



*Aug. 1, 2023*

## **A Primer on Graduate Education and the Graduate Employees' Organization at the University of Michigan**

### **Introduction**

Graduate education at the University of Michigan trains students to contribute and lead in professions that range from medicine, to music performance, to law, and to academia. Just under half of all University of Michigan students are here to pursue the master's, professional doctorate, and Ph.D. degrees that represent graduate education. In graduate education, the engagement of students with faculty is high, the connection between the degrees and the university's research, patient care, and teaching missions is strong, and the reputation and ranking of our programs is sterling.

The purpose of this document is to provide a briefing on the structure of graduate education, the distribution of graduate students by degree type, the nature and sources of graduate student funding, and the relationship of this funding to the collective bargaining agreement with the Graduate Employees' Organization ("GEO"). The briefing focuses on graduate education on the Ann Arbor campus; both Flint and Dearborn do have graduate students, but very small numbers of students on these campuses are covered by the UM-GEO contract.

### **Graduate Education Structure at U-M**

Each of the 19 schools and colleges of the Ann Arbor campus, as well as the Flint and Dearborn campuses, engages in graduate education. Graduate degrees offered are master's and professional doctorates as well as the Ph.D. degree. Master's degrees extend from research-based degrees such as the Master of Science and the Master of Arts to degrees with a professional focus, such as the Master of Business Administration and the Master of Social Work. Professional doctorates include degrees such as the Doctor of Medicine (MD) and the Doctor of Law (JD). The Ph.D. degree is a research-based degree that requires the submission and acceptance of a dissertation reporting original research and scholarship in a field. The Ph.D. degree is offered in more than 100 fields at the University of Michigan. All Ph.D. programs on the Ann Arbor and Dearborn campuses are Rackham degrees; there is one Ph.D. program on the Flint campus that is not a Rackham degree.

As described in Table 1, among the more than 18,000 graduate students at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor campus, approximately 5,500 are (Rackham) Ph.D. students, 10,100 are master's students (Rackham and non Rackham), and 2,600 are professional doctorate students. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the graduate student population in Ann Arbor by school/college and course of study.

**Graduate students are students first. Their employment status as a graduate student instructor (GSI), graduate student staff assistant (GSSA) or graduate student research assistant (GSRA) is**



**entirely dependent on their status as students in good standing in their respective graduate degree programs.**

### **Graduate Student Funding**

Similar to undergraduates, the cost of attendance for graduate students includes items such as tuition, fees, educational expenses, and living expenses. Graduate students also may receive financial aid to promote their access to graduate education and to recruit them to the University of Michigan. The level and type of financial aid varies by degree type – and can include both need and merit components. Across all degree types – master’s, professional doctorate, and Ph.D. – the University of Michigan provided \$546,936,074 in student support payments to graduate students in FY22. These student support payments are drawn from scholarship, fellowship, and employment sources. This figure does not include student loans.

The Ph.D. degree – because of its special nature – offers a funding package to its students as part of the offer of admission. Because of the attention paid to this funding, we here describe Ph.D. funding in more detail, as well as the specific progression and requirements of this degree.

#### *Ph.D. funding*

To recruit the best Ph.D. students and to support them in their academic progress and studies, the University of Michigan offers generous financial aid packages that provide funding through fellowship payments and employment opportunities. These resources support broad access to the benefits of Ph.D. education and the career outcomes associated with receiving the Ph.D. degree. Although details vary significantly by program—especially between STEM and humanities/social sciences fields—the academic expectations of the Ph.D. student include the following:

- Coursework expectations (always in the first year, but also in the second and sometimes third year in humanities and social sciences programs)
- Research and scholarship expectations (research progress is required even in the first year in many STEM programs and in all programs by the third year; the nature of research varies considerably – from lab work, to field work, to archival work)
- Milestone examinations (these include qualifying and candidacy exams; when students take these varies by program, typically between at the end of the first year to at the end of the third year)
- Authorship, submission, and defense of a dissertation (the dissertation, which must be accepted by a faculty committee, typically represents the completion of the Ph.D; research and scholarship expectations support the research production that is reported in the dissertation)

When a student makes satisfactory progress toward meeting these expectations, as assessed by their program faculty, they are judged to be in "good academic standing." This standing is a key criterion in determining whether they may continue pursuing the Ph.D. as well as their eligibility for continued funding. The typical time to complete the Ph.D. degree is about 4-7 years, depending on discipline. The average time to degree at the University of Michigan is currently 5.2 years.



While doctoral students take classes for only 2 or 3 years, faculty are deeply involved in all stages of the academic progression of a Ph.D. student. In addition to teaching Ph.D. students in classes, faculty mentor them in their research and scholarship, train them in authorship and pedagogy, serve on dissertation committees, and otherwise create the departmental environment that supports doctoral scholarship. When Ph.D. students engage in these activities with faculty, they are performing academic work as students. Moreover, tuition assessed to Ph.D. students flows into the pool that pays for faculty time to work with Ph.D. students. Tuition also pays for year-round access to university resources (e.g., libraries, student services, recreation services, CAPS, UHS, etc.) for Ph.D. students.

The financial aid packages received by Ph.D. students are described in their offer of admission. On the Ann Arbor campus, these include fully paid tuition, fringe benefits, and 12 months of stipend for a specified period, provided that the student maintains good academic standing. The duration of this funding package – typically between 4-6 years – is specified in the offer of admission and varies by Ph.D. program as per the expected time to degree and the funding available to the program to support Ph.D. students. The sources of funding in a student’s financial aid package are determined by the Ph.D. program and can include fellowship funding and/or appointment as a graduate research assistant (GSRA), graduate student instructor (GSI), or graduate student staff assistant (GSSA).

The investment of Rackham graduate faculty and the university in the financial packages to support Ph.D. education is significant. Each year approximately 1,000 new Ph.D. students matriculate at the University of Michigan. In fiscal year 2022, doctoral programs, schools and colleges, and Rackham devoted more than \$335,000,000 to Ph.D. student support payments that included stipend, benefits, and tuition. This equates to an average annual expenditure totaling more than \$60,000 per Ph.D. student.

Central to funding graduate students’ education, the University provides part-time employment opportunities for graduate students in the form of student instructor and research assistant positions. These work opportunities also provide experience for the graduate students’ educational program and their career goals.

The stipend and wages that are guaranteed to Ph.D. students are provided as a GSI/GSSA, GSRA, or fellowship (the latter is not employment). Each of the academic units make the determination of how funding is provided each semester. Each of these appointments have different expectations and obligations. Again, GSI and GSSA appointments are defined in the collective bargaining agreement, while GSRA and fellowship appointments are governed by university policy.

**Fellowship appointments** are provided to Ph.D. students from department, school/college, Rackham, and external funders such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) or the Department of Education Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Program. Fellowships are provided to Ph.D. students to promote their academic work, studies, and progress. These appointments are not employment. The requirements of fellowships are academic work and progress – including in research and scholarship. They are paid to the student’s financial aid account rather than through the payroll system.



**GSRA appointments** are part-time employment for research, subject to University policies. They are often associated with external grants provided by the federal government. In some fields, the work of GSRA employment is indistinguishable from the academic activities of Ph.D. education. In that case the Ph.D. student can make academic progress toward the degree and dissertation through part-time employment. In other fields, the work of GSRA employment is distinct from progress on the dissertation research needed to complete the Ph.D. Regardless, as part of this employment graduate students receive valuable training that develops their skills in research. These appointments are paid through the payroll system.

**GSI and GSSA appointments** are part-time employment for instruction and administrative, counseling, or educational duties, respectively, subject to the collective bargaining agreement of the university with GEO. The work of GSI and GSSA employment is distinct from academic and dissertation progress; however, as part of this employment graduate students receive valuable training that develops their skills in instruction or administration. These appointments are paid through the payroll system.

For further information, please see Rackham's resource on [Funding for the Ph.D. Degree](#).

#### *Non-PhD. Students and Ph.D. students beyond their funding guarantee*

While we provide a guarantee of funding for our approximately 5,500 Ph.D. students for a certain amount of time, the remaining 13,000 graduate students are master's and professional doctoral students who do not have guaranteed funding from Rackham during the time they spend earning their degree.

Additionally, a portion of our Ph.D. students are outside of their funding guarantee. Ph.D. students outside of funding commitment are those who have been at the university pursuing their PhD for more than the time that they were given guaranteed funding. Ph.D. students are able to continue past their funding commitment as long as they continue to make satisfactory progress as defined by the graduate program. While they are able to continue past their commitment, they no longer enjoy the benefits of the funding commitment including guaranteed stipend/wages, tuition waiver, and benefits.

As long as these students are in good academic standing in their degree program they are eligible to apply for appointments as GSRA's as well as for fellowships. If students are in academic good standing and meet the requirements set forth in the collective bargaining agreement, they are eligible to apply for appointments as GSIs or GSSAs.

#### *Rackham Plan for Ph.D. Student Summer Funding*

On March 24, 2023, Rackham Graduate School introduced a new funding model. Going forward, all Ph.D. programs will be required to provide 12-months of stipend support to new Rackham Ph.D. students on the Ann Arbor campus for the duration of the funding packages as specified in their offers of admission. All current Ph.D. students within the duration of their funding packages also had their funding



extended from 8-months to 12-months, effective May 1, 2023. Previously, 8-month funding packages for Ph.D. students were required. Most programs—for competitive reasons – were already offering their Ph.D. students 12-month packages that included full summer stipend; programs that did not were primarily in the humanities, arts, and social sciences. The source of this funding was new fellowship funding allocated by the Provost to Rackham Graduate School. **Fellowship funding is provided to support *academic work*; it is not employment. For this reason, fellowship appointments have never been part of the collective bargaining agreement between U-M and GEO.**

Rackham’s plan applies only to Ph.D. students within the duration of their funding packages specified in their admissions offer. It applies neither to Ph.D. students who have exceeded the guaranteed funding of their admissions offers (typically 4-6 years, depending on program), nor to master’s students or professional doctorates. It does not apply to Ph.D. students beyond the limits of their funding packages because guaranteeing spring/summer stipend to these students is inconsistent with the fact that they are not guaranteed even fall or winter term support at this point in their academic progression. These late-stage Ph.D. students have exceeded the time limit that their Ph.D. program has determined is appropriate for its students; they no longer have a claim to guaranteed funding whether in fall, winter, and spring/summer terms.

Likewise, the Rackham plan does not apply to master’s and professional doctorate students because the academic progression of each of these degrees is different. Specifically, Ph.D. students, per Rackham academic policy, are expected to make 12-month academic progress as described by Rackham’s continuous enrollment policy. Master’s students, on the other hand, generally do not have expectations for academic progress in the summer; neither do master’s students generally receive comprehensive, multi-term guaranteed funding packages as part of their offers of admission. There are a few master’s degrees – like the Dance MFA – that do guarantee multiple terms of funding to their students; however, these programs determine their funding due to specific conditions in their field. There is no common rationale for a general extension of summer funding to master’s and professional doctorates in the way that there is for Ph.D. students.

For further information, please see Rackham’s FAQ on the [12-Month Funding Model for Rackham Ph.D. Students](#).

### **GEO bargaining unit**

The Graduate Employees’ Organization (GEO) was established in the 1970s and is the oldest graduate student union in the country. GEO only represents those who hold GSI or GSSA appointments. While these appointments can be used as part of the guaranteed funding that Ph.D. students receive, there are students who earn their Ph.D. and never hold an appointment covered by the union contract.

The GEO bargaining unit includes Ph.D. students, master’s students, and professional doctoral students. See Table 3 for the breakdown of the appointments in Fall 2022 by course of study. Table 4 shows the distribution of appointments across the 19 schools and colleges.



There are two ways to get a GSI/GSSA appointment. The first is for the appointment to be assigned by the academic unit as part of a funding commitment (Ph.D.). Additionally, units who have more instructional needs than they have Ph.D. students who require funding will post GSI and GSSA positions for graduate students who meet the criteria set forth by the unit.

The terms and conditions of employment for these appointments are governed by the collective bargaining agreement.

What a GSI/GSSA gets as TOTAL COMPENSATION:

- i. Salary: \$24,055 for 8 months/year, approximately 20 hours/week.
- ii. Tuition: paid by the University for members working at least 7.5 hours/week.
- iii. Benefits: comprehensive health insurance with no monthly premium.
- iv. Childcare: \$6,086 subsidy per year for one child.
- v. Leaves of Absence: medical, family, maternity/childbirth.



**Appendix**

Table 1

Headcount of graduate students at the University of Michigan, by campus and course of study (Fall 2022, n= 21,762)

Campus	<u>Course of study</u>			
	Ph.D	Masters	Professional	Total
Ann Arbor	5,573	10,106	2,600	18,279
Dearborn	125	1,982	0	2,107
Flint	45	791	540	1,376
Total	5,743	12,879	3,140	21,762



Table 2

Headcount of graduate students at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor, by school or college and course of study (Fall 2022, n= 18,279)

Unit	<u>Course of study</u>			Total
	Ph.D.	Masters	Professional	
Taubman	41	413	0	454
Art and Design	0	19	0	19
Business	78	1,817	0	1895
Dentistry	12	101	475	588
Education	87	212	0	299
Engineering	1,689	2,390	0	4,079
SEAS	45	508	0	553
Information	131	1,215	0	1346
Information and Pub. Hea.	0	76	0	76
Kinesiology	35	95	0	130
Law	4	24	972	1000
LSA	2,104	624	0	2,728
Medicine	631	154	672	1457
Music, Theatre, and Dance	127	167	0	294
Nursing	17	299	159	475
Pharmacy	110	14	322	446
Public Health	230	836	0	1066
Public Policy	0	230	540	230
Rackham Interdepartment	232	45	0	277
Social Work	0	867	0	867
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,573</b>	<b>10,106</b>	<b>2,600</b>	<b>18,279</b>





Table 3

Graduate student headcount by appointment type, University of Michigan Ann Arbor (Fall 2022)

<u>Course of study</u>	<u>Appointment type</u>	
	GSI/GSSA	GSRA
Ph.D.	1,477	2,089
Masters	772	119
Professional	69	0
Total	2,318	2,208

Note: Some students have multiple appointments, so totals across columns won't equal overall headcount within the degree categories.



Table 4 - UPDATED 7/20/23

Graduate student headcount by appointment type and appointing school or college, University of Michigan Ann Arbor (Fall 2022)

<u>Appointing unit</u>	<u>Appointment type</u>		
	GSI	GSRA	GSSA
Architecture	58	4	1
Art & Design	14	1	4
Business <sup>1</sup>	8	56	4
Dentistry	0	6	1
Education <sup>1</sup>	23	24	2
Engineering <sup>1</sup>	398	1,100	0
SEAS	53	23	0
Information	124	38	3
ISR	0	22	0
Kinesiology <sup>1</sup>	19	8	1
LSI <sup>1</sup>	0	21	1
LSA <sup>1</sup>	1,323	404	5
Medicine <sup>1</sup>	27	302	0
Music	104	1	9
Nursing	0	1	1
Pharmacy	20	21	1
Pub Health <sup>1</sup>	62	156	2
Pub Policy	22	0	0
Rackham	0	5	7
Social Work	5	9	1
UMOR_CSCAR	0	2	0



UMOR_IRWG	0	2	0
VP_Engaged Learn	0	2	0
Total	2,277	2,208	42

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Note: <sup>1</sup> Some students have multiple appointments, so totals across columns won't equal overall headcount within these units.