

University of Toronto

2021-22 NSERC USRA FAQs

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STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

Are first-year students eligible to apply?

No, at UofT, first-year students are not eligible 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. Are they eligible? Which GPA would be counted: current year or year they 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, they are eligible to apply. They 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.

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

Yes, 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 defer the award to September/the fall if unavailable in the summer? If not, can the student's salary be paid in advance of the award starting in September?

No. UofT holds the competition only in the summer. Financial reporting to NSERC on the program is completed in September. Paying the student's salary in advance while actual research will be done in September-January is not eligible.

A student, who is a Canadian citizen, and is currently registered at a US university would like to spend the summer here and engage with a researcher at UofT. Is this 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 them as an external candidate for one of their USRA quota.

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

No, the student is not eligible.

A student is in 3rd year but is currently enrolled only in graduate courses since they have taken all relevant undergraduate courses and the department ran out of courses to offer. They will complete their undergraduate degree in June. Are they eligible?

The student is deemed eligible to apply for a USRA since they are 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), they would not be eligible to apply for a USRA for the Summer 2021. They 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, is it 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, are they 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 to accept such students.

SUPERVISOR ELIGIBILITY

Where can I find a list of UofT researchers who are eligible supervisors?

Interested students should contact the department (through the Undergraduate Counsellor) where they would like to apply. A faculty member must meet the [NSERC eligibility requirements](#) to be considered eligible to supervise a USRA.

Does NSERC allow co-supervision? For example, if one supervisor is a grantee and overseer of the project, but the student actually conducts research in the lab and engages more directly with another supervisor.

Students must be supervised by faculty members who are NSERC eligible. NSERC allows USRA students to research under the supervision of two NSERC eligible supervisors as long as they engage 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 eligible supervisor has to be designated as the student's official supervisor. Co-supervision by a non-NSERC eligible supervisor is not acceptable.

How many students is a Supervisor allowed to supervise?

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

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. They also have the right to set research hours and assign tasks within the University policies. 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 award term. RSO and NSERC should be informed.

AWARD TERM DURATION & LOCATION

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

For 2022 only because of the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, awards will not be pro-rated this competition year. It is expected that award terms less than 16 weeks will be in exceptional cases only.

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

Supervisors can have USRA students undertake field work 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 Supervisor. Field work would need to be an intrinsic part of the research.

What is the recommended research hours for a USRA recipient?

NSERC views the USRA program as an opportunity for students to focus their efforts on their research project over 16 weeks, which is one of the reasons NSERC recommends students limit courses they take while holding a USRA to no more than two. While NSERC is not prescriptive about the number of daily or weekly hours students must spend on their USRA project, students and supervisors are encouraged to discuss any specific questions they may have regarding the amount of time certain tasks of a project may take to complete.

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

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

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

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

The student would have to contact the department where they would like to engage in research. The next step would be to contact the department's Undergraduate Advisor/Counsellor. It is the department who makes finally decisions regarding student nominations. Please visit the university website at www.utoronto.ca for the departments' websites.

Are copies of the students' Record of Landing required?

No, however, the date of landing is to be indicated on the application form.

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

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

What is the grant application number? PIN?

The research grant application number is no longer used by NSERC. Enter 999999 or any six-digit number on the Form 202 part 2.

All NSERC grantees have their PIN #s. It can also be found in the letter of award. If you have not previously applied to NSERC, leave the field blank and a PIN will automatically be assigned by the On-line System.

Is the official UofT transcript mandatory?

A transcript is required. It is the students' discretion if they would like to use an official paper or electronic version of the official U of T transcript. Note that the most recent academic history report from ACORN is acceptable for NSERC.

Is it possible for a student to apply to 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 be completed?

Students must complete the information on-line and then forward the reference number provided by the system to their potential supervisor. 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 they are using the new version of Part II of Form 202?

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

What does a supervisor do if they have 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.