Assessing Rackham Merit Fellowship Eligibility

This guide is intended to help graduate chairs and admissions committees identify newly admitted students who may be nominated for the 2020-2021 (Fall, 2020 Cohort) Rackham Merit Fellowship (RMF) program. Deciding which students to nominate requires a holistic evaluation process: information found in different parts of the Rackham Admissions Application can help graduate chairs and admission committees determine which students are best qualified for an RMF. Faculty may ask admitted students for additional information that may help determine eligibility for an RMF award, but it is important to note that information about race, ethnicity, gender, and national origin may not be used to justify nominating a student for an RMF award.

A faculty panel reviews each RMF competition nomination, and makes recommendations for the awarding of fellowships. It is important that nominations provide an explanation with as much detail as possible to establish grounds for considering a student eligible for an RMF. RMF allocation submissions are also reviewed by Rackham to ensure it meets at least one of the eligibility criteria. This guide will help graduate chairs and admissions committees use the Rackham Admissions Application and supporting materials to decide whether a student is eligible, and to provide as complete a nominating statement as possible for the review panel.

Eligibility Criteria

Once an applicant has been admitted to a program, the graduate chair and admissions committee may seek to determine whether the applicant is eligible for an RMF award.

The RMF is open to newly admitted students in a Rackham graduate program who:

- have a record of superior academic achievement;
- are U.S. citizens or permanent residents;*

And meet one or more of the following additional criteria:

1. come from an educational, cultural, or geographic background that is underrepresented in graduate study in your discipline in the United States or at the University of Michigan;
2. have demonstrated a commitment to diversity in the academic, professional, or civic realm through their work experience, volunteer engagement, or leadership of student or community organizations. By diversity, we mean efforts to reduce social, educational, or economic disparities based on race, ethnicity, or gender, or to improve race relations in the U.S.;
3. have experienced financial hardship as a result of family economic circumstances;
4. are first generation U.S. citizens or first generation in their families to graduate from a four-year college.

*Undocumented students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) are considered permanent residents for the purposes of the RMF.
Indicators of Eligibility
The following information is intended to help guide you to appropriate sources of data to determine RMF eligibility. We recognize that there is more than one way of meeting the criteria, and we encourage a holistic review of the applicant to determine eligibility.

Requirement 1
Have a record of superior academic achievement.

- Superior academic achievement could be defined in many ways. Some examples captured on the Rackham Admissions Application form include:
  - Grade Point Average (self-reported on page 2);
  - Awards/Scholarships Information (page 3);
  - Activities Information (page 4).
- Curriculum vitae/résumé
- Official transcript
- Official Grade Point Average (captured in M-Pathways)
- Official Graduate Record Examination score (captured in M-Pathways)

Requirement 2
Are U.S. citizens or permanent residents.*

Applicants are required to indicate their citizenship status on the Rackham Admissions Application form (page 1).

*Undocumented students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) are considered permanent residents for the purposes of the RMF.
Criteria 1
Come from an educational, cultural, or geographic background that is underrepresented in graduate study in your discipline in the United States or at the University of Michigan.

Educational Background That Is Underrepresented in Graduate Education
Within the Education Information section of the Rackham Admissions Application form, the student is asked to indicate the type of institution from which the student received a degree (page 3). To establish eligibility under this criterion, the student must select at least one of the following options:

- Community or Junior College
- Historically Black College or University
- Predominantly Latino or Latina-Serving College or University
- Single-Gender College
- Tribal School or College
- None of the above

Cultural Background That Is Underrepresented in Graduate Education
This refers to a culture, a broad range of experiences and backgrounds, that enables a student to bring new or different approaches and expertise to the University community, that is not typical in your discipline. It cannot, however, be explained on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, or national origin.

- Personal statement;
- Letters of recommendation may include a description of the student's experience that could enrich the university community.

Geographic Background That Is Underrepresented in Graduate Education
This refers to how the applicant's geographical background created an educational disadvantage for the student, as opposed to the location of where an applicant is from (e.g., city or region) being underrepresented among current graduate students. We are especially supportive of nominations of students from isolated rural areas or from inner city neighborhoods.

- Personal statement.
Criteria 2
Have demonstrated a commitment to diversity in the academic, professional, or civic realm through work experience, volunteer engagement, or leadership of student or community organizations.

By commitment to diversity, we mean efforts to reduce social, educational, or economic disparities based on race, ethnicity, or gender, or to improving race relations in the U.S.

- Personal statement;
- Curriculum vitae/résumé; and
- Awards/Scholarship Information (page 3);
- Activities Information (page 4)
Criteria 3

Have experienced financial hardship as a result of family economic circumstances.

The specific circumstances will vary for each student and it is up to the nominating program to determine the extent of the financial hardship, given the full range of experiences among the applicants. This could be inferred from the applicant's:

Participation in a program (page 4) that supports students who experience a financial hardship. For instance, criteria 5 would be met if the student participated in at least one of the selected programs:

- Reply to the questions within the Financial Assistance Information section (page 4).
  - Receiving a Pell Grant (a Federal grant for undergraduates with a high level of financial need). Any student receiving a Pell Grant automatically meets criterion 5;
  - An applicant may meet criterion 5 if he or she indicates:
• Personal statement;
• Letters of recommendation may include reference to financial obstacles the applicant may have had to overcome to attain his or her educational goals.

Criteria 4
Are first-generation U.S. citizens or first-generation in their families to graduate from a four-year college.

First-generation U.S. Citizen
Within the Personal Information section of the Rackham Admissions Application form, there is a series of questions under Citizenship Status (page 1). A first-generation U.S. citizen is defined as someone who is a U.S. citizen or permanent resident whose parents were not citizens or permanent residents at the time the applicant was born. A student must have the following responses in order to demonstrate that he or she is a first-generation U.S. citizen:

First Generation in Their Families to Graduate from a Four-year College
Within the Personal Information section of the Rackham Admissions Application form, there is a series of questions on the highest level of education completed by the applicant's parents (page 2).

To establish eligibility under this criterion, any combination of the following options must be selected for both parents:

• Some high school or less;
• High school diploma or equivalent;
• Associate's degree or equivalent; or
• Unknown.

Contact
For questions regarding this document and other matters about the Rackham Merit Fellowships, please contact Donna Huprich (dhuprich@umich.edu; 734-615-3680).