**Brandon University Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada**

**Undergraduate Student Research Awards (NSERC USRA)**

**Committee Procedures**

**Committee Composition**

* Chair: Vice-President (Research & Graduate Studies) or designate; votes in the case of tie
* Voting Members: Five (5) NSERC-eligible members and three (3) alternates, normally no more than one member from each department
* NSERC USRA Liaison Officer: Research Officer
* NSERC USRA Administrative Support: Administrative Assistant

The NSERC USRA Committee will seek appointments from the Faculty of Science by way of a notice sent to the Dean. The Committee encourages appointments from departments that are not represented on the Committee at the time of appointment. Members shall be NSERC-eligible. Members will normally be appointed in September for a term of three years, with the option to serve multiple terms. Terms will be staggered to ensure the Committee is comprised of both new and experienced members. Priority should be given to appointees who are former USRA supervisors. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion shall be taken into consideration when populating the Committee, specifically, in relation to the four groups designated by the Employment Equity Act:

1. Women;
2. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples;
3. Members of Visible Minorities; and
4. Persons with Disabilities.

**NSERC-eligible Researcher**

**An NSERC eligible researcher is someone who h**olds or has a firm offer of an academic appointment at Brandon University. The appointment can be:

* a tenured or tenure-track; or
* a term or contract position of no less than three years.

The position must require the researcher to engage in research that is not under the direction of another individual and must authorize the researcher to supervise or co-supervise the research of students registered in an undergraduate or graduate degree program, or postdoctoral fellows (e.g., thesis supervision and not supervision of regular course or laboratory assignments).

Note: USRA Committee members who are the proposed supervisor of a USRA applicant cannot be part of the adjudication process or any subsequent policy review process for that funding year.

**Conflict of Interest**

The BU NSERC USRA Committee is guided by the [Brandon University Conflict of Interest in Research Policy](https://www.brandonu.ca/research/files/ConflictInterestPolicy.pdf) which is based on the Tri-Agency Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy. From the institutional policy:

*Conflict of Interest may arise when activities or situations place a person or the University in a real, perceived, or potential conflict between their duties or responsibilities related to research and their personal, University or other interests. Conflict of Interest may occur when individuals’ or University’s judgments and actions in relation to research are, or could be, affected by personal, University or other interests, including, but not limited to, business, commercial or financial interests, whether of individuals, their family members, their friends, or their former, current, or prospective professional associations – or of the University itself. Conflicts of Interest that create divided loyalties may distract researchers, research ethics boards (REBs), and the University from concerns for the welfare of participants and are contrary to the core principles of research ethics. Failure to disclose and manage conflicts may impede the informed and autonomous choices of individuals to participate in research. Prospective participants need to know about real, potential or perceived Conflict of Interest in order to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. Conflict of Interest may also undermine the respect for participants. It is preferable to avoid or prevent being in a position of conflict of interest, if possible. When it is not possible to avoid a Conflict of Interest, then it shall be disclosed to the appropriate people and steps taken to minimize or manage the conflict. Researchers, their University and REBs should identify and address Conflict of Interest – real, potential, or perceived – to discharge professional and University obligations, maintain public confidence and trust, and ensure accountability. In some cases, the conflict cannot be managed and the University, the researcher, or the REB member may need to abandon one of the interests in conflict. When necessary, researchers may have to manage a conflict of interest either by disclosing it to participants or by removing themselves from the research.*

***BU NSERC USRA Committee Members are Required To:***

* be knowledgeable with the information set forth in the Brandon University Conflict of Interest in Research Policy,
* self-declare a Conflict of Interest for an application where a Conflict of Interest is present,
* refrain from completing the formal evaluation for the identified application(s), and
* abstain from participating in the review and adjudication of the identified application(s).

**Student and Supervisor Eligibility**

The [NSERC USRA Program description outlines](https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/students-etudiants/ug-pc/usra-brpc_eng.asp) the eligibility criteria for students. Supervisors must be NSERC-eligible researchers and have an active research program. The USRA Liaison Officer will verify student eligibility at the time of application.

**URSA Quota**

NSERC normally provides institutional quotas to Liaison Officers in January. This information will be communicated to the Committee once received.

Proposed supervisors must be able to support the students who they agree to supervise should their applications be successful. This includes financial support and the required resources and facilities needed to undertake the research project.

Indigenous and Black applicants do not count towards the institution’s quota but are in addition to it. Both groups are encouraged to self-identify through the application process.

As of the 2023-2024 funding year, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) have made a limited number of SSHRC and CIHR USRA awards available for students of Black heritage. Students applying for these awards will submit applications through the NSERC portal and will be assessed by a respective committee. Please see the SSHRC and CIHR USRA Committee Procedures document for more detail.

**Application Review**

The Office of Research Services will manage the administration of the awards. Only complete applications will be considered. All applications will be reviewed by the Committee to ensure adherence to NSERC and BU guidelines. Specifically, NSERC applications are assessed on the basis of the student’s academic record and research aptitude. NSERC requires that all applications be categorized for purposes of online administration as either:

1. A – Approved application submitted to NSERC;
2. B – Supplementary application which could potentially be changed to “A” should an award become available; or
3. C – Unmeritorious application.

Applications on the supplementary list will be ranked in the event an award becomes available via withdrawal, refusal, or addition to the University quota.

**Submission Requirements**

A Complete NSERC USRA Application includes the following:

1. Form 202 Part I – completed by student;
2. Form 202 Part II – completed by supervisor;
3. University Transcripts;
4. Letter of Support from Supervisor; and
5. Letter from Student.

**Letter of Support from the Supervisor (one page maximum)**

The letter of support should address the student’s research aptitude and other abilities. Supervisors who have more than one student applying for a USRA are required to rank the students clearly within the letter. The letters should include:

1. Why the supervisor wants to work with the student;
2. Fit of the student with the supervisor’s research program;
3. Fit of the student with the proposed research project;
4. Student’s preparation and skill to conduct research, their theoretical and applied skills;
5. Student’s written, oral, and interpersonal skills;
6. What the student will learn and how they will benefit from the research experience; and
7. Where a student has received a USRA in the past, address how the student’s research will progress and build on their previous research and the anticipated outcomes.
8. A statement confirming that the supervisor is able to top up the USRA student’s salary by the minimum amount outlined in the table below. The source of funds must be included to determine eligibility.

**Letter from the Student (one page maximum)**

The letter from the student should address how the NSERC USRA will benefit the student’s career/future and provide an idea of their plans.

A student who has previously held an NSERC USRA(s) must also clearly describe their role in the previous project(s), the theory or concepts and skills they have learned, and any progress they have made, if applicable, towards formal research contributions, for example, presentations, publications or other research contributions.

**Selection Criteria**

Review will be based on the following criteria and weightings:

**Academic Excellence (50%)**

Academic excellence as demonstrated by:

1. Transcripts;
2. Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA);
3. Grade Point Average (GPA) within discipline;
4. Trajectory of GPA over academic career;
5. Stage in academic program; and
6. Scholarships and awards held.

The following factors may be taken into consideration while reviewing CGPA and GPA within discipline:

* Total number of credit hours taken;
* Evidence of progression;
* Weighting on Major vs. Minor, preference may be given to applicants who show progress in their field of study; and
* Applications with CGPA deviations of less than or equal to 0.05 shall not be considered significant when adjudicating.

**Research Potential (50%)**

Research potential as demonstrated by:

1. Letter of support from supervisor;
2. Letter from student;
3. Academic training;
4. Previous research/work experience (can include co-op terms, previous USRAs held);
5. Relevance of work experience and academic training to field of proposed research;
6. Judgement and ability to think critically;
7. Ability to apply skills and knowledge;
8. Enthusiasm for research, relevant community involvement and outreach;
9. Initiative and autonomy;
10. Research experience and achievements relative to expectations of someone with the applicant’s academic experience.

**Other Considerations**

1. The Committee will take into consideration the number of USRAs a student has received in the past, when adjudicating applications.
2. Priority will be given to first-time applicants who have not previously held a USRA.
3. Consideration may be given to applicants who are continuing and building on a previous USRA project.
4. Supervisors are normally limited to two USRA recipients per competition, with the exception of students who do not affect the institutional quota, i.e., Aboriginal students or any other exceptions that may apply.

**Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)**

Brandon University is committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion when providing awards and services to student researchers. We invite application from all eligible candidates and especially those who are members of underrepresented groups, including, those within the four designated groups, and LGBTT2SQ\* People (sexual orientation and/or gender identity minorities).

Brandon University supports the [Tri-Agency Statement on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/EDI-EDI/index_eng.asp) which states:

*The*[*Canadian Institutes of Health Research*](https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/193.html)*, the*[*Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada*](https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/index_eng.asp)*, and the*[*Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada*](https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/home-accueil-eng.aspx)*are committed to excellence in research and research training. 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 to respond to local, national and global challenges.*

*With these goals in mind, the agencies are committed to:*

* *Supporting equitable access to funding opportunities for all members of the research community*
* *Promoting the integration of equity, diversity and inclusion-related considerations in research design and practices*
* *Increasing equitable and inclusive participation in the research system, including on research teams*
* *Collecting the data and conducting the analyses needed to include equity, diversity and inclusion considerations in decision-making*

*Through these means the agencies will work with those involved in the research system to develop the inclusive culture needed for research excellence and to achieve outcomes that are rigorous, relevant, and accessible to diverse populations.*

It is important that applicants consider EDI in the design of their research projects, specifically, from the [NSERC USRA Program Description](https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/students-etudiants/ug-pc/usra-brpc_eng.asp):

*Incorporating diversity considerations, including but not limited to sex (biological), gender (socio-cultural), race, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, geographic location, among other factors in your research design can make it more ethically sound, rigorous and useful.*

*NSERC is 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 to respond to local, national and global challenges. This principle informs the commitments described in the*[*Tri-Agency statement on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI)*](https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/EDI-EDI/index_eng.asp)*. For more information consult the document:*[*Equity, diversity and inclusion considerations at each stage of the research process*](https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/Policies-Politiques/EDI_guidance-Conseils_EDI_eng.asp)*.*

**Committee EDI Training**

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training for BU NSERC USRA Committee members is required prior to the adjudication meeting, specifically:

1. [Unconscious Bias Training Module](https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/lms/e/bias/); and
2. [Sex and Gender Training Modules](https://www.cihr-irsc-igh-isfh.ca/).

It is recommended that Committee members take the EDI training every four (4) years.

**EDI and the Institutional USRA Quota**

Eligible First Nations, Metis, Inuit, and Black applicants who have self-identified in the NSERC on-line application and who meet the criteria shall receive a USRA independent of internal ranking procedures and the formal BU quota allotted by NSERC.

**Supplemental Funding**

In order to meet [Manitoba minimum wage standards](https://www.gov.mb.ca/labour/standards/doc,minimum-wage,factsheet.html), and to ensure equity with comparable undergraduate research assistant work, Brandon University requires that students receiving a USRA are provided with a total salary equivalent to that of a [PSAC RAII level](https://www.brandonu.ca/hr/collective-agreements/). As the USRA award values $6,000, a minimum amount of supplemental funding must be contributed to achieve that level of funding in relation to a full-time, 35-hour work week. Brandon University will provide 50% of this required supplemental funding, and the USRA supervisor is required to provide at minimum the remaining 50%. However, there is no maximum contribution, and supervisors are encouraged to contribute as much as they are able and as they deem appropriate.

At the time of the application deadline, supervisors must provide a statement in their Letter of Support form confirming that they have the minimum required funds to contribute towards the required USRA student salary top-up. The source of funds must be included to determine eligibility. Unconfirmed funds are not eligible sources.

As an example, the minimum contributions for 2024-2025 are calculated as follows:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Number of Weeks | Total PSAC RAII Salary (35 hrs/wk x $16.98/hr x # wks) | NSERC Contribution | Brandon University Contribution | Supervisor Minimum Contribution |
| 14 | $8,320.20 | $6,000.00 | $1,160.10 | $1,160.10 |
| 15 | $8,914.50 | $6,000.00 | $1,457.25 | $1,457.25 |
| 16 | $9,508.80 | $6,000.00 | $1,754.40 | $1,754.40 |

**Submission Deadline and Award Notification**

The deadline for application submission is February 1st. This includes both the student’s and supervisor’s submission. Where the 1st falls on a weekend, the deadline is the following business day. Review will take place within two weeks of the February 1st deadline and official award notifications will be sent from the Chair of the Brandon University NSERC USRA Committee following the adjudication meeting.

**Reporting Requirements**

A Brandon University NSERC USRA Report shall be submitted by the student and supervisor upon completion of the USRA.

Revised: November 2023