



MEMORANDUM

TO: Undergraduate Student Research Award (USRA) Liaison Officers

FROM: Annemarie Fraser, Program Officer, Scholarships and Fellowships Division

DATE: April 15, 2020

SUBJECT: **FAQ for the USRA program, re: COVID-19 (Version 2)**

1. Is the program cancelled?

No, the USRA program for Summer 2020 will go forward, even in the event of a shortened or cancelled work term.

2. What happens if the university isn't open in May? Will shortened work terms (<12 weeks) be possible?

In the event that a university remains closed in May, USRA work terms can begin when the university re-opens later in the summer. NSERC will honour the full value of the award, and the minimum university top-up of 25% will still be in effect. Work terms will not have to be 12 weeks long if the university re-opening does not allow it.

3. Are virtual work projects a possibility?

Yes, NSERC strongly recommends that students and supervisors explore the possibility of remote work. Proposed research projects that cannot be carried out remotely (e.g. lab work) can be changed to something that can (e.g. analysis of existing data, literature review). If the proposed research project changes significantly, NSERC should be informed. Supervision is expected to occur via video chats, telecons, and e-mail. NSERC should be informed on the Recommended List of Applicants form which projects will be carried out remotely. Should universities open part-way through the summer, these projects can be converted back to on campus projects.

4. What happens if the university remains closed all summer?

In the unanticipated event that the university remains closed all summer and no work, including virtual/at home work can take place, then NSERC will still pay the full \$4,500. We are exploring options for how we might support institutions with the 25% top-up in this extreme case.

5. Can students continue to hold their USRA part-time in the Fall?

No. NSERC will be honouring the full value of the award regardless of the length of the term. If students and supervisors wish to continue the project part-time once courses have resumed this

will have to be outside of the USRA program. The USRA program is intended to give students academic research experience, and NSERC considers full-time work to be the best way to do this.

6. Can USRA 2020 awards be deferred until 2021?

Universities may choose to postpone research projects until Summer 2021, but the award will have to come from the 2021 quota. It is not possible to transfer an award from one fiscal year to another.

7. Can a USRA holder choose to postpone their award to the Fall or Winter term?

Yes, students may postpone their award from the Summer to the Fall or Winter term provided they will meet the eligibility requirements at that time. As in the Summer term, students are permitted to take a maximum of one course while holding a Fall or Winter USRA, and must devote full-time hours to the USRA project. NSERC should be informed if the student appears on a submitted Recommended List of Applicants form. If universities remain closed in September NSERC will evaluate the possibility of shortened Fall terms.

8. Can a supervisor decide to no longer offer the USRA or to postpone the project to the Fall or Winter?

If a supervisor decides to no longer host a USRA student for the Summer term and an offer has already been made to the student, it is up to the university to decide whether or not the offer can be rescinded. As usual for USRA, if a student's application has already been submitted to NSERC, the university must honour the payments to the student, including the minimum 25% top-up even if the supervisor will no longer host the student.