

What is a USRA?

The three federal funding agencies provide funding to institutions to help nurture and develop the careers of budding researchers in the natural sciences and engineering through research assistantships of 14-16 weeks in duration. The research work experience provided by these awards is meant to complement studies in an academic setting and encourage graduate studies in these fields.

Although, historically, USRAs have been granted by NSERC, in 2023 SSHRC and CIHR began offering USRAs, designated to support Black student researchers.

Allocation & Competitions

The number of awards allocated to Nipissing are posted publicly [here](#). The current allocations are as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Number of awards: | NSERC: Seven (7) awards are available. One (1) additional award is restricted to Black student researchers. Self-identified Indigenous student researchers are eligible for awards beyond NU's base quota. |
| | SSHRC: One (1) award available, restricted to Black student researchers |
| | CIHR: One (1) award available, restricted to Black student researchers |
| Value of award: | \$6,000 plus supervisor's contribution of \$5,137 or \$5,384 |
| Duration of award: | May-August, 16 weeks at 35 hours per week |

Nipissing holds a USRA competition for the Summer term only, with the timeline given below:

| Internal Deadline | Internal Decision | Submission to NSERC | NSERC confirms award |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| March 6 | Apr 15 | May 1 | July |

The Office of Research & Innovation will issue separate calls to faculty and students in February. Both the student and supervisor must submit a portion of the application.

Applicant Eligibility**Students:**

At time of application, the student must:

- Be a Canadian citizen, a permanent resident of Canada, or a Protected Person;
- Be registered, as of the application deadline, in a bachelor's degree program;
- Have been registered in at least one of the two terms immediately before holding the award;
- Have obtained a cumulative average of at least second class -- a grade of "B-" or "B"; 70% or higher (**Note:** *Students with transfer credit from another institution must check eligibility with the Registrar's Office. The cumulative GPA shown on their account does not include transfer credit, and, thus, is not accurate for application purposes.*);
- Have not held a previous USRA in the current fiscal year, or more than 2 previous USRAs;
- Meet all eligibility criteria as described in the [Undergraduate Student Research Awards](#) webpage; and
- Provide a complete application, including up-to-date, official transcripts from the Registrar's Office of each university attended.

Supervisors:

Supervisors must be authorized by the institution to independently supervise students (per the terms of their appointment within their relevant faculty). The proposed supervisor must hold an active research grant (from any funding source, as principal investigator or co-investigator) or have sufficient funds in the Professional Expense Reimbursement (PER) to meet the minimum supervisor contribution based on the Nipissing University minimum wage for research students (table below), for a total of \$5,183.

| Wage | Vacation/ EI/CPP etc | Hours/ week | Weeks | Total award | USRA | Supervisor's Contribution |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|---------|------------------------------|
| \$17.60 (Wage grade I-III) | 13% | 35 | 16 | \$11,137 | \$6,000 | \$5,137 |
| \$17.99 (Wage grade IV) | 13% | 35 | 16 | \$11,384 | \$6,000 | \$5,384 |

Note about supervisors' contributions: Students will start working on their USRA research before the awards will be confirmed by NSERC. The university must start payments to students, to whom they have offered positions, without waiting for NSERC approval. The University must also continue to employ any students whose applications are rejected by NSERC, for the remainder of the work term. As such, researchers must have the maximum contribution (\$11,137 or \$11,384) available to be considered.

Subject matter eligibility

To be eligible for the USRA program, the proposed research project must clearly lie within the broad fields of research supported by the agency to which you apply:

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|
| NSERC | Natural sciences & engineering |
| SSHRC | Social sciences & humanities |
| CIHR | Health research |

For more information about the fields covered by each agency, see [Selecting the appropriate federal granting agency](#). Note that it is not necessary for the proposed supervisor's research program to be exclusively within the selected agency's field of study.

Application Process

Students:

1. The student must first log into [NSERC's Research Portal](#) and complete **Part I** of the application (**Form 202**). Once the application is verified, the student will need to provide the reference number to their proposed supervisor.
2. Students must also submit to the Office of Research & Innovation a one-page statement of interest. The statement of interest **must not** be uploaded with the application but must be sent to research@nipissingu.ca, copying your proposed supervisor, and with the subject line of: *USRA – Name – Statement of Interest*. The document should address the following:
 - Why you want to do this research project;
 - How this research project relates to your plans following the completion of your degree;
 - Your qualifications (e.g. education, experience, leadership roles, etc.) for this award;
 - Your previous awards and scholarships, if applicable;
 - Your publications and presentations (i.e., talks, posters), if applicable; and
 - Your research experience to date, if applicable.

Supervisors:

3. The supervisor must then log into [NSERC's Research Portal](#) and complete **Part II** of the application, entering the reference number provided by the student to link the two parts together.

Use [NSERC's Instructions](#) as your guide. Please make sure that your students read the information completely.

Selection Process

All applications are reviewed and adjudicated by Nipissing University's Training Awards Committee based on the following criteria:

- academic record;
- research aptitude;
- expected quality of the training to be received; and
- written communication skills.

The Senate Research Committee receives the review committee's recommendations and decides whether or not to endorse the recommendations to the Provost & Vice-President, Academic for final approval.

The Research Coordinator will forward successful applications to NSERC by May 1st and contact all applicants with the final recommendations.

Each funding agency will confirm awards and send award letters to students in mid-to-late July. They will issue payments by the end of July.

Grant Access & Use

- Successful supervisors will need to submit HR's [Request to Hire a Student Employee Form](#), using their desired research account as the cost centre.
- Successful students will begin their work on May 1st. They will not need to submit weekly timesheets.
- Funding agencies will issue payment of the awards before the end of July.
- In the unlikely case that an application is rejected by the funding agency, NU must continue to employ the student for the remainder of the term. The student's supervisor would be responsible for covering the \$6000 that was expected from the agency.

Canadian Forest Sector (CFS) Workforce Diversity supplement

NSERC will contact applicants eligible for this supplement in August. As permitted by NSERC, part of the supplement may be used to offset the supervisor's costs, but the total compensation to the awardee cannot be lower than the value of the supplement plus the value of the USRA itself. Supervisors should consult the Research Office to determine the appropriate allocation, based on the following considerations:

- The status of the supervisor's project and grant used for the institutional contribution to the award;
- The contribution and quality of the student's work related to the supervisor's funded research project (e.g., does it meet and/or exceed expectations); and
- The potential for the supplement to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in research.

Questions?

Contact the Research Coordinator at research@nipissingu.ca.
