

Rackham Merit Fellowship Guide for Assessing Eligibility and Evaluating Criteria

The overall goal of the Rackham Merit Fellowship (RMF) program is both to aid programs in the recruitment of top talent and to incentivize programs to create environments where student success is fully supported. The RMF is integral to Rackham's stated mission to 'advance excellence in graduate education, to cultivate a vibrant and diverse student community, and to impact the public good through the scholarship and discoveries of its students and degree recipients.' In support of that goal, each year Rackham makes available 160 RMFs to admitted students.

Graduate programs are responsible for nominating newly admitted students for the RMF. This guide is intended to help graduate chairs and admissions committees identify strong candidates for the RMF program from their pool of newly admitted students.

Key Steps in RMF Nomination and Evaluation Process*

Step 1

Graduate programs admit student(s) to their program as part of their regular admissions process.

Step 2

Graduate programs identify strong RMF candidates from their admitted student pool using the RMF Evaluation Rubric included as part of this guide (and available on the website).

Step 3

Graduate programs complete and submit a nomination to Rackham for each of their nominees. It is important that nominations provide an explanation as to how the nomination is awardable along the lines of the RMF criteria in a compelling way. **Note**

that a nomination that includes race, ethnicity, gender, and/or national origin as part of the justification will be rejected without further consideration.

Step 4

Once submitted to Rackham, nominations are reviewed in a tiered process that utilizes the RMF Evaluation Criteria Rubric to determine if an RMF will be awarded. For nominations submitted as part of a Program's allocation, this process is completed within 2 business days. Review of nominations submitted to the RMF or RMA competition is typically completed within two weeks of the deadline. Programs will be notified via email of the review outcomes.

Step 5

Once a Program is informed that an RMF nomination has been determined awardable, the Program informs the nominated student that they have received an RMF.

*These steps apply to both the allocation and competition process.

Eligibility & Evaluation: RMF Criteria

The RMF criteria are used both to determine the eligibility and the strength of a potential nominee. Newly admitted students in a Rackham graduate program are determined to be **eligible** for the RMF nomination if they:

- have a record of superior academic achievement; **this is satisfied by admission to a Rackham graduate program.**
- are U.S. citizens, permanent residents, or undocumented students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA). **This information is found in the Rackham application.**

In addition to these eligibility criteria, there are **evaluative** criteria that are used to determine which admitted students are RMF awardable. The evaluative criteria are:

1 have led and/or substantially engaged in activities that broaden the participation of individuals with diverse backgrounds in the academic, professional, or civic realm. By broadening participation, we mean efforts in the US to specifically reduce educational disparities based on race, ethnicity, first-generation status, familial income, or gender.	2 have experienced financial hardship as a result of family economic circumstances	4 are first-generation US citizens	6 from an educational or geographic background that is underrepresented in their discipline in the US or at U-M and/or holds membership in a federally recognized Tribe.
	3 participated in programs open to students from disadvantaged backgrounds (specified in the Rackham application)	5 are first generation in their families to graduate from a four-year college	

Information found in different parts of the Rackham application can help Programs determine which students are strong candidates for an RMF. Additionally, faculty may ask admitted students for additional information. **Nominees are deemed RMF awardable if they meet the threshold of ‘excellent’ for at least one of the evaluative criteria and/or ‘good’ in two or more criteria.**

Indicators and Assessment of RMF Evaluative Criteria

Criteria 1

Led and/or substantially engaged in activities* that broaden the participation of individuals with diverse backgrounds in the academic, professional, or civic realm. The sustained commitment is within the US and aims to reduce educational disparities based on race, ethnicity, first generation status, familial income, or gender.

*Eligible activities will be carried out with an organization whose stated goals are to reduce educational disparities based on race, ethnicity, first-generation status, familial income, or gender. This work must be carried out in the US with US citizens, permanent residents, or DACA recipients.

Excellent

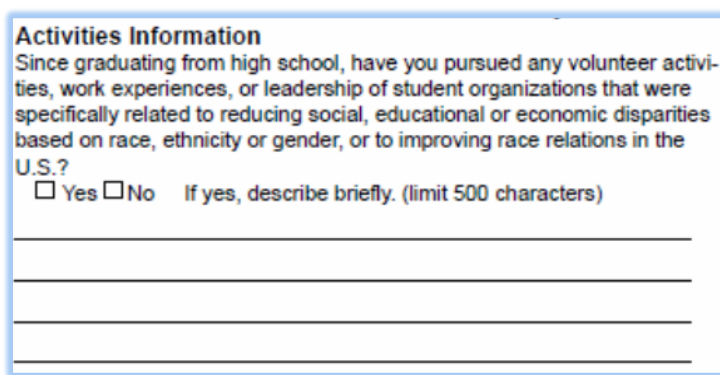
Leadership position within the last four years in one or more effort in the US that specifically reduces educational disparities based on race, ethnicity, first-generation status, familial income, or gender. The leadership position should be for a sustained period (>1 year).

Good

Substantive engagement within the last four years in one or more effort in the US that specifically reduce educational disparities based on race, ethnicity, first-generation status, familial income, or gender. Deep engagement in one such effort or substantive engagement in two or more. 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 question.



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)

Note that not all activities that a student might describe in the above question will satisfy Criterion 1.

Criteria 2

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

Excellent

Multiple, substantive lines of evidence that financial hardship as a result of family economic circumstances has affected the path to the current educational level. By financial hardship as a result of family economic circumstances, we mean long-term financial circumstances such as lack of access to generational financial resources.

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 which has impacted the student's educational journey.

Evidence Within the Rackham Application

Personal statement; Letters of recommendation; CV; indication of a Pell award; Financial assistance information (see reference)

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)?

If a student replies 'yes' to Question 1, then that is an indication that the student **could** receive a 'good' or even 'excellent' for this Criterion. Answers to questions 2 and 3 as well as the personal statement, letters of recommendation, and CV are sources of information regarding how the educational journey of the student has been impacted.

Criteria 3

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

Excellent

Nominee identified participation in one or more University-recognized program in the application and indicated that the experience significantly impacted their educational journey. Significant impact could be indicated by, for example, a reflection on an SROP research experience that transformed the educational trajectory or a mentoring relationship formed through MICHHERS that opened a path to higher education.

Good

Nominee identified participation in one or more University-recognized program in the application **and** there is evidence that the experience impacted their educational journey.

Evidence Within the Rackham Application

Personal statement, letters of recommendation, research statement, University-recognized program question (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 US citizens. A first-generation US citizen is defined as someone who is a US 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

At least one substantive line of 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), research statement, letters of recommendation

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

Parent #2 was a citizen or a permanent resident of the U.S. at the time I was born.

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 and/or family support for higher educational attainment or other academic experiences, difficulties associated with navigating hidden curricula and expectations in US higher education.

Good

At least one substantive line of 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 US higher education.

Evidence Within the Rackham Application

Personal statement, Parents education information (see reference)

Parent's Education Information

Parent #1 highest educational level completed _____

Parent #2 highest educational level completed _____

Criteria 6

Come from an educational or geographic background that is underrepresented in graduate study in your discipline in the United States or at the University of Michigan and/or holds a membership in a federally recognized Tribe.

Additional clarification for each category 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;
- 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. The student comes from an under-resourced school system or from a war-torn community;
- Membership in a [federally recognized Tribe](#).

Excellent

Multiple lines of evidence that the educational path of the student was significantly affected by the educational, geographic background, or federally recognized Tribal membership.

Good

Substantive evidence that the educational path of the student was significantly affected by the educational, geographic background, or federally recognized Tribal membership.

Evidence Within the Rackham Application

Personal statement, CV/resume, Transcript, Letters of recommendation, Type of institution (see reference)

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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

Contact

For questions regarding this document and other matters about the Rackham Merit Fellowship Program, please contact the Rackham PACE team by email at rackham-pace@umich.edu, or by phone at 734.615.5670.