

NIPISSING UNIVERSITY

Policy Category:	Research
Policy Name:	Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRA) Policy
Responsible Department:	Office of Graduate Studies & Research
Original Approval Date:	March 2017
Approval Authority:	Research Committee
Last Updated:	February 2020
Next Review Date:	March 2025

Rationale

The objective of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) Undergraduate Student Research Award (USRA) is to nurture and fully develop undergraduate students' potential for a research career in the natural sciences and engineering. The USRAs are also meant to encourage students to undertake graduate studies in these fields.

Collection of Self-Identification Data

Equity, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) strengthens 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 to monitor the fairness of our programs, and to inform future measures that 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; however, each category has the option "I prefer not to answer".

Allocation of Awards

Beginning in the 2020-2021 fiscal year, NSERC follows the CRC calculation method for allocating a quota to eligible institutions. The quota may vary from year to year depending on the university's annual successful grant submissions to the Tri-Agencies (NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR).

Supervisor Eligibility

- Beginning in 2020, supervisors no longer need to hold an active NSERC grant; however, they must be authorized to independently supervise students appointed by the institution (per the terms of their appointment within their relevant faculty). The proposed supervisor must hold an active research grant (from any funding source), as a principal investigator or co-investigator, or they must have sufficient funds in their Professional Expense Reimbursement (PER) account to meet the minimum 25% top-up (\$1125 per

student) required by NSERC. Additionally, the minimum wage for research students (table below) at the University must be followed.

Wage	EI/ CPP/EHT	# of Hours/week	Number of weeks	Total Wage	USRA	Supervisor
\$14.56	\$1.38	35	16	\$8,928	\$4500	\$4428

- A Faculty member can only supervise one eligible student. A supervisor may be allocated a second student, as per the evaluation criteria, if USRAs remain after the first allocation.
- The Faculty member must have institutional approval to supervise the student.

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 assign tasks.

Changing supervisors

Award recipients may change supervisors, at the discretion of the university, before the award starts. After the award has started, the recipient is expected to stay with their 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, thereby allowing them to be exposed to all aspects of the research process. One supervisor must be designated as the official supervisor.

Applicant Eligibility

At the time of application, the student must:

- Be a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident;
- Be registered in a bachelor’s program at an eligible university;
- Have been registered in at least one of the two terms immediately before holding the award;
- Have obtained a cumulative average of at least second class (a grade of “B” or “B-”; 70% or higher);
 - **Note:** Students with transfer credit from another institution must check eligibility with the Registrar's Office. The cumulative GPA shown on their account does not include transfer credit and thus, is not accurate for application purposes.
- Not have held more than 2 previous USRA awards, as a student may hold a maximum of three USRAs throughout their undergraduate university career;
- Hold only one USRA per fiscal year (April 1 to March 31); and
- Provide a complete application.

To hold an award, the student must:

- Have completed all the course requirements of at least the first year of university study (or two academic terms) of their bachelor's degree;
- Have been registered in at least one of the two terms immediately before holding the award in a bachelor's degree program at an eligible university;
- Not have started a program of graduate studies in the natural sciences or engineering at any time; and
- Be engaged on a full-time basis in research and development activities in the natural sciences or engineering during the tenure of the award.
- Not work on thesis research during the term of the award.

Incentive for Indigenous Students

Any qualified Indigenous student, who meets the program's eligibility criteria, and is recommended for a USRA, will not be counted towards Nipissing University's NSERC USRA quota. Students who wish to identify themselves as Indigenous, when applying for a USRA, should do so **on Form 202 Part I** and should be able to provide proof, if necessary.

Selection Process

All application and review processes are internal to the institution. It is the institution's responsibility to establish its own selection criteria, within the broad guidelines that NSERC provides, and it may choose to apply stricter criteria. When selecting students for awards, the institution will take into account the objectives of the USRA program.

The selection process is done by the institution based on the following three criteria:

Academic record;

- The student must provide (upload) a PDF of up-to-date official transcript(s) of their entire academic record (including from previous academic institutions where transfer credit may have been received).

Research aptitude;

- Student Letter

The student must upload a detailed letter describing (1-page maximum):

- Why you want to do this research project;
- How this research project relates to your plans following the completion of your undergraduate degree;

- Your qualifications (e.g. education, experience, leadership roles, etc.) for this research award;
- Your previous awards and scholarships, if applicable;
- Your publications and presentations (i.e., talks, posters), if applicable;
- Your research experience to date, if applicable;

Expected quality of the training to be received

- Form 202 Part II is completed by the proposed supervisor.
 - Supervisors should outline the proposed research project to be completed during the period of the award; include details on the quality of training to be received; and, when stating the student's role, consider the inclusion of sex, gender, and diversity in the research design and training strategies.

Evaluation Criteria

The following evaluation criteria apply to all applicants:

1. **ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE (60%)** – i.e., duration of previous studies; scholarships and other awards (competitiveness, amount, duration and prestige); and academic record.
2. **RESEARCH ABILITY AND POTENTIAL/APTITUDE (30%)** – i.e., academic training and relevant work experience; research proposal (feasibility, merit and significance); justification for location of tenure; critical thinking, application of knowledge, judgment, originality, initiative, autonomy, enthusiasm for research; and ability to complete projects within an appropriate time period.
3. **WRITTEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS (10%)** – quality of presentation of application; awards for papers, reports, posters or oral presentations; and participation in publication writing (e.g., statement of contribution)
4. **Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) – The evaluation of eligible candidates will take into consideration Nipissing University's EDI quota established by the Canada Research Chair (CRC) Secretariat.**

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Evaluation Committee

Committee members will be selected from various disciplines within the university, and with the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) mandate of the university.

The review and selection of all applicants will follow the university CRC management plan for (EDI).

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.