

# **NSERC USRA Program Undergraduate Student Research Awards – 2021 Competition**

**Presented by: Linda Hurrell, Grants/Contracts Officer  
Office of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation**

February 5, 2021

# AGENDA

- Brief Overview of NSERC
- Overview of the USRA Program
- USRA Objectives
- Changes to the USRA Program
- Pre-application steps
- Student and Supervisor Eligibility
- Application Process
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- University Allocations
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# What is NSERC?

- The major source of research funding for post-secondary institutions in Canada is provided by the Tri-Council Agencies: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).
- **NSERC** is the primary federal agency investing in university research and training in the **natural sciences and engineering**.
- **NSERC**'s role is to make investments in people, discovery, and innovation for the benefit of all Canadians.

# What are USRAs?

- USRA - Undergraduate Student Research Award

University-based research ➡ USRA

- **NSERC USRA program** must be completed and submitted to the Canadian university where you wish to hold an award. Selected/nominated applications are submitted to NSERC by the university.
- **You can apply to more than one university**; however, it is the university's choice whether to accept candidates from other institutions.

# USRA Objectives

- Stimulate student interest in research in the natural sciences and engineering
- Provide work experience that complements the degree program
- Encourage students to undertake graduate studies and pursue a research career
- USRA is intended to be **over and above** the academic credits needed for the degree, similar to a co-op or intern placement
- NSERC encourages qualified Indigenous students to apply to this program (\*\*USRAs awarded to Indigenous applicants who meet the requirements of the program do not count towards the university quota)

# Changes to the USRA Program

## Their motivation:

- to improve the experience for all participants
- to increase the fairness for recipients and supervisors
- to allow students to access more work experiences
- to allow more Early Career Researchers to access the program, help them establish their research programs and attract students
- to reduce administrative burden

# Before you begin your application:

- Read the NSERC USRA Program Description
  - Ensure you meet eligibility criteria

For an online NSERC USRA application tutorial - check the NSERC website at

[http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/Videos-Videos/usra-brpct\\_eng.asp](http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/Videos-Videos/usra-brpct_eng.asp)

- Read the NSERC USRA & Ryerson Application Guidelines and Instructions, which can be found at:

<https://www.ryerson.ca/research/students/support/>

# Student Eligibility

- Is a Canadian Citizen / Permanent Resident of Canada as of the application deadline date
- Is registered in a Bachelor's degree program, at an eligible university, at the time of application [and has been registered in at least one of the two terms immediately previous to the award]
- Have obtained, over the previous years of study, a cumulative average of at least 3.67 (equivalent to A-)
- Not have begun a graduate program prior to tenure of award / Not hold higher degree in natural sciences or engineering
- Not enrolled in an undergraduate professional degree (MD, DDS, BScN)
- May hold only 1 USRA per fiscal year (April 1 to March 31)
- May hold up to 3 USRAs throughout undergraduate university career



# Eligibility of Proposed Research

## 1) Supervisor eligibility

- Supervisors no longer need to hold an active grant but they must be authorized by their university to independently supervise students. [Ryerson eligibility: **RFA members only**].

## 2) Proposed research eligibility

- Proposed research *project* must clearly lie within the natural sciences and/or engineering (NSE).

**\*It is not necessary for the proposed supervisor's research program to be exclusively within the NSE.**

\*\*The suitability of the supervision & research project will be evaluated by the university as part of the award selection process. Projects deemed outside of the NSE will be deemed ineligible and the application will be withdrawn from the competition.

# Applying for USRA

- Find a supervisor/faculty member working in the research area that you want to explore and discuss the proposed USRA application with him/her.
- Complete **Part I** of the NSERC online application (**Form 202**) and upload your current transcript (including a legend) – be sure to click “verify” [once it passes the verification - Status will be marked as “complete”].

**\*\* Universities are permitted to recommend an unlimited number of self-identified Indigenous applicants to the USRA Program above their application quota.** In order to be considered for this, Indigenous applicants must provide consent within the application form to share this information with their universities and NSERC. Self-identification data are not seen or used during the review process or by the proposed supervisor.

# Applying for USRA - continued

- Give Reference # to Supervisor who will complete **Part II** of the NSERC online application, click “verify”, “preview” & “**submit to LO (Liaison Officer)**”.

The Ryerson Liaison Officer is Linda Hurrell, Grants/Contracts Officer (Natural Sciences & Engineering)

- **Prepare a Student Statement**

Each applicant is asked to submit a 1-page statement that describes

- A) Explain why you want to undertake this research project and how it relates to your plans following the completion of your undergraduate degree.
- B) Describe your qualifications and your research experience to date for this research award.
- C) If you are a previous NSERC USRA awardee, provide justification why you should be considered for a 2<sup>nd</sup> (or 3<sup>rd</sup>) award.



## FORM 202 - PART I Application for an Undergraduate Student Research Award

System-ID 381104210
Date 2016/1/19

Reference No. 433630
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Family name of student Hurrell	Given name Linda	Initial(s) of all given names LA	Personal Identification no. (PIN) 146448
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**ACADEMIC BACKGROUND (including ongoing postsecondary degree)**

Degree	Name of discipline	Institution	Department	Year and month of expected degree completion
Bachelor's	Biochemistry	Ryerson	Chemistry and Biology	

At the time of application, you are attending a postsecondary institution?  
 full time?       part time?

The screenshot shows the NSERC web application interface. The browser address bar displays [https://ebiz.nserc.ca/nserc\\_web/laws/nserc\\_utils/n\\_cst\\_form/of\\_web\\_get/](https://ebiz.nserc.ca/nserc_web/laws/nserc_utils/n_cst_form/of_web_get/). The page header includes the NSERC logo and the text "NSERC www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca". A navigation menu contains "Save", "Preview", "Portfolio", "Contact Us", "Help", "Instructions", and "Logout".

The main content area is titled "Form 202 Part II - Project Profile" and includes a sidebar with a "Form" menu. The "Form" menu is expanded, showing options like "Project Profile", "Supervisor Profile", "Current Employment", "Address at Location of Tenure", "Outline of Proposed Research Project", "Access Student Form", "University Comments", "Proactive Disclosure", and "Proactive Disclosure".

The "Form 202 Part II - Project Profile" form contains the following fields:

- Student name: Hurrell, Linda
- Reference number: 433630 (highlighted with a yellow circle)
- Proposed work term: Summer
- Year: 2016
- Title of proposed research project: Testing System
- Research subject code: Use the 'List...' button
- Application language: English (selected)
- Institution that will administer the award: Ryerson
- Department: Chemistry and Biology

At the bottom of the page, there is a "Date Modified: 2016/01/07" and a "Top of Page" link.



# Selection Criteria

The applications will be assessed on the following criteria:

- Academic record
  - Have obtained, over the previous years of study, a cumulative grade point average (cGPA) of at least 3.67 (equivalent to A-)
- Research aptitude
  - Each applicant is asked to submit a 1-page statement that describes their research interests, experience and how the NSERC USRA will benefit their academic/career goals.
- Expected quality of the training to be received
  - Should be described in section provide on the NSERC Form 202 Part II.

\*\* Priority will be given to students entering into their 3rd or 4th year of study

# Deadlines & Review Process

- **Submission Deadline**

**Thursday, February 25, 2021 by 4:00pm (EST)**

- Your supervisor will need to submit the completed application [Form 202 Parts I & II with transcript(s)] on the NSERC On-Line Services Portal
- You (the student) will need to submit the **Student Statement** via Google Form to the Office of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation

- **Review Process**

- The Departments will review and rank the USRA applications that were submitted by supervisors from their respective department.
- The University Selection Committee will then meet to review the rankings and select the 37 nominated applications to be recommended to NSERC.

# University Allocations

- NSERC provides annual allocation of awards to each institution/university. The Ryerson 2021 quota is 37 USRAs.
- Students interested in holding an award at another university must contact and apply directly to that university.
- Awards cannot be transferred from one institution to another.

**\*\* NSERC no longer provides Travel Allowances. As of the summer 2020 competition cycle, travel expenses will no longer be reimbursed by NSERC.**

# What happens to your application at NSERC?

- NSERC verifies the application and ensures all of the eligibility criteria are met.
- NSERC approves complete and eligible applications.
- NSERC will send a letter to the students to confirm the award, but this will not be until after the start of the semester.



# Notification of Decision

- Notification of Decision will be made *in writing from OVPRI* to the student and supervisor by early April.
- Successful applicants will be asked to confirm their acceptance of the USRA and the start date for the 16-week period by **mid-April**.
- Note: NSERC has final approval of the University's nominees; however, the University will support the NSERC contribution of the award should an ineligible decision be made.

# IMPORTANT

- The University has a quota of awards and the University Selection Committee maintains a short waiting list of USRA applicants.
- Please be courteous to your fellow applicants. If you are lucky enough to be offered another funded opportunity, we ask that you make your final decision in consultation with your Supervisor and notify OVPRI of your decision **as soon as possible**. This will allow the release of the award to another applicant in a timely manner.
- Ryerson will accept ***only one (1) application per student*** for the 2021 Competition. And will ***only award one (1) USRA per supervisor***.



# Thank you!

## Any questions?

For more information, please contact  
Linda Hurrell at  
[lhurrell@ryerson.ca](mailto:lhurrell@ryerson.ca)

# Definition of Indigenous

- ‘Indigenous peoples’ is a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. ‘Aboriginal peoples’ is also often used as a synonym. For the purposes of this program, NSERC uses the Canadian *Constitution Act, 1982* definition of Aboriginal peoples as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.