

# Capitol Connection

## Congresswoman proposes STEM Opportunities Act

April 16, 2013 | Author: Summer Allen, Graduate and Postdoc, Brown University



United States Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (a Democrat from Texas) introduced a bill called the STEM Opportunities Act of 2013 in early March. If passed, this legislation would ensure that the NSF, academic institutions, and government labs track data about women and minority scientists, identify barriers to their success in the sciences, and produce solutions for these barriers.

Although the bill's text is not yet available (eventually it will be made public [here](#)), a [press release](#) from the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology (Representative Johnson is its Ranking Member) website offers some details about what it will contain, including:

- A requirement that the National Science Foundation (NSF) “collect more comprehensive demographic data on the recipients of federal research awards and on STEM faculty at U.S. universities.”
- The promotion of “data-driven research on the participation and trajectories of women and underrepresented minorities in STEM so that policy makers can design more effective policies and practices to reduce barriers.”
- Development of “consistent federal policies for recipients of federal research awards who have care-giving responsibilities, including care for a newborn or newly adopted child.”
- “Guidance to grant reviewers and program officers on best practices to minimize the effects of implicit bias in the review of federal research grants.” (I find this point particularly important in light of findings from the [NIH's Ginther report](#) showing that minority researchers were less likely to receive funding).
- A requirement that the NSF work with universities and federal labs to identify barriers that limit “the recruitment, retention, and achievement of women and minorities in research careers” and determine the best ways to overcome these barriers.
- And giving the NSF authority to “award grants to universities to implement or expand research-based practices targeted specifically to increasing the recruitment and retention of minority students and faculty.”

It will be interesting to see if this bill passes out of committee. Representative Johnson has introduced similar bills in previous years that have not passed, but—according to the press release—this bill encompasses new input from stakeholders and has the support of 13 cosponsors and from organizations like the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering and the Society for Women Engineers.

Personally, I'd love to see this bill become law. I'd also like to see the NIH be included in these policies (especially since they have lagged behind the NSF in tracking [career outcomes](#) in general). Unfortunately, [GovTrack](#) says the prognosis of this bill being enacted is low. Maybe if you call your representative, you can help change that.