

July 17, 2024

Patrick J. Lechleitner
Deputy Director and Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director
US Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Student and Exchange Visitor Program, SEVP Response Center
500 12th St. SW, STOP 5600
Washington DC 20536-5600

RE: STEM CIP Code Nomination

Dear Mr. Lechleitner,

On behalf of the undersigned, we write to share our support for the discipline of “Rehabilitation Science” (CIP: 51.2314) to be added to the Department of Homeland Security STEM Designated Degree Program List. Rehabilitation science is uniquely positioned as a STEM discipline to tackle major challenges faced by people with disabilities using innovative and novel solutions using science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Rehabilitation science programs are equipped to train and prepare future clinicians and scientists to become independent clinicians and scientific researchers to make massive and transformational contributions across various sectors.

Rehabilitation science is deeply rooted in engineering, biological and biomedical sciences, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences. Rehabilitation science employs scientific principles and methods and basic science foundations to explore the mechanisms, and risk factors and biomarkers associated with rehabilitation across the lifespan. Rehabilitation research applies technology in instrumentation and measurement, robotics, virtual reality, and transcranial stimulation to improve the lives of persons with disability. Rehabilitation scientists utilize engineering in areas of modeling and simulations, and prosthetics and orthotics design in order to develop adaptive and assistive devices and technologies. Rehabilitation researchers utilize mathematical and statistical methods to analyze and interpret data problems and implement quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods to better understand complex issues.

Building on the success of the NIH Research Plan on Rehabilitation, the federal government has created large Common Fund programs that include rehabilitation research and has consistently and substantially increased funding for rehabilitation research. In addition to the NIH, other agencies and institutes (NSF, VA, DOD, NIDILRR, etc.) have invested in research funding and development related to rehabilitation and disability.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) STEM Designated Degree Program List is a complete list of fields of study that DHS considers to be science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) fields of study for purposes of the 24-month STEM optional practical training extension. Currently rehabilitation science is not listed on the STEM Designated Degree Program List despite similar disciplines currently on the approved list. Because of the training of rehabilitation scientists using STEM methods and practices, the federal government's investment in rehabilitation research, and similar disciplines on the STEM Designated Degree Program List, Rehabilitation Science should be unequivocally be added to the Program List.

We request that the DHS add Rehabilitation Science to the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List as Rehabilitation Science is fundamentally a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) program. Please see the enclosed white paper on this issue for additional information. If you have any questions, please contact Justin Elliott, Vice President of APTA Government Affairs at justinelliott@apta.org. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Occupational Therapy Association

American Physical Therapy Association

APTA Academy of Research

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association