

Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRA)

Overview	
Value	\$6,000 Tri-Council funding plus a minimum supervisor supplement of \$2,730
Duration	16 consecutive weeks (May through August)
Application Deadline	January 31, 2024, @ 4 pm
Notice of Decision	March 2024
Start Date	May 1, 2024
ORIS contact	Esther Ekpe Adewuyi (403-329-2101 or esther.ekpeadewuyi@uleth.ca)

***Please note:** Guidelines are subject to change after Tri-Council releases its quotas and full updates.

Description

The USRAs will nurture your interest and develop your potential for a research career in the health, natural sciences, engineering, social sciences, or humanities. They also 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. The agencies encourage qualified indigenous and black students to apply for this award.

Each agency provides a stipend of \$6,000 for sixteen consecutive weeks at 35 hours per week. The supervisor provides a top-up of a minimum of \$2,730 to the agencies' portion.

Please note these recent changes:

- 1. Awardees are now encouraged to give a poster presentation of their research activities over the summer at the UG Research Symposium (an outreach initiative organized by the Faculty of Arts and Science) during the last week of August. Details will follow.**
- 2. Self-identification is very critical. The online system has been updated -- returning applicants should also ensure their information is updated.**
- 3. CIHR and SSHRC USRAs are exclusively for Black students. Although the application is through the NSERC online system, CIHR and SSHRC will send their notifications of results.**
- 4. For NSERC, USRA applications from self-identified Indigenous and Black student researchers may be submitted beyond the institutions' allocations. However, for Indigenous and Black student researchers to be recommended for awards above the institution quota, they must self-identify and provide consent within the application form for this information to be shared with their institution and NSERC.**



Note - Effective October 1, 2017, the Office of Research and Innovation Services requires that faculty members 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 must also be included. [Please see the Notice Board for more information on this decision.](#)

For the 2024 application cycles, the top-up required is calculated as follows:

2024 USRA Awards	#hours Per week	#weeks	Min wage as of October 1, 2017	Est. CPP/EI	Total cost	NSERC Contr.	Required faculty top-up.
Amount	35	16	\$15.00/hr	\$517 *subject to change	\$8,730	\$6,000	\$2,730

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 usually is 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 two previous USRAs, 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 two courses if special arrangements are made). For the USRA program, the credits assigned to co-op placements are not considered academic credits;
- Not working on thesis research during the term of the award.

* **NOTE:** NSERC has revised their guidelines on [eligibility for 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:

- Supervisors must be authorized to independently supervise students by the institution (per the terms of their appointment within their relevant Faculty). Typically, it is preferred that the proposed supervisor hold an active research grant (as principal investigator or co-investigator) to provide the top-up (\$2730 per student) required by the agencies. In the absence of a current grant, supervisors must provide proof of additional funding sources to ORIS to meet the top-up requirement (e.g. startup funds, professional supplements etc.).
- A faculty member can be the proposed supervisor for more than one applicant. However, a maximum of **two** USRA recipients will be eligible to be supervised by one faculty member per summer – with the exemption of indigenous and black students who choose to self-identify.

Timeline

- December: Launch of current competition.
- **January 31, 2024, at 4.00 pm: Application deadline (Late or incomplete applications will not be considered).**
- February – March 2024: Applications are sent to the NSERC Scholarship Selection Committee for review and ranking (see *Evaluation Criteria and*



Process below). The NSERC Scholarship Selection Committee meets to rank applications and make funding decisions.

- March 2024: Applicants receive a Notice of Decision.
- May - August 2024 (16 consecutive weeks): Term of the award.

How to Apply

General Guidelines

The student must link with a faculty member with an ongoing research program. The student should discuss the application thoroughly with the faculty member before applying. The student's responsibility is to ensure that the complete application is submitted before the deadline.

Submissions for the current competition are **due by 4:00 pm on January 31, 2024**. Late submissions will not be accepted, and incomplete applications may be deemed ineligible.

Resources: These resources guide **students** through the process of applying to USRA.

- NSERC website: [Resource Video-How to Apply](#), [Resource Video - Program Information](#), the [Undergraduate Student Research Awards, Form 202](#) (must be logged in to NSERC Online system), the [Instructions for Completing an Application -- Form 202](#), and the [Frequently asked questions about USRAs](#).

Complete applications require the following components:

Online system updates:

- Creating an application: Regardless of the granting agency, students must create their application using the NSERC online system
- Selecting the appropriate agency: Students must select the agency (NSERC, CIHR or SSHRC) whose mandate aligns best with their field of research (health, natural sciences and engineering, social sciences and humanities)
- For CIHR and SSHRC: Students must self-identify as Black and confirm they understand that this information will be shared with the institution to which they apply by checking the relevant box within the application form.
- For NSERC: Black and indigenous students must self-identify to be recommended for awards above the institution quota.

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

These forms are found on the [NSERC Online website](#) and must be submitted



through NSERC's Online 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 they may complete Part II;
- Form 202 Part II is completed and submitted by the proposed supervisor.

2. Official transcript (s)

The student must provide an up-to-date official transcript(s) of their entire academic record (including transfer credit). When ordering online from MyCreds.ca, you can request that your official University of Lethbridge transcripts be sent to usra@uleth.ca and yourself (Form 202 Part I (see #1, above) requires a PDF copy of the student's official transcript to be uploaded). Other institutions follow a similar process. Students whose home institution is not the University of Lethbridge must ensure their official transcript is accompanied by the grading scale (grading legend).

3. Student Letter

The student letter can now be submitted online by filling out [the form](#).

4. Letter of Recommendation

The recommendation letter from a faculty member -- the supervising faculty, other University of Lethbridge faculty, or a faculty member from another post-secondary institution known to the student, is now submitted online by filling out [the form](#).

Please see the *Conflict of Interest Guidelines* below for guidance on requesting a letter of recommendation. The student must ensure that the recommendation letter is submitted.

Application Submission Instructions

Ensure that you read this guideline before attempting to apply for this studentship. All application components must be submitted by 4:00 pm on January 31, 2024. Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.

- NSERC Online Form 202 (Parts I and II) with uploaded transcripts should be submitted [online](#).
- NSERC, CIHR & SSHRC USRA [student letters](#) and [letter of recommendation](#) forms will be submitted online.



- Transcripts are sent directly from MyCreds.ca to usra@uleth.ca.

Conditions of the Award

1. **Value:** The Tri-Council USRA provides a stipend of \$6,000 for sixteen consecutive weeks at 35 hours of work per week. The faculty supervisor provides a minimum top-up of \$2,730 to the agency's portion. Successful applicants will be paid on the last business day of each month during the award period.
2. **Term:** The award term is for sixteen (16) consecutive weeks between May 1 and August 31, 2024. The student is expected to work full-time equivalent (35 hours) each week over the summer. The supervisor and student should agree on the exact hours and schedule. 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. However, awardees are encouraged to give a poster presentation of their research activities over the summer at the UG Research Symposium (an outreach initiative organized by the Faculty of Arts and Science) during the last week of August.
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 period.
- **WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS (10%)** - the quality of application presentation; 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, if any).

- **EXPECTED QUALITY OF THE TRAINING TO BE RECEIVED** – As demonstrated by the proposed supervisor's plan for the student described in Form 202 Part II and letter of recommendation, if applicable.

Following the application deadline, applications are sent to the NSERC Scholarship Selection Committee members, 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 of 22 and CIHR and SSHRC USRAs of 1 each. The number of fundable applications is expected to exceed the available awards for each competition. A waitlist will be generated because applicants often apply for other scholarships (e.g. Chinook Summer Research Awards and Alberta Innovates (AI) Summer Research Studentships). The ORIS will fund 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.

Please also note –any qualified Indigenous and Black student researchers who meet the program's eligibility criteria, are self-identified and are recommended for a USRA will not be counted in the University of Lethbridge's NSERC USRA quota. Students who wish to identify as Indigenous/Black when applying for a USRA are asked to do so on Form 202 Part I.

Other grants for Indigenous Students

Through the [*NSERC Indigenous Student Ambassadors*](#), Indigenous students may receive up to \$5,000 toward the expenses of visiting Indigenous communities and schools in Canada to share their university experiences in a natural science or engineering (NSE) program.

USRA Supplements:[Canadian Forest Sector Workforce Diversity Undergraduate Supplement](#)

This Undergraduate Student Research Award (USRA) supplement provides financial support to high-calibre students working towards degrees in *forestry sciences and related fields relevant to Natural Resources Canada – Canadian Forest Service*. Natural Resources Canada – Canadian

Forest Service offers up to 30 supplements annually. NSERC automatically considers applications if the proposed project falls within the research areas relevant to Natural Resources Canada – Canadian Forest Sector. The supplement will offset the hiring costs, including the required institutional top-up, should we have successful applicants. If you successfully obtain the supplement, the total amount of your award compensation may or may not change.

[Environment and Climate Change Canada \(ECCC\) Atmospheric and Meteorological undergraduate supplements](#)

This supplement aims to stimulate research in the atmospheric and meteorological sciences in Canadian academic institutions, encourage and support undergraduate students to carry out research of interest to ECCC, increase contacts between ECCC researchers and Canadian academic institutions, and promote the training of potential candidates for possible future graduate studies in the atmospheric and meteorological sciences and possible future employment at ECCC.

To be eligible for the supplement, you must hold or have held an Undergraduate Student Research Award (USRA) in the preceding fall or winter terms. USRA holders must apply directly to ECCC by August 1 of the summer they hold the award.

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

A **conflict of interest occurs if there 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 an actual, perceived, or potential conflict of interest when the review committee member, external reviewer, or observer:



- May receive professional/personal benefits 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 been reviewed?

A **conflict of interest may exist** when reviewing 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 individual 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 a reviewer for such applications.

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