervising them. The agencies expect the research supervisor to be present for the majority of the award period (i.e., at least seven to eight weeks), and supervisors must make appropriate arrangements for colleagues, postdoctoral fellows and/or or doctoral students to fill in for them the remainder of the time.
- Remote work is acceptable, with supervision expected on a frequent basis.
- USRAs are meant to be held in an academic setting. However, an institution may choose to authorize its adjunct faculty members to supervise USRA students, including outside of the academic setting. In this case, the supplemented funds for the award must come from institution sources or from a Tri-agency research grant for which this expense is eligible (for example, NSERC Discovery Grants or SSHRC Insight Grants). The student should not be an employee of the supervisor's non-academic institution as it relates to the USRA. All such arrangements described above must be approved by the institution. USRAs are not industrial internships.
- Students holding university USRAs may spend a maximum of 25% of their time at a company location during the term of the award.

WORKING HOURS OF USRA HOLDERS:

The agencies expect 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

Provided you are authorized by your institution to independently supervise students, the agencies consider you eligible to supervise USRA holders. You must be approved by your institution to supervise a USRA student.

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

The agencies allow for co-supervision of USRA students, if they are working on a research project that allows them to be exposed to all aspects of the research process. One supervisor must be designated as the official supervisor, and that person should complete Part II of form 202.

d) Maximum number of students

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.

DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Departments must select students for the USRA awards according to the USRA guidelines and attached Appendix A. Each application must be assessed based on the student's academic record AND research aptitude.

The department must submit their List of Recommended Applicants and copies of the applications on their A List – Recommended Applicants to the Office of Research Services by email to orsfinance@uvic.ca by the USRA INTERNAL 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 B List applications at this point.

Upon confirmation from the Office of Research Services that the Recommended Applicants have been approved and will be submitted thru NSERC online system (by way of an Award letter being issued by ORS), the department will:

- Notify their B 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. 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 number of consecutive weeks.
 - the student salary includes the top-up amount of at least the minimum required.

Please note the *original completed Recommendation for Appointment* form *should be sent directly to the payroll department for processing at least 2 weeks prior to the start of the work term.*

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions regarding this program that are not on the NSERC site, you may contact orsfinofficer1@uvic.ca.

Frequently asked questions about USRAs:

https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/students-etudiants/ug-pc/usrafaq-brpcfaq_eng.asp



APPENDIX A: SELECTION GUIDELINES, CRITERIA, AND INDICATORS FOR USRA APPLICATIONS

SELECTION GUIDELINES:

Refer to the [Guidelines governing membership of NSERC's peer review committees](#) for the selection of internal selection committee members. The agencies believe that diverse selection committee membership results in higher-quality reviews. In choosing members for USRA selection committees, we encourage institutions to consider the following:

- diverse gender representation
- representation of people from underrepresented groups
- individuals at different stages of their careers
- broad range of expertise on multi-disciplinary committees
- where necessary, members who can review in both official languages.

To support the merit review of CIHR and SSHRC USRA applications, institutions may wish to include health, social sciences and humanities, or multi-disciplinary experts on their selection committees.

The agencies encourage institutions and departments to publish selection committee membership and selection procedures on their websites.

The agencies expect institution 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, the perceived value of fundamental versus applied research, areas of research or approaches (including emerging ones), size or reputation of an institution, experience or prominence of the proposed supervisor, age, gender and/or other personal factors associated with the applicant.

The agencies are acting on the evidence that achieving a more equitable, diverse and inclusive Canadian research enterprise is essential to creating the excellent, innovative and impactful research necessary to advance knowledge and understanding and respond to local, national and global challenges. This principle informs the commitments described in the [Tri-agency statement on equity, diversity and inclusion \(EDI\)](#) and is aligned with the objectives of the [Tri-agency EDI Action Plan](#).

For more information, consult the [Equity, diversity and inclusion considerations at each stage of the research process](#) section of the [NSERC guide on integrating equity, diversity and inclusion considerations in research](#) web page.

USRA selection committee members are encouraged to complete the following training modules: [Bias in Peer Review](#) (produced by the three granting agencies) and one of the [Sex and Gender](#) training modules (produced by CIHR).



SELECTION CRITERIA

The following table contains suggestions for evaluating the 3 selection criteria. Institutions are encouraged to develop their own evaluation methods.

Selection criteria	Indicators and evidence
Academic excellence	<p>As demonstrated by past academic results, transcripts, awards and distinctions</p> <p>Indicators of academic excellence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic record • scholarships and awards held. • duration of previous/current studies • type of program and courses pursued. • course load • relative standing in program (if available) <p>Members should consider an applicant’s entire academic record when assessing academic excellence. Members should favourably consider situations where an applicant has demonstrated an improving trend.</p>
Research potential	<p>As demonstrated by the applicant’s research history and their interest in discovery. Along with form 202, many institutions require students to submit additional material to support this selection criterion. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a resume/CV • a statement of interest outlining the student’s research interests and goals • a letter of support from the proposed supervisor <p>Institutions may also conduct interviews with applicants.</p> <p>Indicators of research potential include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic training • previous research/work experience (can include co-op terms) (e.g., previous USRAs held) • relevance of work experience and academic training to field of proposed research • judgment and ability to think critically • ability to apply skills and knowledge • enthusiasm for research, relevant community involvement, and outreach • initiative and autonomy • research experience and achievements that could reasonably be expected from someone with the applicant’s academic background
Expected quality of the training and mentorship to be received	<p>As demonstrated by the proposed supervisor’s plan for the student described in form 202 Part II. Indicators of expected quality of the training and mentorship to be received include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exposure to a research team • training in research techniques and skills • expected contributions to research output • the proposed supervisor’s supervisory experience

