

Rackham Merit Fellowship

Assessing Eligibility and Evaluating Criteria

The Rackham Merit Fellowship program is based upon two guiding principles:

- 1) *Excellence in our research, scholarly, and educational endeavors is most effectively achieved in an environment that values, supports, and includes participants from a diverse array of paths, backgrounds, and viewpoints.*
- 2) *There are well-defined barriers to entering higher education that many potential students face.*

With those principles in mind, this guide is intended to help graduate chairs and admissions committees identify newly admitted students who could be nominated for the 2025-2026 (Fall 2025 Cohort) Rackham Merit Fellowship (RMF) program. Identifying potential RMF-eligible students and deciding upon which students are the strongest nominees is best accomplished by a holistic process guided by the RMF evaluation rubric. It is important to note that race, ethnicity, gender, and/or national origin may not be used as the justification for an RMF award, just as these characteristics cannot be used to determine admission to your graduate program.

How Rackham Merit Fellowship Nominations Are Evaluated

RMF nominations are evaluated based upon the evaluation rubric included as part of this guide (and available on the website). A faculty panel reviews each RMF competition nomination and makes recommendations for the awarding of fellowships. It is important that nominations provide an explanation as to how an applicant meets the RMF criteria in a compelling way. RMF allocation submissions are reviewed by Rackham using the same evaluation rubric. Thus, the rubric used for evaluation of nominations is an excellent tool in your selection process for either the RMF competition and/or allocation award mechanism.

Eligibility & Evaluation: RMF Criteria

The RMF criteria are used both to determine the eligibility *and* the strength of a potential nominee. 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. Additionally, faculty may ask admitted students for additional information that may help determine eligibility 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, permanent residents, or undocumented students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA).

And are “excellent” in at least one dimension and/or “good” in two or more dimensions:

1. have a sustained 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.;
2. have experienced financial hardship as a result of family economic circumstances;
3. participated in programs open to students from disadvantaged backgrounds (specified in the Rackham application);
4. are first generation U.S. citizens;
5. are first generation in their families to graduate from a four-year college;
6. 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.

Indicators And Assessment Of RMF Criteria

The following information is intended to help guide you to appropriate sources of data to assess a student’s excellence in the dimensions of the RMF criteria. In addition to the dimensions described below. RMF nominees must 1) *have a record of superior academic achievement, and 2) be a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or an undocumented student with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA)*. Superior academic achievement is substantiated by a Rackham graduate program offering a student admission into the graduate program.

A successful nominee will be excellent in at least one criterion and/or good in two or more dimensions.

CRITERIA 1

Have demonstrated a sustained 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.

Excellent: The applicant has held one or more leadership positions within the last four years to reduce social, educational, or economic disparities based on race, ethnicity or gender or to improve race relations in the US. Engagement in such activities over a sustained period (> 1 year). Deep engagement in one such effort or substantive engagement in two or more.

Good: There is evidence of substantive engagement in one or more activities since graduating high school in efforts to reduce social, educational, or economic disparities based on race, ethnicity or gender or to improve race relations in the US. Engagement in such activities over a sustained period (>1 year).

Evidence within the Rackham Application: Personal statement; CV/resumé; Awards/Scholarship information; Letters of recommendation; Activities information (see below)

Activities Information
Since graduating from high school, have you pursued any volunteer activities, work experiences, or leadership of student organizations that were specifically related to reducing social, educational or economic disparities based on race, ethnicity or gender, or to improving race relations in the U.S.?
 Yes No If yes, describe briefly. (limit 500 characters)

CRITERIA 2

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

Excellent: There are multiple, substantive lines of evidence that financial hardship has affected the path to the current educational level. The student has participated in one or more of the programs identified on the Rackham application, as well as being a recipient of a Pell, lack access to generational financial resources, etc.

Good: The student is a Pell recipient (or could not access Pell funding due to administrative limitations - such as DACA) and has had a lack of access to generational financial resources, as demonstrated by working to pay for their undergraduate education or a personal history of lack of financial security.

Evidence within the Rackham Application: Personal statement; Letters of recommendation; indication of a Pell award; Financial assistance information (see reference below)

Financial Assistance Information

1. During your undergraduate study, did you receive a Pell Grant from the U.S. Government? (For U.S. Citizens and Permanent Residents only)

2. While you were an undergraduate student, did you work to pay at least some of the cost of your undergraduate tuition, books and housing? (Do not include work you did to pay for other expenses such as meals, transportation or entertainment.)

3. How much financial hardship did you or your family experience to pay for the total cost of your undergraduate education (tuition, housing, books)?

CRITERIA 3

Participated in programs open to students from disadvantaged backgrounds (specified in the Rackham application).

Excellent: The applicant identified participation in one or more University-recognized program and reflected on this experience elsewhere in the application and/or through the admissions process.

Good: The applicant identified participation in at least one University recognized program in the application and/or through the admissions process.

Evidence within the Rackham Application: Personal statement, University-recognized program (see reference below)

For U.S. Citizens and Permanent Residents only:
If you attended a U.S. college or university, indicate whether you have participated in any of the following programs that encourage students to pursue graduate education: (select all that apply)

- Bridges to the Baccalaureate
Committee on Institutional Cooperation: Summer Research
- Opportunity Program (CIC – SROP)
- Gates Millennium Scholars Program
- Graduate Engineering and Science Fellowships for Minorities (GEM)
- Institute for Recruitment of Teachers (IRT)
- Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP)
- Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship
- Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC)
- Post-baccalaureate Research Education Program (PREP)
- Project 1000
- Ralph Bunche Summer Institute
- Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (RISE)
- Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program
- Public Policy and International Affairs Program (PPIA)
- Western/National Name Exchange (NNE)
- None of the above

CRITERIA 4

Are first-generation U.S. citizens.

A first-generation U.S. citizen is defined as someone who is a U.S. citizen or permanent resident whose parents (both parents) were not citizens or permanent residents at the time the applicant was born.

Excellent: Multiple lines of evidence that first generation status has impacted the path to the current educational level. This might include limited role models or family support for higher educational attainment or other academic experiences, difficulties associated with navigating hidden curricula and expectations in US higher education, and significant cultural adjustment.

Good: Substantive evidence that first-generation status has impacted the educational experience of the nominee. This might include limited role models or family support for higher educational attainment or other academic experiences, difficulties associated with navigating hidden curricula and expectations in US higher education, significant cultural adjustment.

Evidence within the Rackham Application: Personal statement, Parental citizenship (see reference below)

<p>For U.S. Citizens and Permanent Residents only Parent #1 was a citizen or a permanent resident of the U.S. at the time I was born</p> <hr/> <p>Parent #2 was a citizen or a permanent resident of the U.S. at the time I was born.</p> <hr/>

CRITERIA 5

Are first-generation in their families to graduate from a four-year college.

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.

Excellent: Multiple lines of evidence that first generation status has impacted the path to the current educational level. This might include limited role models or family support for higher educational attainment or other academic experiences, difficulties associated with navigating hidden curricula and expectations in US higher education.

Good: Substantive evidence that first-generation status affected the educational experience of the nominee. This might include limited role models or family support for higher educational attainment or other academic experiences, difficulties associated with navigating hidden curricula and expectations in higher education.

Evidence within the Rackham Application: Personal statement, Parents education information (see reference below)

<p>Parent's Education Information</p> <p>Parent #1 highest educational level completed _____</p> <p>Parent #2 highest educational level completed _____</p>

CRITERIA 6

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.

While educational, cultural and geographic background are not always distinct categories, additional clarification for each is provided.

-Educational: This includes the type of institution a student graduated from including a community college, minority serving institution (MSI), or single gender college/university.

-Cultural: This refers to a broad range of experiences and backgrounds that enables a student to bring new or different approaches and expertise to the University community that cannot be explained on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, or national origin. This could include a student who is a tribal community member or grew up with a native language unusual to the academy.

-Geographic: 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. This includes nominations of students from isolated rural areas or from inner city neighborhoods, students that come from an under-resourced school system such as a rural, urban environment or from a war-torn community.

Excellent: Multiple lines of evidence that the educational path of the student was significantly affected by educational, cultural, geographic background.

Good: Substantive evidence that the educational path of the student was significantly affected by educational, cultural, geographic background.

Evidence within the Rackham Application: Personal statement, CV/resume, Transcript, Letters of recommendation, Type of institution (see reference below)

For U.S. Citizens and Permanent Residents only
Additional College or University Information
Indicate whether you received or will receive a degree from any of the following institutions in the U.S.: (select all that apply)

- 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

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Contact

For questions regarding this document and other matters about the Rackham Merit Fellowship Program, please contact the Rackham PACE team (rackham-pace@umich.edu; 734-615-5670).