

BROCK UNIVERSITY
Undergraduate Student Research Award (USRA) Guidelines (2024–2025)

Brock University's Internal Deadline: Monday, February 26, 2024, 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time. No late applications will be accepted.

For questions: **Tyler Weaver**, Research Officer and USRA Liaison Officer (LO), Office of Research Services, Brock University, Email: tweaver2@brocku.ca

Program Description:

[Undergraduate Student Research Awards \(USRAs\)](#) are meant to nurture your interests and help to develop your potential for a research career in health, natural sciences, engineering, social sciences or humanities. These awards are also meant to encourage you to undertake graduate studies by providing research work experience that complements your studies in an academic setting.

Continuing in 2024–2025: the USRA program has been expanded and is administered jointly by Canada's three research granting Agencies; the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

[Brock University's USRA allocation:](#)

NSERC USRA: 21 awards, in addition, applications from qualified self-identified Indigenous* and Black student researchers for **NSERC** USRAs may be recommended beyond the institutional allocation of awards. To be considered for this, Indigenous and Black student researchers must provide consent within the application form to share this information with their institutions and NSERC.

* "Indigenous peoples" is a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. "Aboriginal peoples" is also often used as a synonym. For the purposes of this program, the Tri-agencies use the Canadian Constitution Act, 1982 definition of Aboriginal peoples as including the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

SSHRC USRA: 1 award, and CIHR USRA: 1 award

At the present time, both the SSHRC and CIHR USRAs are exclusively for self-identified Black student researchers. To be eligible to apply for these awards, applicants are asked to disclose within the [NSERC On-line System](#) that they self-identify as Black and to confirm that they understand that this information will be shared with Brock University and, if awarded, publicly.

Eligibility:

To be eligible to apply for an award

- you must be a Canadian citizen, a permanent resident of Canada or a Protected Person under subsection 95(2) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Canada), as of the internal deadline date.
- you must be registered, as of the internal deadline date in a bachelor's degree program.
- you must have obtained, over the previous years of study, a satisfactory cumulative average (a cumulative average of at least a B as defined by the university). Brock University students must have a minimum overall academic average of 70%.
- you cannot be currently enrolled in an undergraduate professional degree program in the health sciences (e.g., MD, DDS, BScN) (does not apply for CIHR USRAs).
- you cannot be currently registered or have been previously registered, at any time, in a graduate program in the same field of study.
- you cannot have completed all your degree requirements.
- Note: SSHRC and CIHR USRAs are, at the present time, exclusively for self-identified Black student researchers.

In addition

- if you already hold a bachelor's degree and are studying toward a second bachelor's degree, you may still apply for this award.
- you may hold only one USRA per fiscal year (April 1 to March 31)
- you may hold a maximum of three USRAs throughout your undergraduate career (regardless of the granting agency)

To hold an award

- you must have completed all the course requirements of at least the first year of study (or two academic terms) of your bachelor's degree.
- you must have been registered in a bachelor's degree program at the time of application and in at least one of the two terms immediately before holding the award.
- you must be engaged full time in research work experience that complements your studies in an academic setting.
- you cannot be registered in a graduate program.

Notes:

You may hold an award at any time during the year as permitted by your academic program and in consideration of the other eligibility criteria.

Value and Duration of USRA Awards

- The value of the Agency portion of the award is **\$6,000**, with a total value ranging from \$8,109.50 to \$12,544.00 (see Table 1).
- Supervisors must have an active research account with sufficient funds to be used to supplement their contribution of the award value.
- The duration of the award is 14 to 16 weeks on a full-time basis. Exceptions will be made for shortened work terms only in exceptional cases where the situation is beyond the control of the award recipient, and where the appropriately justified request is received before the beginning of the work experience (please discuss with LO if applicable).

Table 1: Total Value of 14 and 16-week award durations, as well as required minimum supervisor contributions.

Level	NSERC Contribution	VPR Contribution	*Supervisor Contribution	Total Value	*Supervisor Contribution	Total Value
			14-Week Award	14-Week Award	16-Week Award	16-Week Award
2 nd year complete or less	\$6,000.00	-----	\$2,109.50	\$8,109.50	\$3,268.00	\$9,268.00
3 rd year complete	\$6,000.00	\$73.50	\$2,109.50	\$8,183.00	\$3,278.50	\$9,352.00
4 th year complete	\$6,000.00	\$2,866.50	\$2,109.50	\$10,976.00	\$3,677.50	\$12,544.00

Canadian Forest Sector Workforce Diversity Undergraduate Supplements (applicable NSERC USRAs only)

In partnership with Natural Resources Canada – Canadian Forest Service NSERC is providing a supplement to the USRA program. The supplement has a value of \$5,000, in addition to the USRA. For full information see: https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/UG-PC/Forest-Forest_eng.asp

Environment and Climate Change Canada Atmospheric and Meteorological Undergraduate Supplements (applicable NSERC USRAs only)

This USRA supplement provides financial support to high-caliber students working toward degrees in the atmospheric or meteorological sciences or related fields. Environment and Climate Change Canada offers

up to 20 supplements annually. The supplement has a value of \$1,000 in addition to the USRA. You must apply to this supplement separately. For full information see: https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/UG-PC/Meteorological-Meteorologique_eng.asp

Note, both of the above supplements are in addition to the NSERC contribution and supervisor's supplement referenced above.

Overview of Application Process: The USRA application process involves *both* an internal Brock University Application (Parts A and B, and a reference letter) which will be reviewed by the internal selection committee, and an external application ([Form 202, Parts I and II](#)) which will be forwarded to the Funding Agencies (NSERC, SSHRC, or CIHR) if successful in the internal competition. Both internal and external applications have sections that are completed by the student applicant (Part I and Part A, transcript(s)) and the supervisor (Part II and Part B), in addition for the internal application a reference letter is **required** which is written either by the proposed supervisor or someone with the capability to describe the applicant's research potential.

Both internal and external applications must be completed and submitted by Brock University's internal deadline, **Monday, February 26, 2024, 5:00 p.m. No late applications will be accepted.**

Please see the Brock University USRA Application Instructions for the Student Applicant and the Proposed Supervisor below, the submission checklist, and be sure to consult the selection criteria below.

Please read the following carefully:

- the [USRA Program Description](#),
- the [Instructions for completing an application Form 202](#),
- and the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about the USRA program.

[NSERC On-line System](#) will be used for the USRA program regardless of the Agency chosen.

For CIHR and SSHRC supervisors: If you have not previously applied to NSERC, when creating the research supervisor profile leave the NSERC PIN field blank and a personal identification number (PIN) will be automatically assigned to you by the On-line system.

Research supervisors who have previously applied to NSERC have received an NSERC PIN from the former online system or a common personal identifier (CPI) from the research portal, the PIN or CPI can be found on all official correspondence from NSERC.

For an overview of navigating the NSERC On-line System please see the following [YouTube Video](#), and the [Frequently Asked Questions about the On-line System](#). For technical issues, or if you do not remember your NSERC PIN or CPI please contact [On-line Service Helpdesk](#) by email at: webapp@nserc-crsng.gc.ca.

The project's subject matter must be aligned with the funding Agency mandate (NSERC, SSHRC, or CIHR) selected in the Application form. Please consult [Selecting the Appropriate Federal Granting Agency](#).

An eligible supervisor for a USRA application under Brock policies is permitted to supervise the research work of undergraduate students and holds a research grant (does not need to be a Tri-Agency research grant).

Brock University USRA Instructions for the Student Applicant

1. (Student) **Official, up-to-date transcripts from all post-secondary institutions attended.** Order your transcript(s) from the Registrar's office. Your transcript must show your most recent marks for the Fall 2023 term. Upload a .pdf copy of your official transcripts through the PART A internal application online form. Ensure you follow the file naming convention detailed on the online form. For Brock students, see [this link](#) for ordering transcripts.
2. (Student) **USRA application form, Form 202 Part I.** [Instructions for completing an application Form 202](#). If you have applied previously, log into your account and update your existing form on the [NSERC On-line system](#). If you do not have an NSERC account, register and create a profile.
 - Complete Form 202 online.
 - Include your e-mail address.
 - Include anticipated year/month of degree completion.
 - Upload your transcripts as a single document (PDF).
 - Verify (on the "My Portfolio" page) then give a copy of the completed form and the reference number to your proposed supervisor. (You may provide the Form 202 Part I to your proposed supervisor before uploading your transcript.)
3. (Student) **Brock USRA online application form Part A.** When answering the questions on Part A, please consult the selection criteria below. Complete the PART A internal application online form. You can only submit this form one time, so be sure to proof-read your answers and ensure all criteria are met before submitting the online form. Also ensure your official transcripts are uploaded to the form as described above, following the appropriate naming convention detailed on the form. [\[Part A Form\]](#).
4. (Student) **Statement of academic standing.** Upload a screenshot of your statement of academic standing to the PART A online application form. Ensure this screenshot is in .pdf format and follows the naming convention detailed in the form. This statement will show your cumulative or overall academic average as of the end of the fall term 2023 (for Brock students, "Program Status, UG1" from BrockDB). Non-Brock students may use a screenshot (.pdf format) of their unofficial transcripts for this purpose.
5. (Student and proposed supervisor, or reference letter writer) **Reference Letter.** Ask your proposed supervisor or another person in a position to address your research potential such as a previous supervisor, to write a reference letter. The reference letter **should not include** the value of marks from any coursework. **Note: The reference letter is required and must be provided by someone who can address your research potential as described above. Applications without a reference letter will not be considered.**

If your proposed supervisor writes the reference letter, they are to submit a .pdf copy in the PART B online application form. The letter should be addressed to the USRA Selection Committee.

If someone other than your proposed supervisor writes your reference letter, it should be addressed to the USRA Selection Committee and sent by the writer directly by email to ors-submissions@brocku.ca before the deadline.

6. (Proposed supervisor) **NSERC USRA application form, Form 202 Part II.**
7. (Proposed supervisor) **Brock USRA online application form (Part B).** [\[Part B Form\]](#)

To ensure your internal application is received accurately, please follow the instructions below.

- Official Transcripts online form upload should be in .pdf format.
- Statement of Academic Standing online form upload should be in .pdf format.
- Reference Letter online form upload should be in .pdf format.
- Ensure that all uploads follow the exact naming convention detailed in the online forms.

- When you complete the online form, use the proper sentence case for your answers (e.g., capitalize the first letter of names, proper sentence structure for longer answers).
- Ensure your proposed supervisor has your correct student number and the proper spelling of your last name.
- Email inquiries - subject line: Please include the competition (e.g., NSERC USRA 2024), and student and supervisor's names.

The LO will review Form 202 Parts I and II through the NSERC On-line System.

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Brock University USRA Application Instructions for the Proposed Supervisor

1. (Student) **Official, up-to-date transcripts from all university programs (.pdf).**
2. (Student) **NSERC USRA application form, Form 202 Part I.**
3. (Student) **Brock USRA online application form [Part A](#).**
4. (Student) **Statement of current academic standing (.pdf).**
5. (Proposed supervisor or another qualified person) **Reference Letter.** The applicant will ask you (or another person such as a previous supervisor) to write a reference letter.

The letter should address the applicant's research potential only (see selection criteria). If you have taught the student in a class, do not include the value of their marks in the letter since these will be redacted. The letter should be addressed to the USRA Selection Committee. If the proposed supervisor writes this letter, it should be uploaded through the online form. If someone other than the proposed supervisor writes this letter, it should be sent by the writer directly by email to ors-submissions@brocku.ca before the deadline. Ensure the letter is in .pdf form.

6. (Proposed supervisor) **NSERC USRA application form, Form 202 Part II** [Instructions for completing an application Form 202](#). Form must be completed in [NSERC's On-line System](#); enter the student's name and reference number from Form 202, Part I, to create the form. The starting date of the award is important for the payment process. For a summer 2024 award, the starting date must be no later than 14 weeks before the Labour Day weekend. For a fall 2024 or winter 2025 award, it is important to note the eligibility criteria, e.g. the student must be able to engage full-time on the USRA project. For a fall award the starting date must be no later than 14 weeks before Brock's holiday closure. There is a bit more flexibility in timing for a winter 2025 award.

The project must be within the appropriate Agency's funding mandate (NSERC, natural sciences and engineering; SSHRC, social sciences and humanities; or CIHR, health research). The research proposal must be specific and detailed. Consider equity, diversity, and inclusion in the research design as applicable. Describe the student's role in the project and information related to the student's supervision. Describe the expected quality of the training to be received. Verify and submit. There will be an opportunity to edit the Form 202, if needed, before recommended applications are forwarded to the Agencies in mid to late April.

7. (Proposed supervisor) **Brock USRA online application form [Part B](#).** The proposed supervisor completes the form and uploads the reference letter (.pdf) through the form (if applicable). You can only submit this form one time, so ensure all your answers are correct and have been proofed before submitting.

To ensure your application is received accurately, please follow the instructions below.

- The Reference Letter upload should be in .pdf format and follow the exact naming convention detailed in the online form.
- E-mail inquiries subject line: Please include the competition (e.g., NSERC USRA 2024), and student and supervisor's names.

The LO will review Form 202 Parts I and II through the NSERC On-line System.

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Complete Submission Checklist:

Brock University's Internal Deadline for both External and Internal Applications:

Monday, February 26, 2024, 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time

External Application

- The applicant completes Form 202 Part I and upload transcript(s) on the NSERC On-line System before the deadline.
- The proposed supervisor completes Form 202 Part II on the NSERC On-line System before the deadline.

Internal Application

- The applicant completes the online application form [Part A](#) and uploads their Official Transcripts (.pdf format) and the Statement of Academic Standing (.pdf format) through the online form.
- The proposed supervisor completes the online application form [Part B](#) and uploads the applicant Reference Letter (.pdf format) through the online form (if applicable).
- IF the reference letter writer is not the proposed supervisor and is another person who is in a position to write a reference letter addressing research potential such as a previous supervisor, this person must send their letter directly to ors-submissions@brocku.ca before the deadline, in .pdf format. **Note: The reference letter is required. Applications without a reference letter will not be considered.**

Selection of Awardees:

There will be three USRA Selection Committees comprised of diverse Brock researchers from appropriate disciplines to rank applicants for 1) NSERC USRAs, and 2) SSHRC USRA, and 3) CIHR USRA. Although a supervisor may support more than one USRA applicant, typically only one will be selected. Under exceptional circumstances as determined by the Selection Committee, an award of a second applicant may be recommended. Applicants will be considered and ranked within their academic level. The Selection Committees will meet in March to rank the applications. Decisions will be communicated to applicants by email before the end of March. Recommended awardees must confirm acceptance within one week of notification. Any declined award will be offered to one of the alternate applicants. The Agencies will send an official award letter after confirmation of eligibility of the awardee, supervisor, and research topic mid-way through the award period.

Selection criteria:

Applicants overall scores will be composed of:

- Academic excellence (student) **40%**
- Research potential (student) **40%**
- Expected quality of the training and mentor to be received (supervisor) **20%**

Academic excellence: The student's **cumulative academic average** will be factored into an overall score.

Research potential: Research potential is evaluated based on the **reference letter** and the student applicant's responses on **Part A**. The following are indicators of **research potential**:

- Previous research/work experience (e.g., co-op terms, previous USRAs held etc.).
- Enthusiasm for pursuing a research career in the natural sciences or engineering, social sciences or humanities, or health research as applicable.
- Relevance of work experience and academic training to the proposed field of research.
- Judgement and ability to think critically, demonstrate problem-solving skills and organizational skills.
- Ability to apply skills and knowledge.
- Initiative and autonomy, and ability to engage in a collaborative environment.
- Written and oral communication skills.
- Curiosity, attention to detail, creativity, persistence.

Expected quality of the training and mentorship to be received: **Part B** completed by the proposed supervisor will be reviewed. Indicators of expected **quality of the training** and mentorship to be received:

- Exposure to the research team (how the student will interact with the supervisor and other team members)
- Training in research techniques, and other important skills
- Expected contributions to research outputs
- Proposed supervisor's past supervisory experience, and success with mentoring undergraduate students

Both **research potential** and **quality of the training** will be rated on the following scale:

10 Exceptional
9.0 **or** 9.5 Outstanding
8.0 **or** 8.5 Very strong
7.0 **or** 7.5 Strong
6.0 **or** 6.5 Moderate
Below 6.0 Insufficient