UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

2017/18 NSERC Undergraduate Student Research Awards
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Contents

Office of Research Services ▪ University of Toronto
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STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

Are first-year students eligible to apply?

At UofT, first-year students are excluded from the competition due to the challenges in confirming eligible cumulative averages before the awards are taken up (which start May 1st). Applicants MUST have completed a minimum of two semesters/terms at the time of application. Since the departments and the University process the applications between February and March, marks/CGPAs must be for at least two terms.

A student completed a Bachelor's degree at UofT a few years ago, completed a Master's degree from another University and is now back at UofT working towards another Bachelor's degree. Is he/she eligible? Which GPA would be counted: current year or year he/she graduated?

If a student already holds a bachelor's degree and is studying towards a second bachelor's degree in the natural sciences or engineering, he/she may still apply to this program. He/She must also have obtained, over the previous years of study, a cumulative average of at least a grade of "B-". Current GPA will be counted. A student cannot have obtained a higher degree (i.e.Master's) in Natural Science or Engineering.

A student graduated from another university and is currently taking some courses at UofT. However, the student does not plan to graduate from UofT. Is he/she eligible?

No, the student is not eligible.

If students who are currently on a work term or co-op placement, but will be returning to school in the following term, be able to apply for a USRA?

These students would be allowed to apply. For co-op students, they are eligible to concurrently hold a co-op placement and a USRA provided that the co-op credit does not count towards the academic requirements of the Bachelor Degree program.

Can a student avail of the award in September/the fall since he is unavailable in the summer? If not, can the student's salary be paid in advance although he will carry out the award starting September?

No. UofT runs the program only in the summer. Financial reporting to NSERC on the program is done in September. Paying the student's salary in advance while actual work will be done in September-January is not feasible.

A student, who is a Canadian citizen, is currently registered at a US university. She would like to spend the summer here and work with a researcher at UofT. Is she eligible?

Students may be registered at universities outside Canada as long as the university is "recognized", the student is eligible, and a Canadian university accepts him/her as an external candidate for one of their USRA quota.

A student is on his 3rd year but is currently enrolled only in graduate courses since he has taken all relevant undergraduate courses and the department ran out of courses to offer him. He will complete his undergraduate degree in June. Is he eligible?

The student is deemed eligible to apply for a USRA since he is still registered in a Bachelor's degree program (as of March) and he has not started a program of graduate studies in the natural sciences and engineering.

A student is not currently registered in the Winter Term as they are on an internship with a company. They are not on a "Professional Experience Year" or on a co-op placement. Basically, they took off for this term to do the internship. However, they are still in their program of study. Are they eligible?

Since the student is not currently registered in the Winter term (and not on a co-op placement), he would not be eligible to apply for a USRA for the Summer 2017. He must have been registered in the term "immediately before holding the award in a bachelor's degree program".

Some of our students go on a Professional Experience Year (similar to a co-op placement) after their third year, and some are wondering if it is acceptable to hold a summer USRA award, and then go on a 12-month PEY. They are still registered in their Bachelor's program but considered as "part-time".

The student would be eligible (provided that all eligibility criteria are met) before going on a 12-month PEY.

Are international/foreign students (enrolled at a Canadian university) eligible to apply?

International/foreign students are not eligible. One of the eligibility criteria is that students must be Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada.

If a student is currently on a 1-year exchange at a university abroad but spending summer in Toronto to do research and then return abroad in September, is he/she eligible for a USRA?

Students registered at recognized universities outside Canada may apply to Canadian universities for USRA places. The student has to be a Canadian citizen. It is at the department's discretion.

SUPERVISOR ELIGIBILITY

Where can I find a list of UofT researchers with NSERC grants?

Research Services does not release information on eligible supervisors to students. They should contact the department (through the Undergraduate Counsellor) where they would like to work in.

A faculty member is waiting for the results of the Fall Discovery Grants competition. Is he/she eligible to supervise?

As long as faculty member have his/her Discovery Grant when the student starts the award in May, then, yes, he/she is eligible. Results are released around the last week of March. In the event that their application is not funded, departments can propose alternate eligible supervisors or alternate students.

Does NSERC allow co-supervision? For example, if one supervisor is a grantee and overseer of the project, but the student actually works in the lab and works more directly with another supervisor (who is not funded by NSERC).

Students must be supervised by faculty members who are NSERC grantees. NSERC allows USRA students to work under the supervision of two NSERC grantees as long as they work on a "genuine" research project allowing them to be exposed to all aspects of the research process. However, students must not move between laboratories on different projects over the 16-week period since this would dilute the value of the experience. One NSERC grantee has to be designated as the student's official supervisor. Co-supervision by a non-NSERC grantee is not acceptable.

Are NSERC co-applicants eligible supervisors?

Co-applicants on NSERC project grants are eligible supervisors. They must indicate their grant application no. on Form 202 Part 2.

Are faculty members on their NSERC extension year (esp. for Discovery Grants) eligible?

Yes, they are eligible. In addition, eligible supervisors must be using up funds for a research grant that terminated during the previous year.

A PI has an NSERC grant expiring end of March 2016 but still has a balance left to be able to pay the student. Is he still eligible to supervise?

Supervisors must either have held an active research grant at the time a student applies or have an active research grant at the time the student holds the award.

How many students is a PI allowed to supervise?

As long as that PI has the funds to top up the award per student, he can supervise more than one. It is at the department's discretion.

Can students work under the supervision of an NSERC Canada Research Chair?

Yes, they can, as long as the granting council is NSERC and not CIHR or SSHRC.

What are the supervisor's rights and responsibilities?

The supervisor has the responsibility to ensure that the student is properly supervised at all times (especially during field work) and appropriately trained in research techniques and safety methods. He/she also has the right to set working hours and assign tasks. Should the student's performance not match expectations, the supervisor is expected to take appropriate steps to explain matters and retrain the student. If, after a reasonable time period, the student's performance has not improved, the supervisor may, in consultation with other university administration, decide to terminate the work term. NSERC should be informed.

WORK TERM DURATION & LOCATION

For work terms of less than 16 full consecutive weeks, what is the minimum no. of weeks that can be requested?

NSERC will not grant an award for periods of less than 12 consecutive weeks. Awards will be prorated.

What is NSERC's official stand regarding the issue of research in the field outside of the university? Does it matter if it is up north, in the US or overseas collecting data as long as the supervisor's appointment is at the university?

Supervisors can send their USRA students into the field, wherever they wish, as long as they (or the university) pay the additional costs related to the field work (e.g., travel expenses). NSERC would expect the student to be appropriately supervised during the period, mostly by the professor. Field work would be an intrinsic part of the research.

What is the recommended working hours for a USRA recipient?

NSERC expects USRA holders to work approximately the same hours on average and have the same working conditions, etc., as other university employees, within the limitations of the type of research they are doing, and in consultation with their supervisor. If staff at the university work 40 hour weeks on average, then the USRA student should, too.

Can a student take a vacation or go on sick leave during the work term?

The USRA program makes no provision for sick leave or other interruptions of awards. Should a work term be interrupted or terminated early for any reason, universities must inform NSERC immediately, and accurately report it at the end of the work term.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

If a student is from another university and is looking for summer research opportunities at UofT, what does he need to do and how does he go about applying for the USRA?

The student would have to contact the department where he/she would like to work in. The next step would be to contact the department's Undergraduate Advisor/Counsellor. It is the department who finally decides which students will be nominated. Please visit the university website at www.utoronto.ca for the departments' websites.

Are copies of the students' Record of Landing required?

No, but the date of landing has to be indicated on the application form.

The department Chair is sponsoring some student applications and they have to be signed by his one-up. Who would this be?

It would be the Vice-Dean/Vice Principal, Research.

What is the grant application no.? PIN?

The grant application no. is referenced on the PI's NSERC letter of award. It is found on the upper right hand corner (Application no.). It can also be found on the funded research digest (FReD), in the box called ""Sponsor's Reference"".

All NSERC grantees have their PIN #s. It can also be found in the letter of award.

Is the official UofT transcript mandatory? Some students did not submit transcripts, because they assume that a ROSI transcript will suffice.

A transcript is required. The ROSI is only accepted to expedite the verification of student marks.

Is it possible for a student to apply for an NSERC USRA with more than one faculty?

Yes, a student can apply with more than one department but can only hold one USRA. Each department has its own screening process and students will have to comply with their requirements.

How should Form 202 completed?

Students must complete the information on-line and then forward the reference number provided by the system to their potential supervisor(s). Supervisors will not be able to complete Part II of Form 202 on-line if they have not received the reference number (i.e., if the student has not completed the form on-line).

Why do students who applied last year find that they can only update Part I of their Form 202?

The on-line system for the USRA program has been created so that students may only have access to Part I of Form 202. The information is biographical, so only updates are allowed. A student may not create multiple versions of the form.

How will a supervisor know if he/she is using the new version of Part II of Form 202?

The new application form is now completed on NSERC's online system, which includes the newest version of this form.

What does a supervisor do if he/she has selected "Final" and then wants to change something in the Form 202 Part II?

The supervisor must contact NSERC's On-line Services Helpdesk: 613-995-4273 (tel.); webapp@nserc-crsng.gc.ca.

How will you know from a paper printout if a supervisor didn't use the new version of Part II of Form 202?

A Form ID number will appear in the grey box at the top right-hand corner of the new version of Part II when it is printed. The box is empty in the old version of the form. The new form will also show two separate boxes for the Research Proposal and the Student's Role where the old version combined these in one box.

Potential supervisors who have used the old version must be asked to go back onto the system and verify the form, select "Final", then print and sign the new version.