



MEMORANDUM

TO: Vice-presidents of Research of Eligible Canadian Universities

CC: Liaison Officers for the USRA Program

FROM: Serge Villemure, Director, Scholarships and Fellowships

DATE: December 23, 2019

SUBJECT: USRA modernization and implementation timeline

The Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) views the Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRA) program as a key component of the Canadian research enterprise. It supports more than 3,000 undergraduate students every year, providing research work experience and encouraging graduate studies in the natural sciences and engineering. Many of Canada's leading scientists in the natural sciences and engineering began their academic careers with a USRA.

NSERC is pleased to announce several changes to the program. These changes are intended to improve the experience for all participants, to increase fairness for recipients and supervisors, and to make the program funding decisions more transparent. These changes have been motivated by feedback from stakeholders and the recent NSERC-led Program Evaluation. Starting in 2020:

- Students will have access to more work experiences.
- A greater number of early career researchers will be able to access the program, which will help them to jump-start their research.
- Administrative burden for our university partners will also be reduced, increasing efficiency.

This memo details these changes and provides a timeline for implementation.

1. Supervisor eligibility and selection process.

NSERC will no longer require professors to hold an active grant when applying to supervise a USRA student. NSERC considers anyone who is authorized by their university to independently supervise students to be an eligible supervisor. The

suitability of the supervision will be evaluated by the university as part of their award selection process. NSERC recommends that USRA applications be assessed on the following three criteria:

- Academic record
- Research aptitude, and
- Expected quality of the training to be received.

The suitability of the supervision and research environment can be evaluated as part of the “expected quality of the training to be received” criterion. This change gives students access to a wider variety of research labs and training environments so they can choose the one that is best suited to their interests and strengths. This will also allow a greater number of early career researchers to host USRA students as they work to establish their careers.

This change will also reduce administrative burden for university administrators. Officials at small universities will no longer have to submit exception requests related to supervisor eligibility.

Form 202 will remain unchanged, but the instructions will be updated to indicate that information related to the student’s supervision can be included in the “Outline of the student’s role” section in Part II of the form.

2. University eligibility.

Going forward, a university must be allocated at least one NSERC Canada Research Chair or a special research chair to participate in the USRA program. The university must also be eligible to administer NSERC funds as a university. This new criterion for eligibility will bring the USRA program in line with other NSERC programs. This change will not affect the eligibility of any university currently participating in the USRA program.

3. Discontinuation of the travel allowance.

This facet of the USRA program is seldom used and inconsistent with other training and scholarship programs. To increase efficiency and reduce administrative burdens, travel expenses will no longer be reimbursed.

4. Award distribution formula.

NSERC is introducing a new USRA distribution formula, similar to the formula

used for the Canada Research Chair program. The number of USRAs each university will receive will be proportional to its share of NSERC grant funding. The minimum allocation will continue to be four awards.

Timeline for changes

All of the changes outlined above will be implemented for the Summer 2020 competition (deadline May 1, 2020).

If you have questions or comments, please contact program staff at usra-brpc@nserc-crsng.gc.ca .