**Comparing self-reported demographic measures: advancing disability inclusion in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) workforce education**

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**Background:**

People with disabilities are significantly underrepresented in STEM, particularly within healthcare education and professions. Leaders in medical and graduate education throughout the U.S. have expressed a commitment to increase diversity, including among students with disabilities. Since 2003, over 2,000 students have participated in various research and professional development programs at LSUHSC-New Orleans. These programs focus on clinical, basic science, and public health research.

**Objectives:**

This study evaluated disability data of undergraduates from two self-reported measures: the Summer Research Internship Program (SRI) demographics survey and the 2024 National Science Foundation’s Education & Training Application (ETAP) common application tool.

The present study compares:

* the two data collection tools (SRI demographics survey and ETAP) on disability information
* the ETAP disability data from the LSUHSC REU and from all of the REU applicants from other NSF programs nationwide

**Results**

The ETAP questionnaire revealed a more comprehensive list of disabilities (e.g., Sight, Hearing, Walking, Lifting, and Cognitive Limitations), ranging from Slight to Severe. The most common were Sight Limitations including color blindness and Cognitive Limitations such as attention deficits.

**Conclusion**

The ETAP tool provided more specific categorization of disabilities that applicants experience so that resources and programs can be appropriately tailored and improve their research experience. Even though the self-disclosure of disabilities via ETAP may help identify accommodations to best serve the students, it may hold negative consequences. Historically, students have faced ongoing and considerable stigma and discrimination surrounding disability, which may discourage self-reporting/self-disclosure.

**Recommendations: Expanding disability data collection is important in the recruitment of students from underrepresented groups.** This could help institutions tailor support services and resources to better meet students’ specific needs. Collaboration between the LSUHSC Schools of Public Health, Allied Health Professions, Nursing, and Medicine may provide training and access to resources which can best accommodate students with specific disabilities