

## **Characterizing the self-advocacy experiences of students with learning disabilities/ADHD in undergraduate STEM courses**

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Although students with disabilities (SWD) are interested in obtaining undergraduate degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), their attrition from STEM majors is higher than for students without disabilities. SWD face many barriers to accessing an undergraduate degree. One barrier arises at the start of college due to a shift in the legislation that guides the accommodation process. In high school, faculty and staff are responsible for identifying and accommodating SWD. In college, SWD are responsible for self-identifying and registering with a disability resource center (DRC) to receive accommodations. If their accommodations are not effective, SWD must self-advocate with DRC staff, and possibly their instructors, in order to adjust their accommodations. As a result, self-advocacy skills are critical to the success of SWD in college. The purpose of this study is to characterize the self-advocacy experiences of undergraduate students with learning disabilities (SLD) and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

The self-advocacy experiences of SLD and/or ADHD in STEM courses will be investigated using a qualitative research design. Participants will be recruited through a partnership with the University of Georgia (UGA) Disability Research Center (DRC). Students who: (1) are registered with the UGA DRC for a learning disability and/or ADHD, and (2) have taken a science core curriculum course will be invited to participate. Participants will complete a demographic survey and a 90-minute research interview. The research team will use a qualitative method called content analysis to label data that reveal participants' use of self-advocacy skills. The researchers will then identify themes in the data in order to describe the self-advocacy experiences of SLD and/or ADHD in STEM courses.

Data from this study will be used to inform UGA DRC staff about self-advocacy issues facing SLD and/or ADHD in STEM courses at UGA. In the short term, the results will be used to create a Center for Teaching and Learning workshop to raise faculty awareness of the experiences of SLD and/or ADHD and to increase inclusivity in UGA classrooms. The researchers will partner with members of the UGA DRC staff to develop and lead this workshop. In the long term, results from this study will also be used to develop an instrument for measuring self-advocacy in SLD and/or ADHD. This type of instrument would allow DRC staff across the country to identify students who might need assistance developing self-advocacy skills. Thus, this study will help reduce the attrition of SLD and/or ADHD from undergraduate STEM majors.