Revised October 2026

Science Experiential Skills Advantage (SESA) Program Guide

1.0 Purpose

The Science Experiential Skills Advantage (SESA) program provides funded work opportunities for Faculty of Science undergraduate students to conduct research and diverse work activities with a supervisor in the Faculty of Science. The purpose is to involve as many students as possible in a broad range of training experiences that match the incredible scope of science conducted at the University of Alberta.

SESA is not adjudicated based on GPA and offers students competitive wages. SESA enables Faculty of Science students to think broadly about what it means to work as a scientist. Projects may include research, communication, education, interdisciplinary initiatives and more. The Faculty of Science embraces multiple ways of knowing and will be a leader in the breadth of opportunities it gives its students. While traditional research projects are welcome, innovative projects that extend beyond conventional research are strongly encouraged.

2.0 Timelines/deadlines to apply

The Faculty of Science will accept applications from January 4 to February 26, 2027 for the next round of SESA opportunities. Studentship application forms will be made available on uab.ca/SESA prior to the application deadline.

3.0 Student eligibility

University of Alberta undergraduate students **currently registered in a Faculty of Science program** may apply for SESA, provided they meet the following criteria:

- ❑ Students must be **registered** in a Faculty of Science undergraduate degree program at the time of application. *Students registered in the Faculty of Native Studies are also eligible to apply for SESA as long as they are supervised or co-supervised by a member of the Faculty of Science*.
- ❑ Students must be in their **first** undergraduate degree program to be eligible. Graduate students and holders of previous undergraduate degrees are not eligible.
    - ❑ International students are eligible to apply, provided their study or work permit allows them to work in Canada and is valid for the entire term of their position. International students are encouraged to consult with University of Alberta International for more information before applying.
    - ❑ Students must be continuing undergraduate studies in the term following their studentship (or during the term). Students that are graduating prior to the studentship term are not eligible. For Spring/Summer term studentships, students must be continuing undergraduate studies in the Spring, Summer, or Fall term.
- ❑ Students must be in **satisfactory academic standing** in the Faculty of Science before the start of the project (see Faculty of Science Academic Regulations in the University calendar).
- ❑ Students must **not** have held SESA previously.
- ❑ Students may **not** apply for SESA to support a project for which academic credit is concurrently earned (e.g., research-based courses, honors projects).

- ❑ Students may **not** simultaneously hold a similar award (e.g., NSERC USRA, Alberta Innovates).
- ❑ Students may **not** apply for SESA to support a project outside the Faculty of Science. Meaning students may not have a supervisor in the Faculty of Science and conduct a project in the lab of a colleague in a different Faculty. Students registered in the Faculty of Native Studies may apply for SESA to support a science project conducted in the Faculty of Native Studies as long as they have a supervisor in the Faculty of Science.
- ❑ Students must have a confirmed supervisor in the Faculty of Science (see supervisor eligibility) before applying. **Students may apply with only ONE supervisor each application cycle.** Refer to finding a project supervisor for advice on connecting with a Faculty of Science member.

4.0 Supervisor eligibility

A member of the Faculty of Science must supervise SESA students. Projects may be supervised by:

- Faculty members
- Postdoctoral fellows
- Non-academic staff (who are approved to supervise)

Supervisors are expected to:

- Serve as a mentor and resource for the student, although the supervisor may or may not provide direct, day-to-day supervision of the student. In the event of an unanticipated or prolonged absence of the primary supervisor, the faculty sponsor may be asked to provide alternate supervision of the student.
- Provide a safe, equitable, supportive and professional environment for SESA students to work.
- Ensure the student's work adheres to University of Alberta research policies and ethical guidelines.
- Pay for necessary supplies, services and expenses for the funded project.

Access to Other Funding

SESA funding is intended, in part, to provide experiential learning opportunities for researchers who may not have access to other funding sources to support an undergraduate student.

Do you currently have access to research grants or other funding that could be used to support the student associated with this SESA opportunity?

- Yes, I have funding that could be used to support this student.
- No, I do not have access to funding that could be used to support this student.
- Unsure whether my existing funding can be used to support this student or this type of experiential learning opportunity.

If you selected "No" or "Unsure," please contact the SESA team at sesa1@ualberta.ca to discuss your circumstances and the possibility of stipend support.

Definitions:

Other Funding: Any active research grants, contracts, institutional awards, start up funds, or external research sponsorships held or co held by the principal investigator/supervisor that permit allocation toward undergraduate student salaries, stipends, or hourly wages. This includes, but is not limited to, Tri

Council grants (NSERC, CIHR, SSHRC), Alberta Innovates, university level funding, internal departmental research accounts, and industry sponsored research agreements

Other Project Related Expenses: Direct operational costs required to carry out the student's specific research project, distinct from student stipend or salary support. Examples include essential laboratory supplies and consumables, specialized software, field work/travel expenses, participant incentives, facilities or specialized equipment use or expenses directly tied to the student's experiential learning outcomes and project deliverable

Supervisors may submit TWO SESA applications per funding cycle (total). Each student must have a separate project.

5.0 Studentship details

5.1 General information

- SESA is a competitive opportunity with an hourly wage of $18.00. Projects are capped at 560 hours (equal to 4 months of full-time 35 hours per week employment).
- SESA may be held for a period of 2–8 months as long as the maximum number of hours employed is not exceeded.
- **Students are expected to begin their project during the term for which they were approved.** If students are no longer able to begin their project in the term they were approved for, they must consult with the Faculty of Science.
- Students must submit a final report within 14 days after project completion.
- Faculty of Science staff may contact students and supervisors periodically to see how their project is progressing. Students may also be contacted for media requests.
- Additional funds are available to meet formal accommodations.

5.2 Terms of reference

6.0 Application process

SESA applications must be submitted online through the application forms made available on uab.ca/SESA prior to the application deadline. Paper or email applications will not be accepted. **Incomplete applications will not be adjudicated.**

Applications consist of two forms:

1. Student application, including a project description and impact statement. The project description and impact statement must be written by the student, not the supervisor (although supervisor input is expected).
2. Supervisor application, including a mentorship statement.

The student application comprises 60% of the overall score, while the supervisor's application accounts for the remaining 40%. For more details, refer to the application information.

7.0 Adjudication process and criteria

A multidisciplinary committee from the Faculty of Science adjudicates SESA applications. A diverse committee of scientists and non-scientists will review SESA applications. As such, applications **must be accessible to a general audience**.

Applicants must meet the eligibility criteria as stated above. All eligible applications will be adjudicated on the following criteria:

- Clarity and depth of the project description
- Originality, potential impact and expected outcomes of the project
- Impact of the project on the student's professional and personal development
- The student's role and contributions to the project
- Quality of the work environment and mentorship provided by the supervisor
- The student's potential for success in the project

The SESA adjudication committee will allocate studentships for First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students each funding round.

Applicants and supervisors are encouraged to consult the adjudication rubric while preparing their application.

Applicants are generally notified of the competition results within four weeks of each application deadline. Adjudication decisions are not appealable. Unsuccessful applicants are welcome to re-apply.

8.0 Stipend payment

8.1 Pay administration

The total SESA studentship is based on an hourly wage of $18.00 with a maximum of 560 hours (including employers' mandatory costs). Payments will be made directly to the student in semi-monthly installments over the term of the project. The Faculty of Science administers salaries through individual departments or units and a training session for finance partners will be conducted as part of the pilot education process.

8.2 Multiple awards

No other stipend award (e.g., awards that provide payment to the student) may be held concurrently with SESA. Stipend-type awards include, but are not limited to, NSERC Undergraduate Student Research Awards, Alberta Innovates Summer Research Studentship and similarly-structured awards.

Students may hold non-stipend awards, which provide funding for non-stipend and non-salary costs associated with work and related professional development activities, such as materials and supplies, travel, conference awards, etc.

9.0 Expectations during the project

9.1 Time commitment to the project

All SESA positions are capped at 560 hours per project. Time commitment should be considered when determining the project scope and duration of the project.

SESA is meant to be flexible and may be full-time or part-time to provide the greatest flexibility to accommodate diverse student needs. Projects held while students are not registered in courses are generally full-time (e.g., 35 hours per week) and 2–4 months in duration. Projects held while students are registered in courses are typically part-time (e.g., 12–15 hours per week). Student availability must be discussed with supervisors before submitting applications.

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring students' work hours comply with University policies and procedures.

9.2 Vacation/time off

Because of the SESA hiring category, students do not accrue vacation time or receive vacation pay. Any vacation or time off during the studentship must be arranged between the student and the supervisor.

9.3 Changes to the project

Students are expected to complete the project for which they were approved, as SESA studentships are not transferable to other projects. The Faculty of Science must approve major deviations from the proposed project or scope. Should the project be terminated for any reason, the student will be compensated for all hours worked in accordance with the Employment Standards.

9.4 Communication

Students are encouraged to consider departments/Faculty of Science as a resource for any questions or concerns related to their project. The Faculty of Science may also conduct periodic check-ins with students and supervisors to ensure that students are making progress in their projects and to address any concerns.

10.0 Reporting and sharing results

10.1 SESA evaluation and reporting

Students and supervisors may be asked to complete pre-project, mid-project, and post-project surveys assessing project goals, progress and outcomes as well as student skill development.

10.2 Student stewardship requirements

Within 14 days after project completion, students must submit a final report/reflection summarizing their project, experience and outcomes. The final report is to be submitted online (via Google Forms). The link for the final report will be sent via email to students.

The final report should be written in language accessible to a general audience, including donors. The information provided may be edited for communication purposes. The final report may be used to help the Faculty of Science improve the SESA program, as well as in reports to our stakeholders and funders.

For more information, refer to the student stewardship requirements.

10.3 Supervisor Stewardship Requirements

As a supervisor, we are requesting a final report/reflection summarizing your project, experience and

outcomes. The final report is to be submitted online (via Google Forms) preferably **within 14 days after project completion**. The link for the final report will be sent via email to supervisors.

The final report should be written in language accessible to a general audience, including donors. The information provided may be edited for communication purposes. The final report may be used to help the Faculty of Science improve the SESA program, as well as in reports to our stakeholders and funders.

For more information, refer to the PI stewardship requirements.

10.4 Dissemination

Students are encouraged to present the results of their work. Many faculties and departments host student research days or offer opportunities for students to present their work.

All presentations, posters and publications arising from SESA should acknowledge the support of the Faculty of Science and philanthropic funding. Please utilize all current University branding procedures.

10.5 Media and donor stewardship requests

SESA is made possible through the generosity of donors. As such, recipients and supervisors of SESA may be invited to share their research experiences through media requests and donor stewardship activities. Past recipients are our best ambassadors for SESA, so we greatly appreciate your support in helping to ensure the continued availability of this program for future students.

11.0 Contact information

If you have any questions regarding the SESA program, please contact the Faculty of Science office at support.sesa@ualberta.ca.