

Access to Research Support Among Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students at RIT

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Background

- Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) students face persistent barriers in accessing academic resources, particularly within STEM education (Braun et al., 2018)
- Prior research shows that STEM environments are often not fully accessible, which can limit participation and sense of belonging (Lillywhite & Wolbring, 2022).
- Because STEM pathways frequently lead into research through coursework, mentoring, and lab experiences, these barriers can extend into research access as well (Coleman & Graham, 2025; Hernandez et al., 2018).
- At RIT, where research is a core institutional priority and DHH student interest in research is growing, understanding access to research support is increasingly important.
- DHH RIT students have a unique opportunity to engage in research activities on campus with signing faculty members and available and proximity access to access service providers

Problem Statement

DHH students have limited access to research support due to linguistic and cultural barriers, thus missed opportunities to enter the STEM workforce

Study Objectives

Goal #1

- Identify which research support resources DHH students are aware of

Goal #2

- Examine which resources they actively use

Goal #3

- Understand gaps in access, support, and overall experience

Methodology

Study Design

- Eligible participants must be 18+ years old and a current RIT student
- Survey was developed using the REDCap platform and the survey video configuration module to ensure accessibility for DHH participants
 - Embedded video links of ASL translations
- Participants shared their experiences with accessing research support on campus

Recruitment

- Flyers with a QR code linking to the survey were distributed in high-traffic spots across campus
- Utilized the RIT/NTID's mass communication system to reach more potential participants
- Engaged with potential participants through tablestanding efforts

Qualitative Interviews

- Eligible participants were invited to participate in qualitative interviews
- Qualitative interviews were conducted on Zoom with a bilingual interviewer and a notetaker
- Two qualitative interviews were conducted
 - Two participants participated in a focus-group style discussion in both American Sign Language and spoken English
- One participant participated in a one to one interview
- All participants shared their opinions on the current state of research support and future opportunities to scale access to research support

Data Analysis

- Quantitate Data was retrieved from REDCap
 - N= 29
 - Communication Preferences
 - Sign language interpreter (21)
 - CART (3)
 - Direct Communication (5)
- Qualitative Data was analyzed using notes written by the notetaker
 - N = 3
- Thematic analysis was performed to illustrate the gaps and trends among the students from the notes in the qualitative interviews

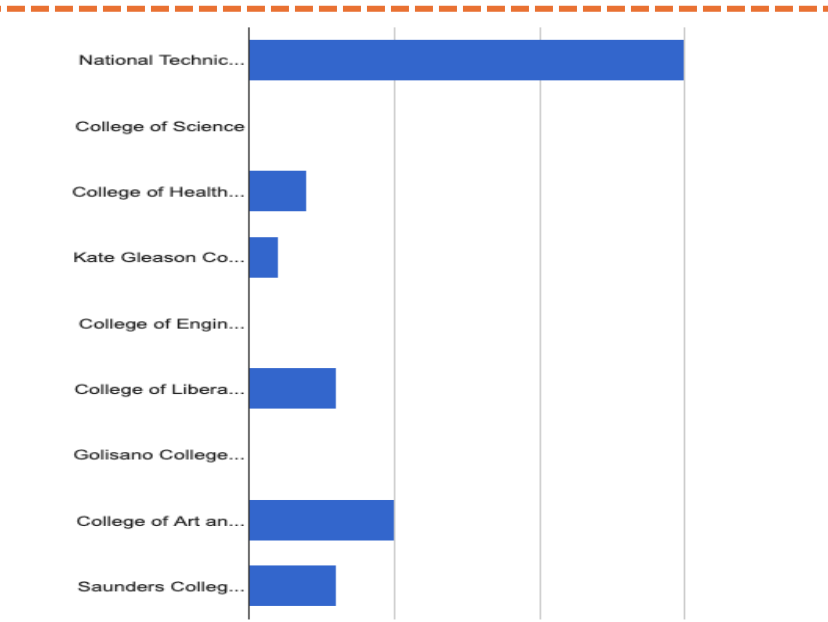


Figure 1: A bar graph showing participants with their respective colleges

Results

Qualitative Findings



Dimension #1: Faculty Members

- Professors were a primary source of research guidance.
- One on one meetings were the comfort with research tasks.
- Flexible topic selection supported the student engagement.
- Limited office hour access reduced individualized support



Dimension #2: Library Resources

- Students frequently relied on RIT Library and librarians.
- Librarians helped located books, databases, and articles.
- Library support was viewed as reliable and accessible



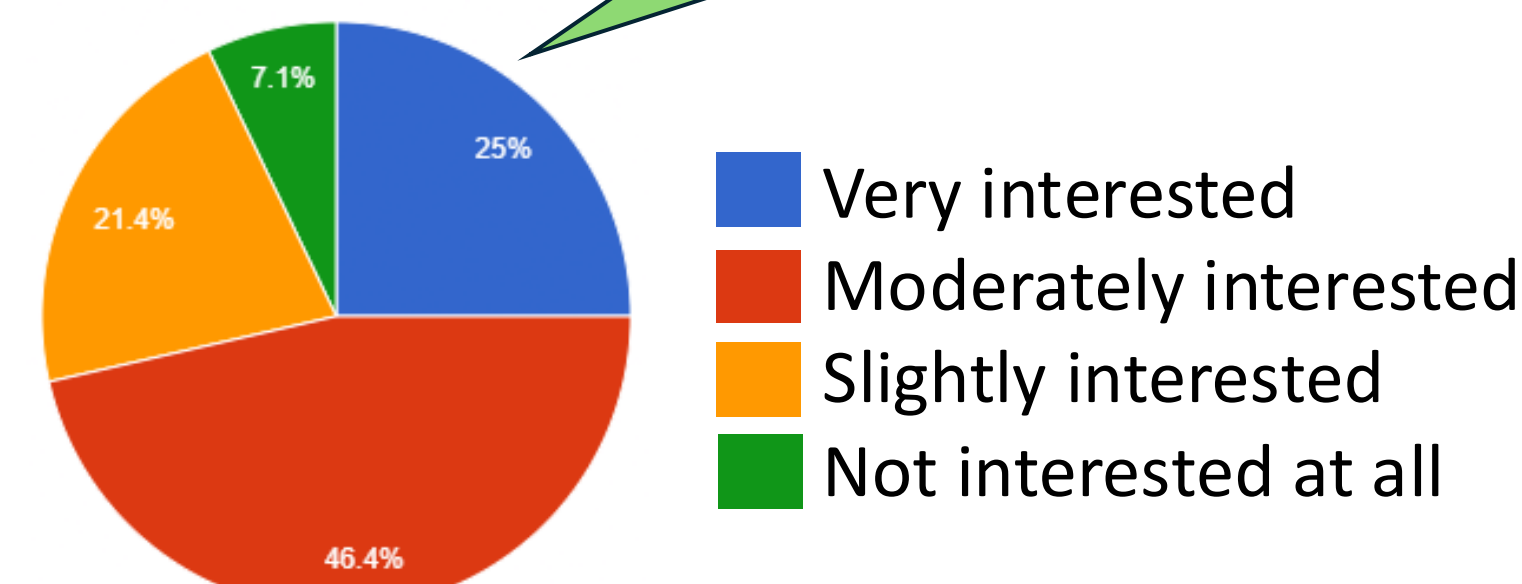
Dimension #3: Accessibility & Visibility

- Some research videos lacked captions or subtitles.
- Students wanted research resources introduced in syllabus
- Participants suggested a beginner "research crash course."
- More peer-to-peer opportunities were requested

Quantitative Findings

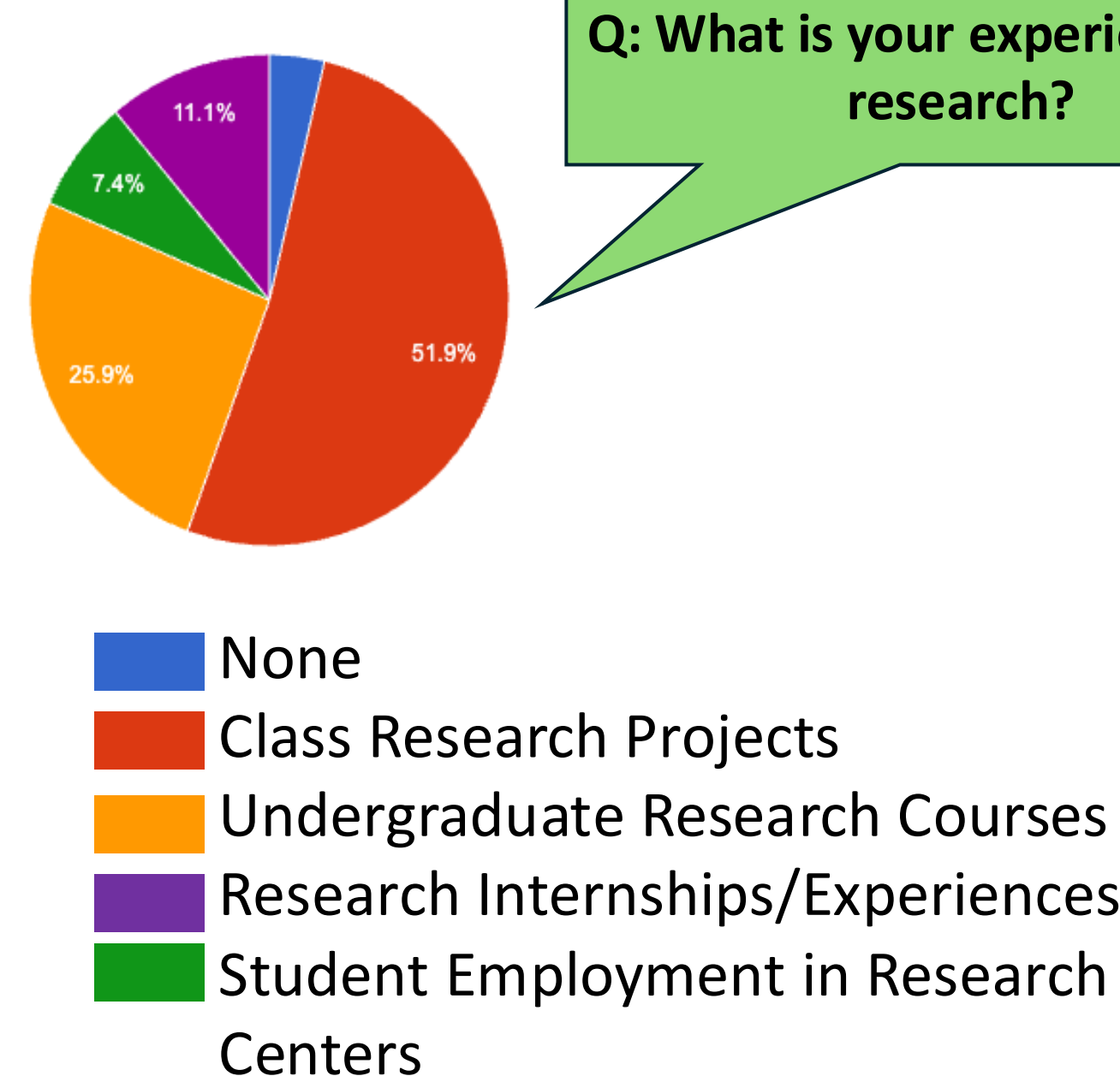
Research Interest

Q: Do you have an interest in research?



Exposure to Research

Q: What is your experience with research?



Access to Research Support

Definition: Research support is defined as resources that are designed to support research activities

Q: Do you feel like you have enough support to conduct research?

- Only 2 participants responded "Strongly Agree" to having received enough support to conduct research
- 12 participants responded "Neither Agree nor Disagree"

Reported Forms of Research Support

- Writing publications/articles (12.5%)
- Survey development (50%)
- Data analysis (50%)
- Professional development (12.5%)
- Mentoring (25%)
- Work experience (37.5%)

Note: Data reflects only 8 responses of all responses

52% of the respondents reported gaining research experience through class research projects

Limitations

- Social media recruitment was not available, limiting outreach.
- Recruitment primarily relied on flyers, email, and in person campus engagement.
- The study included a small number of participants.
- Findings may not fully represent the experiences of all Deaf and hard of hearing students at RIT.
- Participants outreach depended on researcher and staff availability.
- Recruitment opportunities were limited to times when personnel were available for flyer distribution and engagement.

Discussion

- Most respondents gain research experience through undergraduate courses, suggesting that a common entry point into research involvement for DHH students at RIT.
- Our findings alluded to prior literature indicating that embedding research activities into coursework can reduce the barriers to participation in research and expand more research opportunities (Coleman & Graham, 2025; Hernandez et al., 2018)
- Low responses to having adequate support to conduct research activities on campus, highlighting high uncertainty and low confidence to participate in research activities
- Findings suggest students often received practical support than developmental support such as mentoring, writing guidance, and career preparation (Coleman & Graham, 2025).

Future Direction

Research Readiness

- Develop a beginner Research Crash Course for students new to research
- Introduce basic topics such as finding sources, reading articles, and research methods
- Offer sessions in accessible formats (captioning, ASL support, transcripts)

Visibility & Outreach

- Work with administration to better promote research resources across campus
- Include research support information in course syllabus and orientation materials
- Use professors and librarians as referral pathways

Mentoring & Professional Growth

- Expand faculty and peer mentoring opportunities
- Increase support for research writing and presentations
- Offer workshops on graduate school, professional development, and internships

References



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