

Modernization of the USRA program

NSERC webinar

December 2019





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- Motivation for changes
- Overview of changes
- Timeline for implementation
- Changes to the FAQ
- Q&A

Agenda



- USRA awards nurture interest in, and develop potential for, a research career in the natural sciences and engineering.
- They encourage the undertaking of graduate studies in these fields.
- They provide research work experience that complements undergraduate studies in an academic setting.
- They provide financial support.

USRA program



- To improve the experience for all participants.
- To increase fairness for recipients and supervisors and make the funding decisions more transparent.
- Allow students to access more work experiences.
- Allow more ECRs access to the program, helping them establish their research programs and to attract students.
- Reduce administrative burden, increasing efficiency.

Motivation for changes



1. Selection criteria and supervisor eligibility
2. University eligibility
3. Travel allowance
4. Award distribution formula

Upcoming changes



- Supervisors no longer need to hold an active grant.
- They must be authorized to independently supervise students.
- NSERC recommends that the applications be assessed on the following three criteria:
 - Academic record,
 - Research aptitude, and
 - Expected quality of the training to be received.
- Supervisor suitability can be evaluated as part of the “Expected quality of the training” criterion.
- No more small university exception requests required.
- No change to Form 202, but instructions to be updated:
 - Information related to student’s supervision to be included in “Outline of the student’s role”.
 - A valid grant number is no longer required, but supervisors will still need to fill in a six-digit number for the form to be valid.

1. Selection criteria/supervisor eligibility



- A university must hold an NSERC Canada Research Chair allocation and/or a special research chair allocation of at least one.
- The university must be eligible as a university to administer NSERC funds.
- This change will not affect the eligibility of any university currently participating in the USRA program.

2. University eligibility



- The travel allowance is no longer available.

3. Travel allowance



- New award distribution formula inspired by the allocation method used by the Canada Research Chair program.
 - Number of USRAs received by a university will be proportional to its share of NSERC grant funding.
 - Universities still receive a minimum of four awards.
- We are implementing procedures to reduce the impact of large changes to the quotas while maintaining fairness for those who are entitled to an increase based on the calculations.
- Note that there will not be any extra awards allocated to small universities this year.

4. Award distribution formula



- All of the changes will be implemented in the Summer 2020 competition (deadline May 1, 2020).

Timeline of changes



- **I have completed my undergraduate degree but have not yet begun graduate studies. Am I eligible to apply for a USRA?**
 - No, you must be registered, as of the deadline date for applications at the university, in a bachelor's degree program at an eligible university.
- **Am I allowed to hold a USRA while I am completing my fourth-year thesis?**
 - It is permitted to use data generated during a USRA as the basis of a thesis, so long as registration in the thesis course starts after the USRA is held.

New FAQs



- **Is my research project eligible for a USRA?**
 - To be considered eligible for the USRA program, your proposed research must clearly lie within the natural sciences and engineering (NSE), rather than the social sciences or health sciences. Refer to NSERC's Eligibility Criteria for Students and Fellows for additional information. It is not necessary for all of your proposed supervisor's research activities to completely and exclusively fall within the NSE.

New FAQs (2)



- **Am I eligible to supervise a USRA holder?**

- Provided you are authorized by your university to independently supervise students, NSERC considers you eligible to supervise USRA holders. You must be approved by your university to supervise a USRA student.

- **Can I send a USRA holder to work with my colleagues at a different institution during the tenure of their award?**

- NSERC permits USRA holders to spend a portion of time away from their host university, including outside of Canada. Students are not permitted to spend the entire period of their award away from their host university if not in the company of their supervisor, typically this means you must be physically co-located with the student for at least 50% of the duration of the award.

New FAQs (3)



- **Where do I enter information about the expected quality of the training to be received?**
 - Details of the supervision the student will receive can be given in the Outline of student's role section of the application.

New FAQs (4)



Questions?

You can also contact us after the webinar at
usra-brpc@nserc-crsng.gc.ca.

