

University of Lethbridge
NSERC Undergraduate Student Research Awards
(USRA) Summer Term 2021

OVERVIEW	
Value	\$6,000 NSERC funding plus a minimum supervisor supplement of \$1,500
Duration	16 consecutive weeks (May through August)
Application Deadline	February 1, 2021 at 4:00pm
Notice of Decision	March 2021
Start date	May 1, 2021
ORIS Contact	Sola Fasanwon (403-329-2101 or sola.fasanwon@uleth.ca)

Description

The **NSERC Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRA)** are meant to nurture your interest and fully develop your potential for a research career in the natural sciences and engineering. They are also meant to encourage you to undertake graduate studies in these fields. If you would like to gain research work experience that complements your studies in an academic setting, these awards can provide you with financial support through your host university. NSERC encourages qualified Aboriginal students to apply for this award.

The NSERC USRA provides a nontaxable stipend of \$6,000 for the duration of sixteen consecutive weeks at 35 hours of work per week. The faculty supervisor provides a top-up to the NSERC portion. **NEW for 2021 – the supervisor portion is now \$1,500 as per [NSERC guidelines](#).**

Note - Effective October 1, 2017, the Office of Research and Innovation Services requires that faculty members are required to supplement the summer studentships to adhere to current Alberta minimum wage requirements. Because these awards are now considered employment income by the Canada Revenue Agency, Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and Employment Insurance (EI) costs also need to be included. [Please see the Notice Board for more information on this decision.](#)

For the 2021 application cycles, the top up required is calculated as follows:

2021 USRA Awards	# hours per week	# weeks	Min Wage as of Oct 1, 2017 ¹	Est. CPP/EI	Total cost	NSERC contribution	Required faculty top up
Amount	35	16	\$15.00/hour	\$330	\$8,730	\$6,000	\$1,500

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-"; GPA 2.7 or higher - GPA of 3.0 or higher is normally necessary to be competitive);
 - Note: Students with transfer credit from another institution must check eligibility with the Registrar's Office. The cumulative GPA shown on their Bridge 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; and
- Hold only one USRA per fiscal year (April 1 to March 31).

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 take courses during the work hours of the USRA (the student may take up to 1 course if special arrangements are made). For the purposes of the USRA program, the credits assigned to co-op placements are not considered academic credits.
- Not work on thesis research during the term of the award.

* **NOTE: NSERC has revised their guidelines on [eligibility of health based research](#). Please review [the following link](#) to ensure that your proposed project is eligible.**

A student is not eligible for a USRA if they:

- Are currently enrolled in an undergraduate professional degree program in the health sciences (e.g., MD, DDS, BScN); or
- Hold higher degrees in the natural sciences or engineering.

Supervisor eligibility:

- ***New for 2020** Supervisors no longer need to hold an active NSERC grant, however, must be authorized to independently supervise students by the institution (per the terms of their appointment within their relevant faculty). Normally, it is preferred that the proposed supervisor must hold an active research grant (as principal investigator or co-investigator) to meet the minimum 25% top-up (\$1500 per student) required by NSERC. If supervisors do not hold a current grant, they must be able to provide proof of additional sources of funding to ORIS to meet the minimum top-up requirement (e.g. startup funds, professional supplement etc.).

- A Faculty member can be the proposed Supervisor for more than one applicant. However, a maximum of three USRA recipients will be eligible to be supervised by one Faculty member per summer.

Timeline

- December: Launch of current competition.
- **February 1, 2021 at 4.00pm: Application deadline.**
- February - March: Applications are sent to the NSERC Scholarship Selection Committee for review and ranking (see *Evaluation Criteria and Process*, below).
- March: The NSERC Scholarship Selection Committee meets to rank applications and make funding decisions.
- March: Notice of Decisions are distributed to applicants.
- May-August (16 consecutive weeks): Term of the award.

How to Apply

General Guidelines

The student must link with a faculty member who has an ongoing research program. The student should discuss the application thoroughly with the faculty member prior to applying. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the complete application is submitted prior to the application deadline. Submissions for the current competition are **due by 4:00pm on February 1, 2021**. Late submissions will not be accepted and incomplete applications may be deemed ineligible.

Complete applications require the following components:

1. NSERC's Form 202 Part I and Form 202 Part II, *Application for an Undergraduate Student Research Award*.

These forms are found on the [NSERC On-line website](#) and must be submitted through NSERC's On-line system.

- Form 202 Part I is completed by the student. The student must initiate Form 202 Part I and provide the reference number to the supervisor so that he/she may complete Part II;
- Form 202 Part II is completed by the proposed supervisor.

2. Official Transcript(s)

The student must provide a PDF of up-to-date official transcript(s) of their entire academic record (including transfer credit). Official transcripts for the University of Lethbridge (or other institutions) can be requested through the online BRIDGE system and forwarded from the Registrar's Office directly to the student to scan to PDF, and send the e-transcripts to the oris@uleth.ca inbox with the Subject Line: NSERC USRA.

Form 202 Part I (see #1, above) requires a PDF copy of the student's official transcript to be uploaded. Official transcripts received in ORIS will be scanned and a PDF copy will be emailed to

the student for uploading to Form 202 Part I. Please request your official transcripts from the Registrar's Office as early as possible in January, once the preceding Fall term marks are officially posted.

Please note: For students concurrently applying to the *Chinook Summer Research Award* competition, only one (1) official transcript is required. ORIS will coordinate the use of one official transcript for both competitions.

3. Student Letter

The student must submit 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;
- An *additional page* should be used to describe the following, if applicable:
 - An explanation for any course withdrawals and/or lower transfer credits and/or semesters of study with less than 5 courses, if applicable; and
 - If you have taken a full course load (5 courses/semester) and would like to explain exceptional circumstances that may have negatively impacted your GPA, you may do so.
- The Student Letter should be emailed to oris@uleth.ca with the **subject line: NSERC USRA**.

4. Letter of Recommendation

The student must ensure that a Letter of Recommendation is provided directly to ORIS (oris@uleth.ca with the **subject line: NSERC USRA**) from a faculty member. This may be the supervising faculty, other University of Lethbridge faculty, or a faculty member from another post-secondary institution that is known to the student. The letter of recommendation should clearly outline the member's assessment of the student's relevant experience, research potential, and academic record. Please see the *Conflict of Interest Guidelines* below for guidance on requesting a letter of recommendation.

Application submission instructions

All application components must be submitted by 4:00pm on February 1, 2021

- NSERC On-line Form 202 (Parts I and II) should be submitted [online](#).
- All other supplemental material must be emailed to oris@uleth.ca with the subject line: NSERC USRA. Late applications will not be accepted.

Conditions of the Award

1. **Value:** The NSERC USRA provides a nontaxable stipend of \$6,000 for the duration of sixteen consecutive weeks at 35 hours of work per week. The faculty supervisor provides a minimum top-up to the NSERC portion. Payment will be disbursed to the successful applicant once a month on the last business day of each month of the term.
2. **Term:** The term of the award is for sixteen (16) consecutive weeks between May 1 and August 31st, 2021. It is expected that the student work full-time equivalent hours (35 hours) for each week over the summer. The exact hours and scheduling should be made in cooperation with the supervisor and student. No payment will be approved for holidays during the tenure of the award.
3. **Reports:** Normally, there are no reporting requirements for this award from the student or supervisor.
4. **Personnel:** USRA recipients are not governed under a collective agreement.

Evaluation Criteria and Process

The following evaluation criteria apply to all applicants:

- **ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE (50%)** - i.e., duration of previous studies; scholarships and other awards (competitiveness, amount, duration, and prestige); and academic record.
- **RESEARCH ABILITY AND POTENTIAL (30%)** - i.e., academic training and relevant work experience (co-op included); contribution to research and development (publications, patents, reports, posters); 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.
- **WRITTEN AND ORAL 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).
- **INTERPERSONAL AND LEADERSHIP ABILITIES (10%)** - professional and extracurricular interactions and collaborations with supervisors, colleagues and peers (e.g., teaching, mentoring, supervising, project managing, chairing committees, organizing conferences/meetings, and elected positions and industrial work experience held).

Following the application deadline, applications are sent to members of the NSERC Scholarship Selection Committee who are asked to rank the application packages relative to the criteria described above.

Once the applications have been placed in rank order, the awards will be offered* based on the NSERC USRA quota (to be announced) for that funding year. It is expected that the number of fundable applications will exceed the number of available awards for each competition. Because applicants often apply to other studentships (e.g. Chinook Summer Research Awards, and AI Summer Research Studentships), a waitlist will be generated and the ORIS will work towards funding as many students as possible with all available awards. It is hoped that all awards will be accepted and finalized near the end of March or early April.

*A Faculty member can be the proposed Supervisor for more than one applicant. However, a maximum of three USRA recipients will be eligible to be supervised by one Faculty member per summer.

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 in the University of Lethbridge's NSERC USRA quota. Students who wish to identify themselves as Indigenous when applying for a USRA are asked to do so on Form 202 Part I and should be able to provide proof, if necessary.

Please also note that through the *Aboriginal Ambassadors in the Natural Sciences and Engineering Supplement* Program, Aboriginal students may receive up to \$5,000 towards the expenses involved in visiting Canadian Aboriginal communities to share their university experiences in a natural science or engineering program. http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/Aboriginal-Autochtones_eng.asp

Travel allowances

As of the summer 2020 competition cycle, the travel allowance is no longer available. Students are still able to apply for awards at any eligible host institution. Students must apply directly to the university where they would like to hold the award and follow all additional application requirements outlined by the host institution.

Conflict of Interest Guidelines (Adapted from [the Government of Canada](#) website)

A **conflict of interest** is a conflict between a person's duties and responsibilities regarding the review process, and that person's private, professional, business, or public interests. There may be a real, perceived, or potential conflict of interest when the review committee member, external reviewer, or observer:

- May receive professional/personal benefit resulting from the funding opportunity or application being reviewed;
- Has a professional/personal relationship with an applicant or the applicant's institution; or
- Has a direct/indirect financial interest in a funding opportunity or application being reviewed.

A **conflict of interest may exist** when review committee members, external reviewers or observers:

- Are a relative or close friend or have a personal relationship with the applicant(s);
- Have had long-standing scientific or personal differences with the applicant(s); or
- Feel for any reason unable to provide an impartial review of the application.

If an applicant is, has been, or will be under the direct supervision of a committee member, or if there is a personal link (e.g. family member), the member must leave the room and withdraw from the discussion and voting and or ranking of the applicant. The member may not act as reviewer for such applications.

The ORIS reserves the right to resolve areas of uncertainty and to determine if a conflict exists.