

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 BU NSERC USRA Committee 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: Committee 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 [NSERC 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 Must:

1. Be a Canadian Citizen, permanent resident of Canada, or Protected Person under subsection 95(2) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Canada);
2. Be registered, at time of application, in a bachelor's degree program at an eligible university; and
3. Have obtained, over the previous years of study, a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of at least 2.7.

To Hold an Award an Applicant Must:

4. 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;
5. 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;
6. Not have started a graduate program at any time; and
7. 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; 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).

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.

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 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 Research Services 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 Committee to ensure adherence to Tri-agency and BU guidelines. Specifically, USRA applications are assessed on the basis of the student's academic record and research aptitude. All applications are submitted to the NSERC portal, and must be categorized for purposes of online administration as either:

1. A – Approved NSERC, CIHR, and SSHRC applications to be forwarded to NSERC;
2. B – Not forwarded to NSERC: Supplementary application which could potentially be changed to “A” should an award become available; or
3. 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 quota.

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. Letter of Support from Supervisor; and
5. Letter from Student.

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 ([Val Rodgers](#), McKenzie Building, Room 119). Requests for official BU transcripts can be made through [Financial & Registration Services](#).

Letter of Support from the Supervisor (one page maximum)

Supervisors are instructed to use the [Supervisor Letter of Support Form](#). 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:

- a. Why the supervisor wants to work with the student;
- b. Fit of the student with the supervisor's research program;
- c. Fit of the student with the proposed research project;
- d. Student's preparation and skill to conduct research, their theoretical and applied skills;
- e. Student's written, oral, and interpersonal skills;
- f. What the student will learn and how they will benefit from the research experience; and
- g. 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.
- h. A statement confirming that the supervisor is able to top up the USRA student's salary by the minimum amount required to meet PSAC RAI full-time salary for the duration of the award. 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 USRA will benefit the student's career/future and provide an idea of their plans.

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.

Selection Criteria

Review will be based on the following criteria and weightings:

Academic Excellence (50%)

Academic excellence as demonstrated by:

- a. Transcripts;
- 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.

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:

- a. Letter of support from supervisor;
- b. Letter from student;
- c. Academic training;
- d. Previous research/work experience (can include co-op terms, previous USRAs held);
- e. Relevance of work experience and academic training to field of proposed research;
- f. Judgement and ability to think critically;
- g. Ability to apply skills and knowledge;
- h. Enthusiasm for research, relevant community involvement and outreach;
- i. Initiative and autonomy;
- j. Research experience and achievements relative to expectations of someone with the applicant's academic experience.

Other Considerations

- a. The Committee will take into consideration the number of USRAs a student has received in the past, when adjudicating applications.
- b. Priority will be given to first-time applicants who have not previously held a USRA.
- c. Consideration may be given to applicants who are continuing and building on a previous USRA project.
- d. 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 and Black students or any other exceptions that may apply.
- e. 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 LGBTQ2SQ* 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 \(EDI\)](#). For more information consult the document: [Equity, diversity and inclusion considerations at each stage of the research process](#).

Committee EDI Training

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

1. [Unconscious Bias Training Module; and](#)
2. [Sex and Gender Training Modules](#).

Committee members are required to take the 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 First Nations, Metis, Inuit, and Black applicants 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. CIHR and SSHRC USRAs are currently for 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 RAll 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 – NSERC Allocation

Brandon University has implemented a multi-year plan to reduce the institutional contribution toward the required salary top-up. For the 2025 competition, Brandon University will contribute \$1000 toward the salary top-up for each USRA. For the 2026 competition, Brandon University will contribute \$500 toward the salary top-up. Brandon University will not provide a contribution for NSERC Allocation USRAs in 2027 and forward.

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 Black and Indigenous students, which includes non-allocation NSERC USRA awardees, and SSHRC and CIHR awardees. 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](#)).

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.

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, the deadline is the following business day. Review will normally take place within two weeks of the February 1st deadline 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.

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Appendix

Anticipated salary requirements for USRA supervisor contributions

NSERC Allocation USRA salary calculations

2025 Competition Year

Number of Weeks	Total PSAC RAI Salary (35 hrs/wk x \$17.53/hr x # wks)	NSERC Contribution	Brandon University Contribution	Supervisor Minimum Contribution
14	\$8,589.70	\$6,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,589.70
15	\$9,203.25	\$6,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$2,203.25
16	\$9,816.80	\$6,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$2,816.80

2026 Competition Year

Number of Weeks	Total PSAC RAI Salary (35 hrs/wk x \$18.06*/hr x # wks)	NSERC Contribution	Brandon University Contribution	Supervisor Minimum Contribution
14	\$8,847.39	\$6,000.00	\$500.00	\$2,347.39
15	\$9,479.35	\$6,000.00	\$500.00	\$2,979.35
16	\$10,111.30	\$6,000.00	\$500.00	\$3,611.30

2027 Competition Year

Number of Weeks	Total PSAC RAI Salary (35 hrs/wk x \$18.60*/hr x # wks)	NSERC Contribution	Brandon University Contribution	Supervisor Minimum Contribution
14	\$9,112.81	\$6,000.00	\$0.00	\$3,112.81
15	\$9,763.73	\$6,000.00	\$0.00	\$3,763.73
16	\$10,414.64	\$6,000.00	\$0.00	\$4,414.64

*Estimated based on a 3% increase each year from October 2024 PSAC salary rates. Please refer to the [current PSAC Collective Agreement](#) for updated rates.

Black and Indigenous student USRA salary calculations

2025 Competition Year

Number of Weeks	Total PSAC RAI Salary (35 hrs/wk x \$17.53/hr x # wks)	NSERC Contribution	Brandon University Contribution	Supervisor Minimum Contribution
14	\$8,589.70	\$6,000.00	\$1,294.85	\$1,294.85
15	\$9,203.25	\$6,000.00	\$1,601.63	\$1,601.63
16	\$9,816.80	\$6,000.00	\$1,908.40	\$1,908.40

2026 Competition Year

Number of Weeks	Total PSAC RAI Salary (35 hrs/wk x \$18.06*/hr x # wks)	NSERC Contribution	Brandon University Contribution	Supervisor Minimum Contribution
14	\$8,847.39	\$6,000.00	\$1,423.70	\$1,423.70
15	\$9,479.35	\$6,000.00	\$1,739.67	\$1,739.67
16	\$10,111.30	\$6,000.00	\$2,055.65	\$2,055.65

2027 Competition Year

Number of Weeks	Total PSAC RAI Salary (35 hrs/wk x \$18.60*/hr x # wks)	NSERC Contribution	Brandon University Contribution	Supervisor Minimum Contribution
14	\$9,112.81	\$6,000.00	\$1,556.41	\$1,556.41
15	\$9,763.73	\$6,000.00	\$1,881.86	\$1,881.86
16	\$10,414.64	\$6,000.00	\$2,207.32	\$2,207.32

*Estimated based on a 3% increase each year from October 2024 PSAC salary rates. Please refer to the [current PSAC Collective Agreement](#) for updated rates.