

Resources and Advice for Prospective Graduate Students

March 2017

Some of the benefits of our program:

Michigan Astronomy has proprietary access to observing facilities spanning from Radio to X-ray (unique!). Students get to lead proposals (meaning, you are the PI!) and there is priority for student-led programs.

The university's graduate school provides funding on a competitive basis to travel to conferences/meetings; the department funds trips to telescopes (for example, Magellan [Chile], IRAM [France/Spain], MDM [Arizona]).

You will get a laptop! On top of that, there's LSA flux allocations even if your advisor doesn't pay for flux: <http://arc-ts.umich.edu/lsa-flux/>

The department prioritizes research starting day one. By the end of the second year, students are required to have at least one first-author paper submitted. This is built into the program. Research is such a high priority for this department that the department itself pays for ~1.5 semesters during your first two years for you to focus on science, i.e., you don't have to teach or rely on your advisor's funding level during these semesters.

Regardless of where the funding comes from, students are guaranteed funding for 5 years as long as they remain in good standing.

As noted in your offer letter, the department will cover relocation up to a set cost.

You choose your advisor and the science you're interested in. You're not obligated, so if things don't work out, you may switch at the end of the first or second year.

There are several external funding options, including long-term and short-term fellowships, travel funds, etc -- see the list below:

- [Rackham Merit Fellowship](#) (Rackham = [Rackham Graduate School](#))
- [NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program](#): *"Fellows benefit from a three-year annual stipend of \$34,000 along with a \$12,000 cost of education allowance for tuition and fees (paid to the institution), opportunities for international research and professional development, and the freedom to conduct their own research at any accredited U.S. institution of graduate education they choose... [] The fellowship is competitive, and those planning to apply should devote a sincere effort to their application"*. The department offers mentorship for writing successful NSF proposals. Students receive feedback from faculty, to improve their application.
- NESSF: *"Awards of \$30,000 per year are made for up to three years. More information and application instructions can be found at <http://solicitation.nasaprs.com/open> by searching for NESSF."*

- You can get a [travel grant](#) from Rackham Graduate School to go to a conference each year; and [research support](#) grant, e.g., travel to an observatory or collaboration visit, twice during your PhD. This is in *addition* to the department support, or funding through your advisor -- which gives you a little extra flexibility (and adds to your resume!)
- All Rackham grants are listed [here](#).

Cost of living:

\$30K in AA is equivalent to \$45K in LA, \$47K in Boston (from bankrate.com)

Housing: Where should I live?

Where you should live is a personal choice, and depends on your preferences and lifestyle. Ann Arbor is a nice town that consists of a very walkable downtown center, surrounded by a large residential region that requires having a car or using public transportation more. It's important to choose which part you want to live in & commit to it, e.g. choose to be downtown & carless, or choose to be in the outskirts & drive a lot. Also, there is large variability in types of neighbors based on which section of downtown you live in: the southern parts of town are very undergrad-heavy and Greek-life-heavy, which is a turn-off for some; north of downtown has more grad students and is a little quieter while still pleasant. Some students who went to an undergrad school that didn't have Greek/football life, say it was a little shocking to come to Ann Arbor and see that so prominently. If you don't like a loud neighborhoods, avoid the frat house area.

Rental: Prices vary; it can be anywhere from \$700-\$1000/month for one bedroom, but the price, amenities and size really vary with distance from campus / downtown. You can find more spacious, more affordable places outside of downtown.

It is advised to **start shopping early!** Apartments for Sep 2016 were basically on the market as early as Nov 2015. The peak shopping season (for move-in in fall) would be winter. Later in the year you can still find a decent place, but there will be fewer options.

There are a few apartment complexes in downtown Ann Arbor; these tend to be fairly expensive. There are many reasonably priced apartments in converted houses around town (particularly in the Kerrytown Area).

Munger Grad Residence: <http://mungerresidences.org/> The monthly rates are comparable to a decent 1 bedroom apartment. Munger costs \$850/month with amenities included (electricity, TV with cable and netflix, laundry rooms in the suites, gym in the top floor, game room, etc.) with individual bedrooms and bathrooms and a common kitchen and living room. As a plus/minus you will have six suitemates; this is beneficial to your social/mental health (most of the time).

Negative: parking is not included, so you'd need to pay for a private parking permit if you own a car.

Compared to Munger, renting a 6-person house across the street from Munger would be cheaper, though lacking the extra amenities and would probably be a little more run down.

Buying a house: (*most grads rent, but if you're thinking of buying:) The housing market in Ann Arbor is very competitive and seasonal. During the summer months houses may only be listed for a few days before an offer is accepted (the winter is slower). Houses near campus are generally much more expensive, but you could potentially find a place in Ann Arbor for \$100k (so maybe \$20k down and several hundred dollars a month in mortgage plus taxes). People in the department would be happy to recommend realtors if you wanted to go this route.

Shopping:

All the big chain stores, department stores, supermarkets are generally not in the downtown/campus area. This may affect where you choose to live, especially if you don't plan to drive. However, there are plenty of transportation options (see below) and you can get by with the smaller scale stores (like the [co-op](#), [farmers market](#)) at least for daily needs if you live downtown.

Do I need a car?

No. There are many options for transportation. [Zipcar](#), [Uber](#), [public transportation](#), other grad students that own a car would often be willing to carpool. Depending on where you live, parking may be easy or difficult, so if you plan on owning a car what may be a consideration as well. Some places charge >\$50/mo and some places are free, or there's enough street parking (which may or may not require city permit).

Apartment complexes in the outskirts of town mostly have covered parking. Downtown, if you do get reserved parking, it is better to get off-street parking (or best, covered) because of the snow.

Public transportation:

It's free! Ann Arbor Transit Authority (AATA) are all free for students (with your UMich ID card) and would take you anywhere in AA, Ypsilanti. The blue busses are free on campus and shuttle you between North and Central campus (we are on central). The buses go typically every 10 minutes during the day.

It is advised to consider the bus routes when deciding on a place to live.

www.aata.org/

What do I need to know about the weather?

Fall and spring are beautiful!

Winter: Winters in Ann Arbor can get cold and snowy. If you don't already have them you should invest in a warm winter coat and a pair of snow boots. Clearance sales in January are a great time to stock up on sweaters! Wearing layers is the best way to stay warm. Air can get very dry.

Summer: Humidity can sometimes be high, but usually it's very pleasant. There are generally a few days each year with a high somewhere in the 90s. Having air conditioning is not necessary, but could be helpful on hot days, especially if you live on the top floor of your building.

Benefits:

Grad Care <https://hr.umich.edu/benefits-wellness/health/health-plans/gradcare>

You can elect different levels of coverage for vision and dental. Most students elect level 2 for dental (cost-effective if you expect to have anything more than just cleaning).

Most students are satisfied with the health care program.

Childcare and schools:

Ann Arbor Public Schools is in one of the [best school districts](#).

For preschool age kids, childcare could be a very costly expense. University affiliated [child care system](#) has three centers (for infants through 5 years old), of which The Towsley Children's House is the nearest to where your office would be. It is highly recommended to **apply early, because waitlists are long** -- especially for infants. Rates can be found [here](#). These rates are typical for other similar early childhood education centers around town, which are also heavily in demand and often have waitlists.

Other places that are recommended by department parents include [Gretchen's House](#) with a few [locations](#) around town.

There are more affordable home-based child care options.

More **resources for grad students with children** can be found [here](#) (including policies and financial support, and many other resources).

Life in Ann Arbor: What do grad students like to do?

- Tango ([MATC](#)), yoga ([Center for Yoga](#)), weightlifting ([sports coliseum](#))
- Running (at the [Arb](#), [Country Farm Park](#), or Geddes Park / [along Huron river](#), all of which are also fun places to bike, hike, picnic, etc)
- Ann Arbor has a great comic book store, [Vault of Midnight](#), which also has game nights
- [Arboretum](#) any time of year,
- Sledding at [Huron Hills Golf Course](#) in the winter
- [kayaking on the Huron River](#) in the summer

- Rock climbing at [Planet Rock](#)
- Exploring the Ann Arbor [beer scene](#) (wonderful Michigan craft beer)
- Eating out; [restaurant week](#); Try new restaurants (I really enjoy Isalita and Sava's)
- Going to the Gym
- Going to Movies; the [State](#) and [Michigan](#) theaters get a lot of art house movies
- Sports events: both college and professional
- Concerts
- The Farmers Market is great in the spring/summer/fall
- Play the piano in the [Michigan Union](#)
- [Michigan](#) is a beautiful state to explore!
- See live music at [the Ark](#) / [Blind Pig](#) / [MASH](#).
- I spend lots of time in cafés enjoying excellent coffee and chatting with friends and acquaintances.
- Explore Detroit! Detroit Institute of the Arts, Eastern Market, Belle Isle, Henry Ford Museum are all great!
- bar trivia -- we have a team of grads/postdocs (Cluster Flux) that play weekly at Ashley's Bar on campus
- join orchestra or choir group -- they take grad students!

Resources on Campus

- [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)
- [Grad students with children](#)
- [Students with disabilities](#): services, resources on or off campus, [CGSDI](#), Technology solutions, [OIE](#)
- [Students of Color](#): SCOR, AGEP, resources, organizations, societies
- [Undocumented and DACAmented Students](#)
- [LGBTQ+](#): Spectrum Center, "out list", groups, societies, and resources
- [Veterans](#)
- [First generation college students](#)
- [International students](#): International center, resources, rules and regulation, English resources for non-native speakers, immigration, health insurance, banking, housing, driver's license, social security, [international students associations](#), and more.
- [Career center](#)

what to expect during the prospective weekend?

The prospective student weekend (**March 16-18, 2017**) is your opportunity get a first-hand feel of our community! This is your chance to determine whether the University of Michigan is a good fit for you. You'll meet with professors to discuss the research projects you could embark on, and you'll get to know the current students who have already chosen to pursue their PhD in our department – these students will be your fellow graduate students if you decided to come here. You'll also get information on

resources that the University of Michigan offers to help support graduate students during their time here. Apart from the more formal discussions held within the department's home in West Hall, we'll also take you to informal dinners and outings, allowing you to see the vibrant town of Ann Arbor. All expenses, including ground transportation, airfare, hotel, and meals are covered by the department so that your stay is as comfortable and convenient as possible.

General advice from the grads!

- Make sure that you like the city where you go to graduate school because you will be living there for the next 5-6 years.
- Talk to the graduate students about different advisers and who works well with graduate students.
- Shop for apartments early
- Understand where are the parts of Ann Arbor that are a good fit for you in terms of housing. I lucked out with my location (western A2); Many undergrads live south of campus, and that's where the frat houses/frat-like houses are.
- Know how much time you have to spend on classes.
- Grad school is not anything like undergrad -- mostly in terms of the many responsibilities (research, conferences, classes, teaching, etc.) that are expected of you. It will be a challenge to learn to balance it all, but know you are not alone -- we've all been there before and are there to help you succeed!