



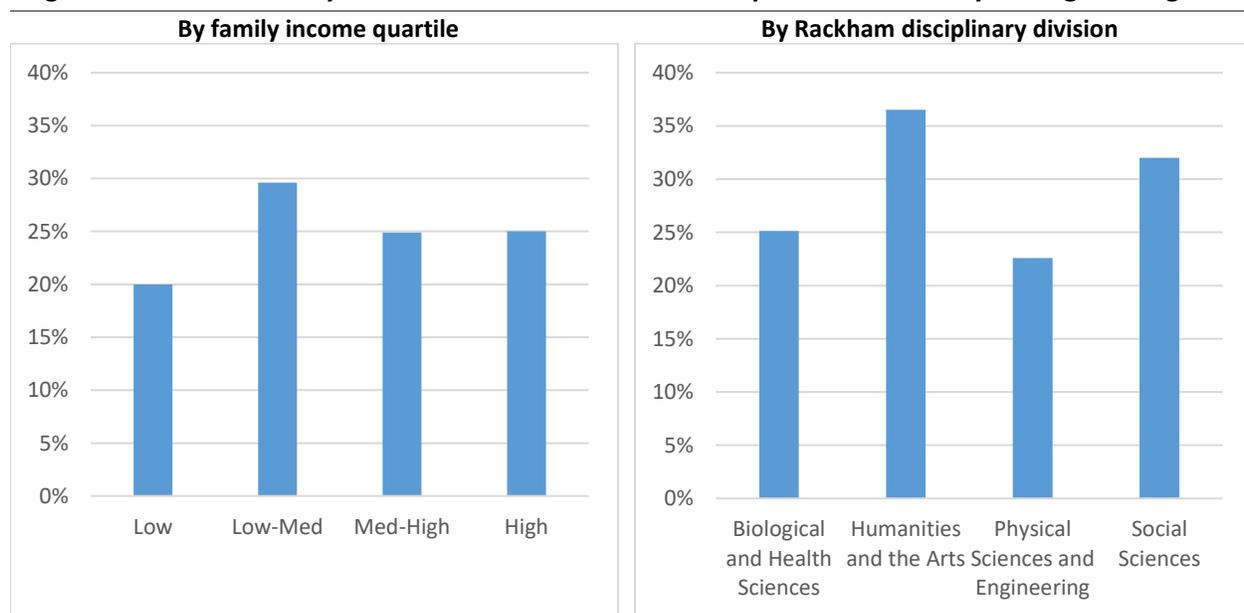
2019 Results: Housing Report

In September 2019, Rackham administered the Michigan Doctoral Experience Study to first-year PhD students. As part of a module on financial circumstances, respondents were asked the following question: “Have you had any difficulty finding suitable housing in and around Ann Arbor?” If respondents answered “Yes,” they were then asked to describe the nature of their difficulties.

Who is Having Difficulty Finding Suitable Housing?

Overall, 26 percent of respondents indicated that they had difficulty finding suitable housing. In 2018, 22 percent of students reported difficulties. As the left graph in Figure 1 indicates, the percent experiencing difficulty is slightly higher for students in a low to medium family income range. Students from Social Sciences and Humanities & the Arts tend to experience more difficulty finding suitable housing than students in Biological & Health Sciences and Physical Sciences & Engineering. There is no statistically significant relationship between family income and Rackham division.

Figure 1. Percent of first-year U-M doctoral students who experienced difficulty finding housing



Why Are Students Having Difficulty Finding Suitable Housing?

Doctoral students described difficulty finding suitable housing for several reasons (see Table 1). The vast majority of responses (76%) were related to the affordability of local housing options. This represents an increase from 2018, in which 66 percent of students who had difficulty finding housing cited affordability concerns. One respondent described these issues related to affordability, stating:

“I’ve had difficulty finding affordable housing in Ann Arbor. The housing market here is the most expensive I’ve ever experienced, and it seems to be tailored to undergrads whose parents help them with rent. For graduate students who are financially independent, affordable housing is extremely limited. Our funding does not reflect the average cost of housing in Ann Arbor.”

Table 1. Main difficulties finding suitable housing reported by new doctoral students at UM

Difficulty Type	Percent Reporting
Affordability of housing options	76
Commuting, parking, and location	34
Timing of housing search for newly admitted students	21
Housing quality that meets needs	20
Issues with university housing	13
Challenge coordinating housing from afar	10
Challenges related to roommates	8
Lack of information	6

Note. Percent reporting refers to the proportion of respondents mentioning a given difficulty type out of all respondents who answered the open-ended question on housing difficulties (N=191)

A substantial number of respondents (34%) also mentioned the difficulty of finding housing given the timing of their admittance into their program (spring) in comparison to when most leases are signed in Ann Arbor (the prior fall/winter). It is not clear whether the Ann Arbor housing market continues to tighten. Perhaps because of these problems, some students sought housing options outside of Ann Arbor but noted additional challenges associated with commuting, including unreliable and time-consuming public transportation options and the lack and expense of parking. Thirteen percent of students mentioned issues with University Housing which included the limited availability for first year students, problems with communication, restrictions on pets, and quality of the units. Respondents also mentioned lack of information provided about housing options and challenges coordinating finding housing while residing abroad or in another state.

Although Table 1 presents problems encountered by respondents as discrete categories, most respondents simultaneously experience issues related to affordability, timing, quality and location:

“There is a high cost of living around the university. Most housing that a graduate student can comfortably afford is either of very low quality or much further away from campus than what is practical.”

“Housing is expensive and my stipend is small. If I want to live close to campus, I have to sacrifice quality of housing. If I want quality, I have to be far from campus. And the busses are not always reliable, so I chose to live close to campus, but it is difficult.”

Students who had partners, children, or pets discussed the unique challenges they faced due to most housing being tailored to undergraduates and traditional graduate students. For example:

“It was difficult to find housing suitable for families with pets in the Ann Arbor area as someone moving from across the country with no Michigan connections. The graduate student options promoted by UM were geared towards single, young students.”

“I have a family including a small child, and it was very difficult to find adequate housing (2+ bedrooms, no cracking lead paint, etc.) within our budget. We ultimately chose housing farther away from campus than we were hoping to get (2 mi away). A lot of the graduate housing close to central campus is not for families, plus the family housing doesn't allow pets, so we really didn't have a graduate housing option available to us.”

Students relocating to Ann Arbor have difficulties in finding housing information and options from afar. Several students also cited particular challenges associated with applying for housing as an international student:

Confidential and Preliminary – Please do not distribute

“I wasn't able to come early to see the apartments, so it was really stressful. I think University housing (where I'm at now and am very satisfied!) should be encouraged and available. It would be great if more support could be given to people who can't visit Ann Arbor and see the places themselves. Also please please do something for international students--if they're coming to the US for the first time, it can be scary! Also a lot of times they don't have credit history, so finding a place can be very hard. More help for the international kids!!”

“Since I am international student, I had only the internet to rely on finding housing. This made me unsure of the decisions i took about the place I rented. Once I am already here, I am not extremely happy with the place I selected and the price I am paying for it.

It would be great if the university could house us for the first month (like some European universities do). This would give us time to find housing options once we are already here.”

Community Context

Students are having difficulty finding housing for good reason: The Ann Arbor real estate and rental markets are highly competitive. As data from US Census American Community Survey indicates, the 2017 Ann Arbor rental vacancy rate was 2.8, down 57 percent from its 2010 level of 6.5. During this same period the median rent increased 26 percent, from \$922 to \$1,166. While the 2017 rental vacancy rate and median rate seem to have improved slightly from 2016, absent any major local initiatives to build affordable housing, it still seems likely that the rental markets will remain challenging for Rackham students for the foreseeable future.

Table 2. Housing statistics for Ann Arbor metro area, selected years

Year	Rental Vacancy Rate	Median Rent
2017	5.1	1,062
2016	2.6	997
2014	4.6	981
2012	2.8	921
2010	8	839

Note. Data from the US Census American Community Survey. 2017 is the most recent data publicly available. Rent is in US dollars.