



## MICHIGAN REPORT

### M.E.R.C. Denies U-M Graduate Student Union Effort

Graduate research assistants at the University of Michigan were blocked Monday from forming a union by the Michigan Employment Relations Commission.

Ruthanne Okun, director of the Bureau of Employment Relations, said the commission voted 3-0 to reject the proposed consent agreement between the U-M Board of Regents and the graduate research assistants. MERC cited its 1981 ruling on the same issue when it stated that such assistants are not public employees because they are primarily at the university to obtain a degree.

“There had to be some substantial change in circumstances that would require a different result,” Ms. Okun said.

The graduate students could ask MERC to reconsider its decision or appeal to the Court of Appeals.

The Mackinac Center Legal Foundation had asked to intervene on behalf of one of the students who opposed the union. MERC denied the motion to intervene, citing commission rules that the student had to demonstrate proof that 10 percent of the graduate research assistants also opposed the union.

Still, the Mackinac Center praised the overall ruling.

“MERC enforced the law, rather than allowing a politically divided U of M Board of Regents to bypass it through a hasty resolution,” said Patrick Wright, director of the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation. “This resolution called for a public employee union election for a group of students who weren’t public employees in the first place. The regents have no legal authority to expand the statutory definition of public employees.”