Brandon University Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRA) Procedures

The Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRA) program is administered jointly by Canada's three granting agencies: the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). USRAs are meant to nurture students' interest in—and fully develop their potential for a research career in—health, natural sciences and engineering, or social sciences and humanities. These awards are also meant to encourage graduate studies in these fields. They provide financial support to students through the host institution, to help them gain research work experience that complements their studies in an academic setting.

Review Committee

Applications for NSERC, SSHRC and CIHR USRAs will be adjudicated by the Senate Research Committee (SRC). The USRA Liaison Officer will provide instructions and application package materials to the SRC prior to the adjudication meeting, and will attend the adjudication meeting as an information resource. Adjudication will take place in February. The Liaison Officer will also attend a SRC meeting prior to the adjudication meeting in order to train the Committee on their responsibilities and the USRA process.

Conflict of Interest

The SRC is guided by the Brandon University Conflict of Interest in Research Policy 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.

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).

Note: SRC Members who are the proposed supervisor of a USRA applicant cannot be part of the adjudication process assessing applications for the Agency to which their student is applying.

Eligibility

Student Eligibility

The USRA Program description should be referenced for up-to-date eligibility criteria for students. The USRA Liaison Officer will verify student eligibility at the time of application.

To Apply for an Award an Applicant:

1. Must be a Canadian Citizen, permanent resident of Canada, or Protected Person under subsection 95(2) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Canada);
2. Must be registered, at time of application, in a bachelor's degree program at an eligible university;
3. Have obtained, over the previous years of study, a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of at least 2.7;
4. Cannot be currently enrolled in an undergraduate professional degree program in the health sciences (e.g., MD, DDS, BScN) (does not apply to CIHR USRAs);
5. Cannot be currently registered, or have been previously registered at any time, in a graduate program in the same field of study; and
6. Cannot have completed all your degree requirements.

In addition, an Applicant:

7. Who already holds a bachelor's degree and is studying toward a second bachelor's degree, may still apply for this award;
8. May apply with more than one department or institution, but can hold only one USRA per fiscal year (April 1 to March 31); and
9. May hold a maximum of three USRAs throughout their undergraduate career (regardless of the granting agency).

To Hold an Award an Applicant Must:

10. Have completed all the course requirements of at least the first year of university study (or two academic terms) of bachelor's degree (30 credit hours). First year students are eligible to apply for this award and must fulfill the aforementioned course requirements prior to award uptake;

11. 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;
12. Not be registered in a graduate program; and
13. Be engaged on a full-time basis in research and development activities in the natural sciences or engineering (NSERC), social sciences or humanities (SSHRC), or health studies (CIHR) during the tenure of the USRA.

Supervisor Eligibility

Supervisors must be Tri-Agency-eligible researchers and have an active research program. A Tri-Agency-eligible researcher is someone who holds or has a firm offer of an academic appointment at Brandon University. The appointment can be a tenured or tenure-track position or a term or contract position. 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).

Proposed supervisors must demonstrate that they are 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.

Subject Matter Eligibility

Each agency supports and promotes high-quality research in a variety of disciplines and areas, which are divided into broad fields of research: NSERC supports research in natural sciences and engineering, SSHRC supports research in social sciences and humanities, and CIHR supports research in health. The selection of the appropriate agency is based on the subject matter of the proposed research project. Please refer to the Selecting the appropriate federal granting agency web page for more information.

USRA Allocation

Each institution receives an allocation of applications (by Agency) that can be forwarded for funding. Confirmation of allocations is normally received from the agencies by January of the award year.

NSERC provides additional awards above the institutional allocation for Indigenous students and a limited number of additional awards above the institutional allocation reserved for Black students. Both groups are encouraged to self-identify through the application process.

SSHRC and CIHR have made a limited number of SSHRC and CIHR USRA awards available for students of Black heritage. Students must self-identify to be eligible to apply for these awards and submit applications through the NSERC portal.

Application Review

The Office of the Vice-President (Research & Graduate Studies) will facilitate the application process and manage the administration of the awards. Only complete applications will be considered. All applications will be reviewed by the SRC to ensure adherence to Tri-agency and BU guidelines. Specifically, USRA applications are assessed on the basis of the student's academic

record, research aptitude, and leadership. All applications are submitted to the NSERC portal, and must be categorized for purposes of online administration as either:

- A – Approved NSERC, CIHR, and SSHRC applications to be forwarded to NSERC;
- B – Not forwarded to NSERC: Supplementary application which could potentially be changed to "A" should an award become available; or
- C – Not forwarded to NSERC: Not recommended and cannot be changed to the A or B list in future.

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

Submission Requirements

A complete 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. Supervisor Statement of Support form; and
5. Student Personal Statement form.
6. For Students who have previously held a USRA, the final report form must have been received at the conclusion of the most recently completed USRA project, and will be included in the evaluation package provided to the SRC.

Form 202 Part I and Part II

USRA applications are completed and submitted via the NSERC On-line System. Please see the NSERC Instructions for Completing an Application – Form 202 for complete details.

University Transcripts

Unofficial transcripts will be accepted, but must be requested by the student from the Registrar's Office. Requests for official BU transcripts can be made through Financial & Registration Services.

Supervisor Statement of Support (two pages maximum)

Supervisors are instructed to use the Supervisor Statement of Support Form (available at the BU USRA Information webpage). The statement of support should address the student's academic excellence, research potential, and evidence of leadership. Supervisors who have more than one student applying for a USRA are required to rank the students clearly within the form. The form includes:

a. An assessment of the applicant's skills, abilities, achievements, experience and contributions related to **academic excellence**;
b. An assessment of the applicant's skills, abilities, achievements, experience and contributions related to **research potential**;
c. An assessment of the applicant's skills, abilities, achievements, experience and contributions related to **leadership**;
d. A description of the supervisor's student training plan, including what the student will learn and how they will benefit from the research experience;
e. Where a student has received a USRA in the past, a description of how the student's research will progress and build on their previous research and the anticipated outcomes; and

f. A statement confirming that the supervisor is able to top up the USRA student's salary by the minimum amount required to meet PSAC RAII full-time salary for the duration of the award. The source of funds must be included to determine eligibility.

Student Personal Statement (two pages maximum)
Students are instructed to use the Student Personal Statement Form (available at the BU USRA Information webpage). The form should address how the USRA will benefit the student's career/future, provide an idea of their plans, and describe how they have demonstrated leadership in academic or extracurricular settings.

A student who has previously held one or more 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.

For previous USRA holders only – The final report from the most recently completed USRA will be attached as part of the application package by the Liaison Officer and will be considered in the review of applications.

Selection Criteria
Review will be based on the following criteria and weightings:

Academic Excellence (30%)
Academic excellence as demonstrated by past academic results, transcripts, awards and distinctions.
Indicators of academic excellence:

a. Academic record;
b. Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA);
c. Grade Point Average (GPA) within discipline;
d. Trajectory of GPA over academic career;
e. Stage in academic program; and
f. Scholarships and awards held.

Sources:

- Transcripts
- Form 202 Part I;
- Supervisor Statement of Support form;
- Student Personal Statement form.

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.

Members should consider an applicant's entire academic record when assessing academic excellence. Members should favorably consider situations where an applicant has demonstrated an improving trend.

Research Potential (50%)

Research potential as demonstrated by the applicant's research history and their interest in discovery.

Indicators of Research Potential:

a. Academic training;
b. Previous research/work experience (can include co-op terms, previous USRAs held);
c. Relevance of work experience and academic training to field of proposed research;
d. Ability to apply skills and knowledge;
e. Enthusiasm for research;
f. Research experience and achievements relative to expectations of someone with the applicant's academic experience;
g. *Previous USRA holders*: description of skills and knowledge acquired during prior award(s) and extent to which the current project builds off of previous USRA projects.

Sources:

- Form 202 Part II;
- Supervisor Statement of Support form;
- Student Personal Statement form;
- *Previous USRA holders*: final reports from previous awards.

Leadership (20%)

Leadership as demonstrated by personal achievement, involvement in academic life, involvement beyond academia, goal-achievement, and the management of self and others.

Indicators of Leadership:

a. Judgement and ability to think critically;
b. Initiative and autonomy;
c. Relevant community involvement and outreach;
d. Mentoring/teaching;
e. Commitment to and leadership in student government and in the institution and broader community, including committees, teams, senate, boards, ethics committees, etc.;

Sources:

- Supervisor Statement of Support form;
- Student Personal Statement form.

Other Considerations

a. The Committee will take into consideration any special circumstances described by the student that may have affected performance and/or productivity.

b. The Committee will take into consideration the number of USRAs a student has received in the past, when adjudicating applications.
c. To be considered for a subsequent award, students must clearly describe the outcomes from their previous USRA project(s). Consideration will be given to applicants who are continuing and building on a previous USRA project.
d. Where reviewer evaluations are comparable, priority will be given to first-time applicants who have not previously held a USRA.
e. Supervisors are normally limited to two USRA recipients per competition, with the exception of students who do not affect the institutional quota, i.e., Indigenous students or any other exceptions that may apply.
f. Priority will be given to Brandon University students.

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 which states:

> *The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada 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 USRA Program Description:

> *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).

When preparing the research proposal, supervisors are encouraged to consult the NSERC guide on integrating equity, diversity and inclusion considerations in research web page.

Committee EDI Training

Committee members are required to take Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training every two (2) years, and to provide their most recent training certificates to the Senate Research Committee administrative assistant.

EDI and the Institutional USRA Allocation

Eligible Indigenous student researchers who have self-identified in the NSERC on-line application and who meet the criteria shall receive an NSERC USRA independent of internal ranking procedures and the formal BU allocation provided by NSERC. NSERC additionally reserves an allocation for self-identified Black student researchers. CIHR and SSHRC USRAs are currently for self-identified Black student researchers only.

Supplemental Funding

In order to meet Manitoba minimum wage standards, 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. 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. There is no maximum contribution, and supervisors are encouraged to contribute as much as they are able and as they deem appropriate.

Brandon University Contribution – Black and Indigenous Students

To promote and support both Brandon University's and the USRA program's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, Brandon University will contribute 50% of the required minimum supplemental funding for all Black and Indigenous students. The USRA supervisor is required to provide, at minimum, the remaining 50%.

Please refer to the Appendix for specific salary rates, or use the USRA Payroll Calculator (found on the BU USRA Information webpage).

Supervisors must provide a statement in the Supervisor Statement 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 funding eligibility. Unconfirmed funds are not eligible sources.

Please see the Appendix for anticipated salary contributions requirements.

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 or holiday, the deadline is the following business day. Review will normally take place in February and official award notifications will be sent from the Chair of the Senate Research Committee following the adjudication meeting.

Reporting Requirements

A Brandon University USRA Report shall be submitted by the student and supervisor upon completion of the USRA. The USRA Report template can be found on the BU USRA Information webpage.

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Appendix

Anticipated salary requirements for USRA supervisor contributions

NSERC USRA salary calculations

Number of Weeks	Total PSAC RAII Salary (35 hrs/wk x $18.97*/hr x # wks)	NSERC Contribution	Supervisor Minimum Contribution
14	$9,295.30	$6,000.00	$3,295.30
15	$9,959.25	$6,000.00	$3,959.25
16	$10,623.20	$6,000.00	$4,623.20

*Based on PSAC salary rates as outlined in the PSAC Collective Agreement – 2024-2028. Please refer to the current PSAC Collective Agreement for updated rates.

Black and Indigenous student USRA salary calculations

2027 Competition Year

Number of Weeks	Total PSAC RAII Salary (35 hrs/wk x $18.97*/hr x # wks)	NSERC Contribution	Brandon University Contribution	Supervisor Minimum Contribution
14	$9,295.30	$6,000.00	$1,647.65	$1,647.65
15	$9,959.25	$6,000.00	$1,979.63	$1,979.63
16	$10,623.20	$6,000.00	$2,311.60	$2,311.60

*Based on PSAC salary rates as outlined in the PSAC Collective Agreement – 2024-2028. Please refer to the current PSAC Collective Agreement for updated rates.