

2019/2020 Social Sciences Undergraduate Student Research Award (USRA) - Information for Students

McMaster Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRAs) are supported by the Office of the Vice-President, Research and the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The USRAs are intended to cultivate and support research partnerships between undergraduate students and faculty members. These Awards provide an opportunity to complete research-based activity either during the Fall-Winter academic year, or during the Summer Term.

As a student, USRAs allow you to:

- obtain meaningful research-based employment;
- explore career opportunities in a research environment;
- develop skills and gain experience;
- investigate and learn more about a specific area of interest; and,
- foster a positive working relationship with a faculty member and/or other professionals.

USRA Competitions

Fall:

There are 3 awards of \$3500 available to cover part-time, research-based activity during the academic year (November – March). The Fall USRA will take place over 20 weeks where students are expected to complete 12 hours of work per week.

Application deadline: October 6th, 2020 before 4:00pm by email (see below)

Summer:

There are 12 awards of \$7500 available to cover full-time, research-based activity during the Summer Term (May – August). The Summer USRA will take place over 15 weeks where students are expected to complete 35 hours of work per week.

Application deadline: January 21, 2020 before 4:00pm by email (see below)

The USRA is paid to students in bi-weekly installments over the duration of the research term.

Students may apply to both competitions within the same academic year. If the student is successful in their Fall USRA application, and wishes to apply for a Summer USRA, the proposal must be for a different project.

Interested students are encouraged to attend the USRA Poster Session where the previous academic year's award recipients will be showcasing their projects. Award recipients will be on hand to present their research and answer questions.

The USRA Poster Session is typically held in the Fall semester, giving award recipients a chance to showcase their work. This is typically drop-in event for guests and visitors. See the USRA web page for dates and details.

Eligibility

In order to be eligible for the Social Sciences USRA, you must:

1. Be registered in the Faculty of Social Sciences in a degree program*, and be enrolled in a minimum of 18 units during the current Fall/Winter term
2. Be in good academic standing with the university (not on academic probation), and normally with a cumulative GPA of at least 8.0 to be competitive;
3. Be in good financial standing with the university (no outstanding financial accounts on the student record);
4. Be eligible to work in Canada; and,
5. Have received fewer than two (2) USRAs to this point in your studies at McMaster;

*Degree Program Notes:

First Year Students

Level 1 students are not eligible for the Fall/Winter USRA because of the GPA requirement, but are eligible to apply for the Summer USRA.

Students in Graduating Year

Students are eligible to apply for a USRA in their graduating year. For graduating students applying to the Summer USRA, preference will be given to students who have applied for graduate studies commencing in September.

Humanities Students in Combined Honours with Social Sciences

Students registered in the Faculty of Humanities in a Combined Honours degree program with a Social Sciences discipline are eligible to apply for the Social Sciences USRA if their proposed faculty supervisor resides in the Social Sciences.

Arts & Science Students in Combined Honours with Social Sciences

Students registered in the Arts and Science program in a Combined Honours degree program with a Social Sciences discipline are not eligible to apply for the Social Sciences USRA. These students should apply for the Arts & Science USRA even if their proposed faculty supervisor resides in the Social Sciences).

Eligible Supervisors

Students must select a faculty supervisor to support their USRA application and supervise their work. Supervisors can be a faculty member in the Faculty of Social Sciences or from another Faculty within McMaster.

Eligible supervisors include: full-time faculty members who are tenure-track, tenured, teaching-track, or permanent teaching professors. Other faculty that are eligible include professors emeriti, adjunct professors, and associate faculty members. CLA professors are also able to supervise USRA students provided their employment contract does not cease throughout the duration of the award.

Sessional instructors and postdoctoral fellows are not eligible to supervise USRA students; clinical and/or visiting faculty from areas outside the Social Sciences are also typically not eligible. Questions related to supervision of the USRA can be directed to Mark Busser (see contact information below).

Recommendations for Getting Started

The following are suggestions that may be helpful as you begin your USRA application.

1. Selecting a faculty supervisor:
 - Plan to approach a potential supervisor as early as possible. It is okay to approach someone if you do not yet have a clear idea about the particulars of your research. Potential supervisors may be able to provide some great advice to help you on your way toward solidifying a project.
 - Try to select 2-3 people that you feel may be appropriate. The first person that you ask may not be available or able to supervise your project.
 - You may wish to approach a faculty member that has similar research interests to your own. Searching Departmental websites can provide information about various faculty members, including what courses they are teaching and specific research areas of interest.

2. Approaching a faculty member to supervise your USRA:
 - Select the most appropriate person from your list to start, and approach only one potential supervisor at a time. Again, you do not need to have a clear idea of what your research project will entail at this point. This will be developed as you work with your faculty supervisor to complete your application.
 - Your first contact with a potential supervisor can be via Email. In this initial correspondence, you can:
 - introduce yourself (if necessary);
 - indicate your interest in the USRA along with a brief outline of your research idea(s);
 - indicate your interest in being supervised by this person; and,
 - request a time to meet to further discuss your project if this person is able and/or interested in moving forward with you.
 - If you would like your first contact with a potential supervisor to be in person, you can visit during regular office hours, but with the intention to set a separate time to meet. There may not be sufficient time to discuss your project. However, it is a good idea to be prepared to elaborate on your project ideas should the faculty member invite an immediate discussion.
 - Be respectful of your potential supervisor's time. Try to stay within allotted meeting times and request additional meetings where necessary. Allow the potential supervisor some time to respond to emails and telephone messages. For a variety of reasons, they may not be able to respond to you as promptly as you would like.

3. Solidifying your research project:
 - It is strongly recommended that you correspond regularly with your faculty supervisor while completing your research proposal. They are a valuable resource to help guide you through the application process. It is appropriate to ask for feedback with regard to your research project, time line and learning plan. If possible, set regular meeting times to help keep on track.

Application Process

USRA applications are to be submitted electronically using the instructions below.

- Scan your completed application (including signatures) and send it to bussermp@mcmaster.ca
- Your Email subject line should list your full name and either Fall or Summer USRA application.
- Please send your application in only ONE (1) attached document. Please do not send all documents separately and do not cut/paste your application into the body of your email.

Any additional information (e.g. additional wording, photos, appendices, brochures, etc.) that exceed the word limit listed on the application form will be removed prior to the review process.

Late or incomplete proposals will not be considered. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that applications are complete and that all information is accurate. Any and all information provided in any application to the Faculty of Social Sciences, including supporting documentation, may be subject to clarification and/or verification for authenticity and accuracy.

Failure to complete the terms and conditions of this award will make you ineligible for future Undergraduate Student Research Awards.

Ethics Approval

Projects requiring an application for ethics approval are discouraged for the Fall USRA competition due to the time required to obtain the appropriate clearance and its impact on the research process.

Ethics approval is not needed to submit an application. However, if an award is offered and ethics approval is required, a copy of the ethics certificate indicating this approval normally has to be produced before the award can be granted. It is strongly recommended that you speak to an ethics officer in the McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat while you are completing your research proposal.

Research involving human participants, (including their records or biological tissue), falls under the University's Research Integrity Policy. Failure to comply with these requirements constitutes a research misconduct offence. You must receive clearance before you recruit or collect data. You can view the following website for further information on receiving ethics approval on the [McMaster Research Ethics Board website](#).

USRA Travel

Update: For the 2020-2021 round, the Social Sciences USRA is unable to support projects involving international travel, or research methods that cannot safely be conducted in keeping with McMaster's policies and practices surrounding COVID-19. For details on McMaster's policies related to the novel coronavirus, please see the [travel information page](#) on [McMaster's COVID-19 web portal](#).

Original Wording: USRA projects may typically involve travel. However, McMaster University cannot fund an activity if warnings issued by Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada advise Canadians to avoid travel to the location of the student experience for any reason (visit travel.gc.ca for more information).

It is the responsibility of the student to determine if any inoculation/medical intervention or insurance is required for travel related to their experience and to ensure that these requirements are completed appropriately before departure. Once selected as a USRA recipient, students will be required to review information and complete paperwork as directed by McMaster's Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services (EOHSS).

Application Evaluation and Selection Process

USRA applications are reviewed by a committee of faculty members using the [USRA Rating Form](#). Students will be notified via email regarding their award status, generally within two (2) weeks of the application deadline date for the Fall USRA and within four (4) weeks for the Summer USRA.

Applications will be evaluated on the overall project description, articulation of potential relevance of the research to a broader audience, and clearly articulated responses to the following criteria:

Learning Objectives

- What are your learning objectives for your research project?
- What strategies will you undertake to achieve your learning objectives?
- How will the successful completion of your objectives be assessed?
- Refer to [EE's Guide to Creating Learning Plans and Learning Objectives](#).

Role in the Research

- What is your overall role in the research project?
- What are your specific tasks in the research project?
- What methods will you use to conduct your research project?

Connection to Academics

- What is the connection between your research and your academic studies in the Social Sciences?

Overall Quality of the Research Plan

- Reviewers will also rate the overall feasibility and quality of the proposal.

Context of Research

- What is the broader relevance of your research project (i.e. to a specific community, population, etc.)?

Academic Record

- Normally, students should have a Term and Cumulative GPA of at least 8.0.

Release of Funding

Upon receiving the award, you must agree to:

- participate in all required weeks of research as per the conditions of each award;
- complete all required health and safety training and documentation;
- submit a reflection document to the Social Sciences USRA coordinator; and,
- participate in the annual USRA Poster Session.

USRA funds will be distributed to student recipients in bi-weekly installments over the duration of the award.

Further Information

Please contact: Mark Busser, Program and Research Coordinator
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