

Applying for NSERC Scholarships

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Outline

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Graduate scholarships
- 3 Proposal writing tips
- 4 Undergraduate student research awards

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Types of scholarships

There are two types of NSERC scholarships that I'll talk about:

- Graduate-level scholarships (PGS/CGS) ← focus here
- Undergraduate student research awards (USRA)

Graduate Studies workshop

- Some (many?) of you may have already attended a Grad Studies workshop on proposal writing. One is coming up on Tues Nov 4 (2–4pm, Halpern Centre):

[http:](http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/events/scholarships-workshops.html)

[//www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/events/scholarships-workshops.html](http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/events/scholarships-workshops.html)

- SFU Library's [Research Commons](http://www.lib.sfu.ca/research-commons/research/grants-funding) provides a number of resources on grant-writing, including an interesting-looking series of videos:

<http://www.lib.sfu.ca/research-commons/research/grants-funding>

(check it out and let me know what you think)

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Graduate scholarship types

CGS M: Master's, \$17,500 for one year

PGS D: Doctoral, \$21,000/yr for 2–3 years

CGS D: Doctoral, \$35,000/yr for 2–3 years

PGS = postgraduate scholarship

CGS = Canada graduate scholarship

- The first two are the “normal” NSERC awards.
- CGS D is a more selective (prestigious) award. No special application is required since consideration is automatic for all PGS D applicants.

Note: You won't be living in luxury, but the money is a HUGE help!

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Eligibility

- Canadian citizen or permanent resident
- First class average (A-) in the last two years of study
- Lots of fine print . . .

The recent confusion

- NSERC is moving to a new system that is **harmonized** across all three granting councils: NSERC, CIHR, SSHRC.
- **Phase 1:** Master's level awards in 2013/14 (complete).
- **Phase 2:** Doctoral level awards in 2016.
- This means that the application format for CGS M is different from that for PGS D.

Application components for PGS D (old)

Form 201: Essentially a resumé or CV. [\[F201_e.pdf\]](#)

Attachments (PDF files):

- Outline of proposed research (1 page, including references).
- Contributions and statements (2 pages):
 - Part I: list of contributions
 - Part II: describe most significant contributions
 - Part III: applicant's statement

Two referee reports.

- Be very careful about who you ask.
- Enter their names and email addresses in the form and they will be contacted automatically.

Transcripts: Due at DoGS on October 7 (paper copies?)

Proposal: Due on October 15

Application components for CGS M (new)

Common CV: The new, standard CV system. This requires a separate account/ID to be set up.

NSERC's online form: Personal and professional information as requested (similar to Form 201).

Attachments (PDF files):

- Outline of proposed research:
 - 1 page for the outline of proposed research.
 - 1 page for citations.
- Transcripts.

Two referee reports.

Due date: December 1

Evaluation criteria

	CGS M	PGS D
Academic excellence	50%	30%
Research ability and potential	30%	50%
Communication, interpersonal and leadership abilities	20%	20%

Other differences:

- Doctoral applications have more space to describe research, and a page for contributions.

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Evaluation process

CGS M (Master's):

- Evaluated entirely at SFU.
- Two levels of adjudication: departmental, university.
- Quotas determine the maximum number SFU can offer awards to.

P/CGS D (doctoral):

- First adjudication level is internal to the university (all science/engineering disciplines).
- Second level is an NSERC committee for Math and Stats.
- Similar quotas imposed at the SFU level.

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Basic tips

- Read the instructions very, VERY carefully.

*This is **excruciating** but, believe it or not, it's great training for the future . . .*

- You need to apply for an NSERC PIN before you can do anything. If you have one and forgot it, then contact NSERC.
- Get your NSERC account set up **right now** (and your CCV if necessary) and start filling out the information in the on-line forms.
- When completing forms online, following the “help” links gives you the most complete information.
- Have your proposal reviewed multiple times, by multiple people.
- Grades don't always correlate with research ability.

Reviewers are looking for **any** good reason to reject your application so they can reduce the number they have to read through in detail.

Insider information

This is “insider” information from the previous chair of the CGS/PGS evaluation committee for Mathematics.

Some is obvious, but some isn't . . .

Research proposal

The committee is judging your ability to write scientifically. If the summary of previous work or proposal are poorly written, this does not inspire confidence. Think about:

- Clear motivation,
- Expected results,
- Follow a clear line of logic.
- Without being too cutesie, make it clear why you like your research, and what inspires you about your area.

Personal qualities

- Show how your skills will help achieve your project goals.
- Focus on things that emphasize your leadership or communication skills: head of a club or union, volunteer work, mentoring other students, . . .
- Describe involvement in relevant but “non-standard” activities: science outreach, work or volunteer experience, refereeing or reviewing work, . . .
- Identify any awards or significant achievements.
- Avoid over-emphasizing elements that are common to **all** students, such as TA work.

Details

- Avoid incomplete, inaccurate or inconsistent information.
- Correct your grammar and spelling.
- Do not wax poetic about how wonderful it is to do research. Instead, focus on exceptional research experiences (conferences, exchanges, etc.)

Referees

- Good referee letters are very important!
- You should cultivate your referees long in advance.
- Pick people who:
 - taught you
 - talked to you at length
 - know you
 - mentored you
- Provide them with a complete draft of your proposal and give them lots of lead time.

Math-specific tips

- There is a fine balance between too much detail and too little.
- Write for a general audience: don't be too technical, avoid too many formulas and symbols.
- Be scientific: don't be too general and forget to talk about the math!
- Make it believable and feasible: this may require advice from a professor to get right.
- **Marni Mishna** is on the NSERC (doctoral) scholarships adjudication committee.

Closing remarks

- A CGS/PGS award will make your graduate life much simpler – it's worth the work!
- Scholarships like this are a sign of prestige, and can open doors later on in your career (other scholarships, grants, etc.).
- Reviewers have boxes full of applications to review – make yours stand out!
- If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

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NSERC USRAs

- Eligibility criteria are similar to graduate scholarships.
- SFU has a mirrored set of VPR USRAs that are open to international students.
- Pays at least \$5,740 for the summer.
- Positions posted in January, deadline in February. No rush, but contact potential supervisors this fall.
- Proposal format is **much** simpler.
- Complete information is available at

<http://www.sfu.ca/math/nserc-usra---vpr/awards.html>

Questions?

These slides are posted on my web page at

<http://www.math.sfu.ca/~stockie/students/students.html>