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Teaching Computing as Science in a Research Experience

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Overview

- Research Training: Benefits and Reality
- Computing as a Discipline
- Experience Gap
- Our Approach
- Results

Research Training

Method

- Holz et al. [ITiCSE '07]
- Witten & Bell [SIGCSE '93]
- Fekete [SIGCSE '96]
- Ward [J. CSC '04]
- Quade [ITiCSE '04]
- Shaffer [SIGCSE Bull. '06]
- Havill & Ludwig [SIGCSE '07]
- Koppelman et al. [ITiCSE '11]

Experience

Integrated

- Reed et al. [SIGCSE '00]
- Hadfield & Schweitzer [ICFE '09]

Capstone

- Schneider [SIGCSE Bull. '02]
- Walker & Slotterbeck [J. CSC '06]
- Koppelman et al. [ITiCSE '11]

Apprenticeship

- Bernat et al. [ITiCSE '00]
- Wenderholm [SIGCSE Bull. '04]
- Koeller [J. CSC '05]
- Peckham et al. [SIGCSE '07]
- Dahlberg [SIGCSE '08]

Benefits and Reality

- **Survey of Undergraduate Research Experiences**

Lopatto, D. (2008). Exploring the benefits of undergraduate research: The SURE survey. In *Creating Effective Undergraduate Research Programs in Science* (112–132). NY: Teacher's College Press.

- Enhance educational experiences
- Attract students to research careers
- Help retain minority students

- **CS experiences highly variable**

Barker, L. (2009). Student and Faculty Perceptions of Undergraduate Research Experiences in Computing. *ToCE* 9(1) 5:1–5:28.

- Depends heavily on mentor, project structure
- “Less likely to participate in the ‘culture of research’”

- **Mixed agreement on structure**

Matzen, R. & Alrifai, R. (2012). Defining Undergraduate Research in Computer Science. *J. Computing Sciences in Colleges*. 27(3), 31–37.

- Requires literature search and presentation: 90%
- Requires “scientific method” (62%) or “formal process” (67%)

Computing as a Discipline

Theory

- Definition
- Theorem
- Proof
- Interpretation

Design

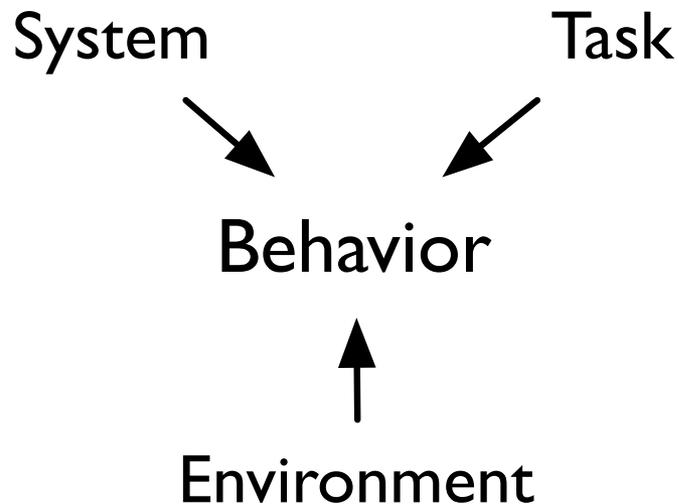
- Requirements
- Specifications
- Implementation
- Testing

Abstraction

- Hypothesize
- Model and predict
- Experiment
- Analyze

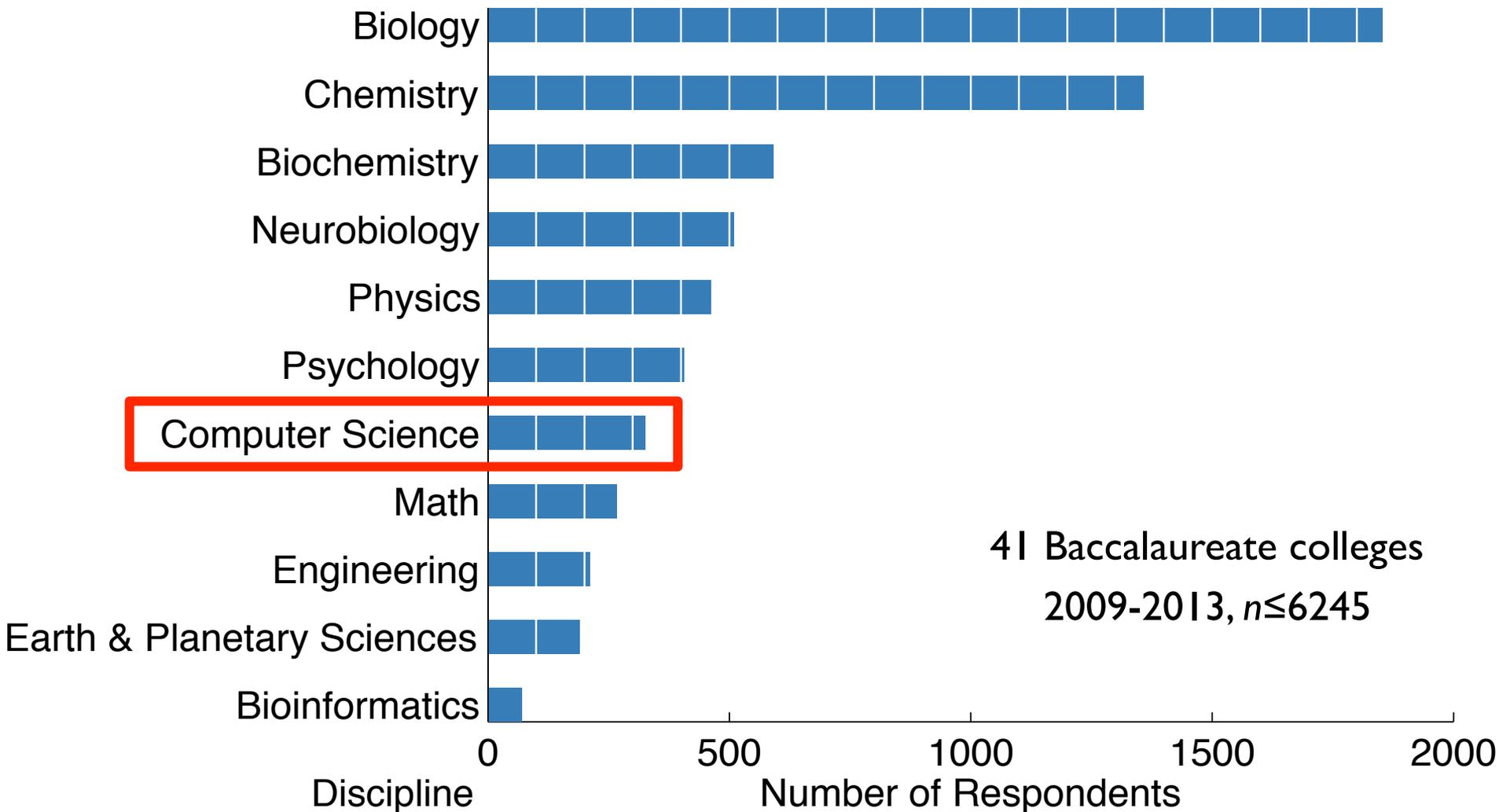
Computing as a Science

- *Sciences of the Artificial* [Simon '69]
- *Computing is a Natural Science* [Denning '07]
- *Empirical Methods for AI* [Cohen '95]



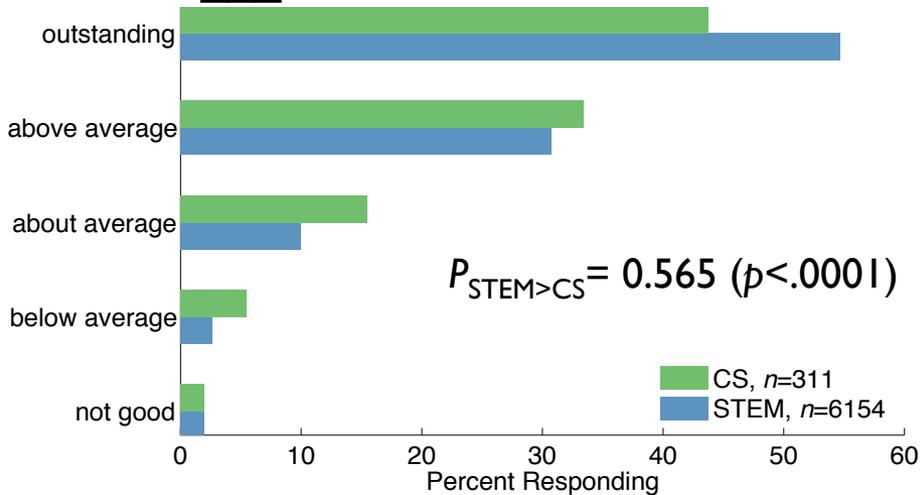
Ergalics: Uncovering general theories/laws governing the behavior of computational tools and computation itself. [Snodgrass '10]

Survey of Research Experiences

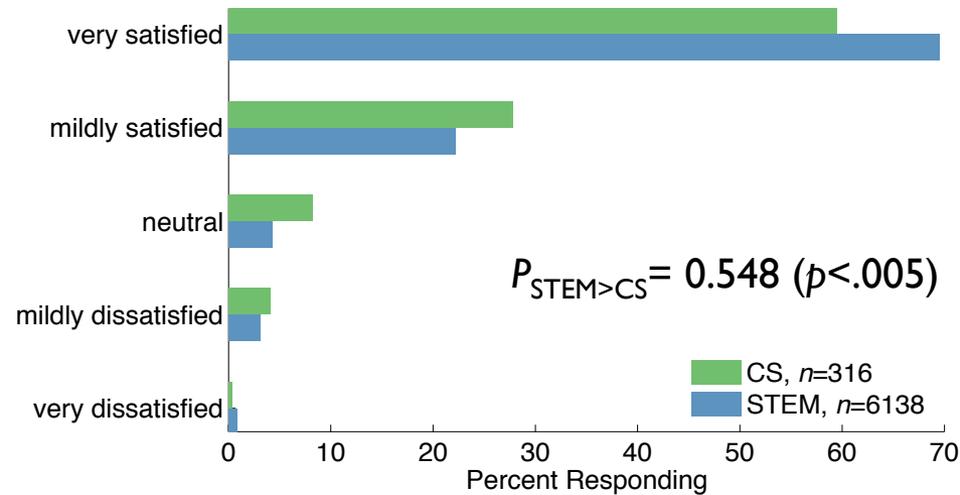


Research Experience Ratings

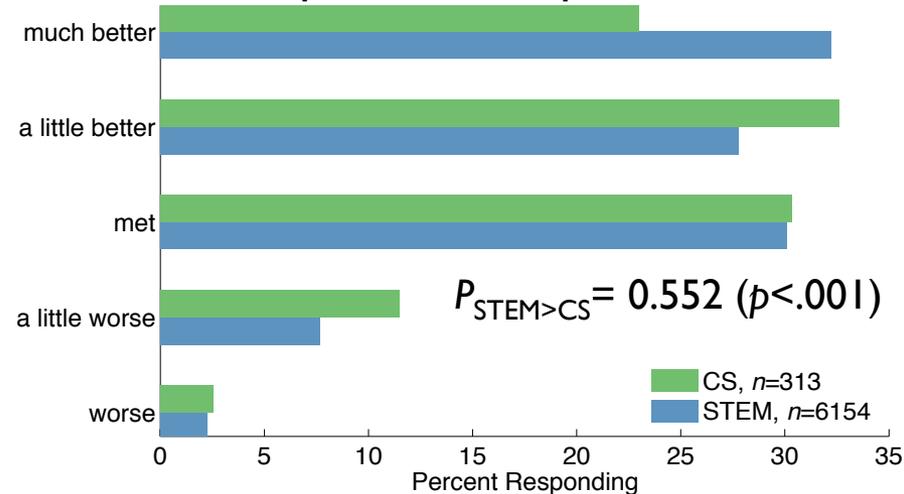
I feel that my supervisor was _____ as a teacher and mentor



Overall sense of satisfaction



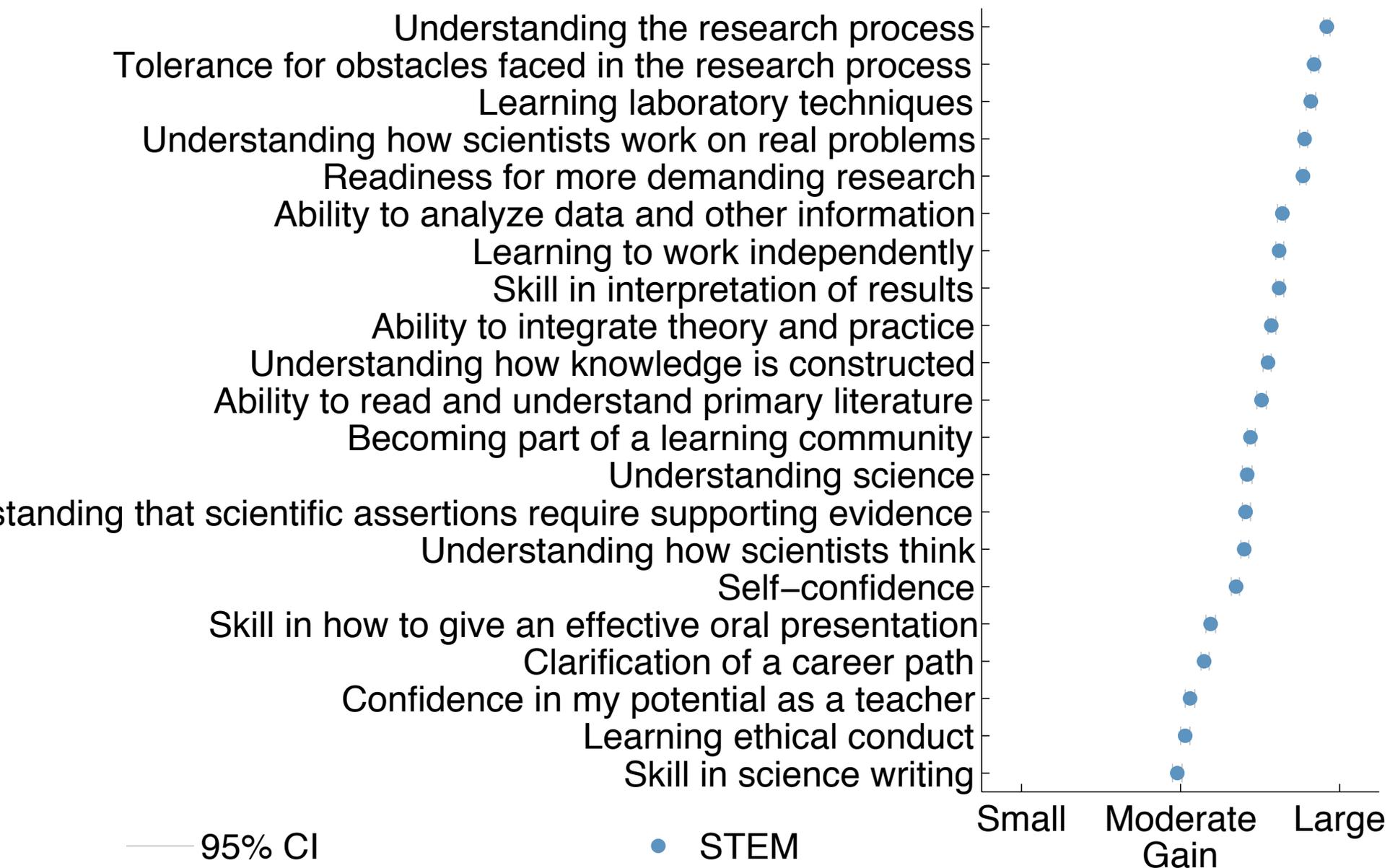
Comparison to expectations



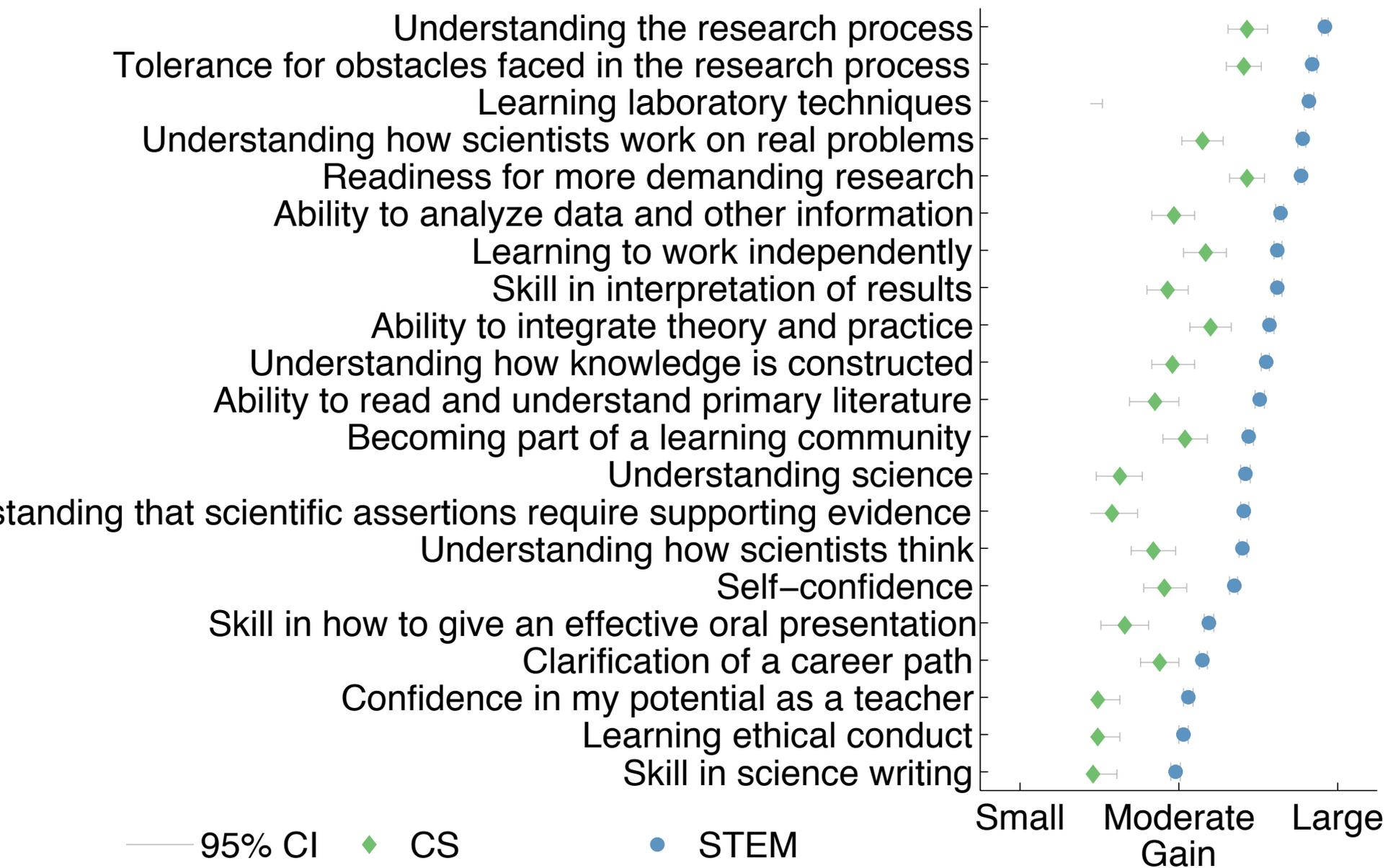
Graduate Education Plans

	CS	STEM
Interest before	62%	91%
Interest gained	29%	57%
Interest lost	2.2%	1.1%

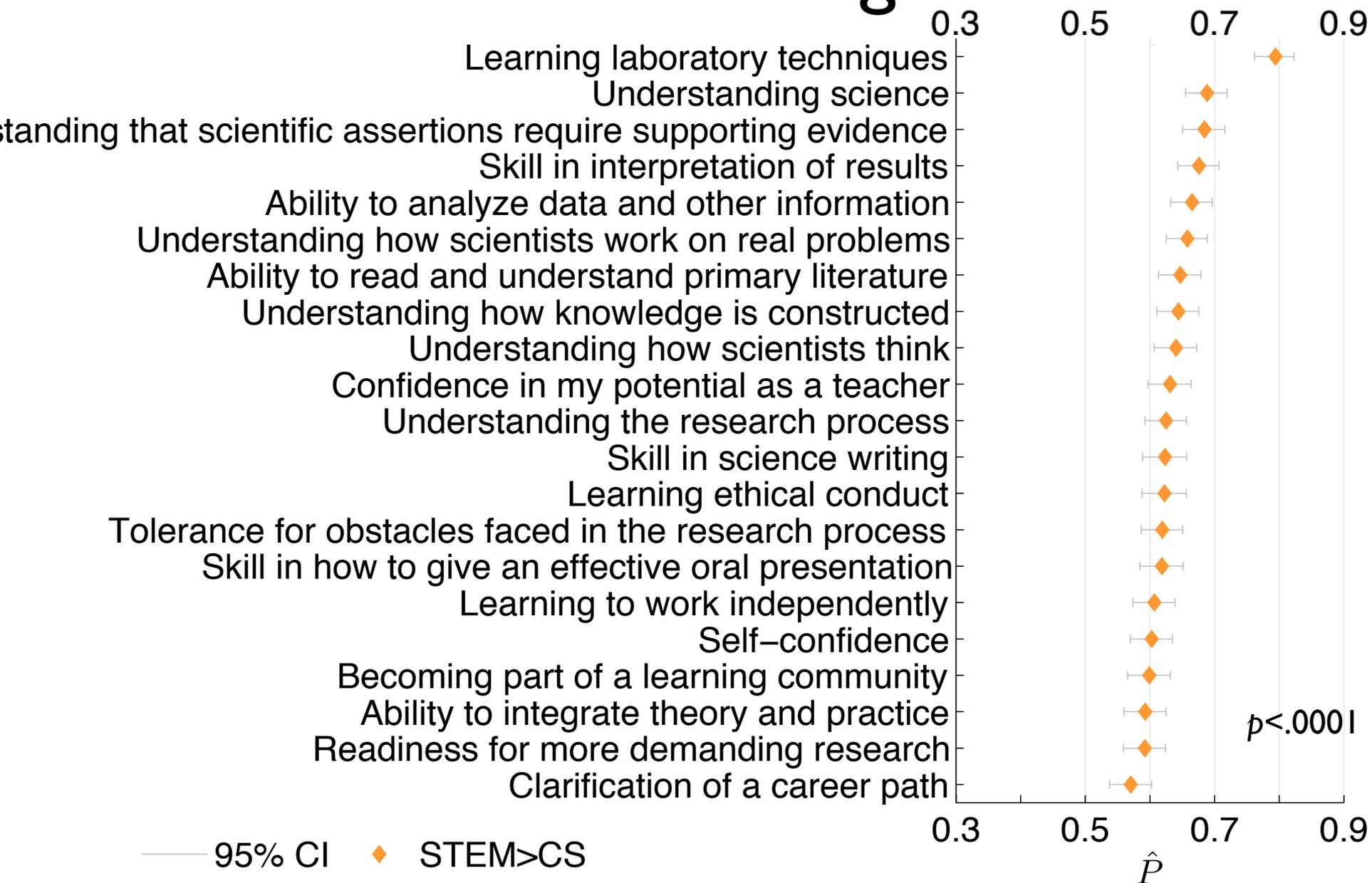
Benefits / Learning Gains



Benefits / Learning Gains



Benefits / Learning Gains



Our Approach

- Integrate methods, experience
 - Situated learning
 - Legitimate peripheral participation [Ben-Ari '04]
- Context
 - Full time, 10 weeks, summer
 - Stipend, four credits (one class)
- Emphasize empirical philosophy alongside research mechanics

Curriculum

Wk.	Discussion	Writing	Wk.
1	Computing as science Reproducible research Selecting projects Scientific activities	Research description	2
2	Research literature	Assessment of current knowledge	4
3	Challenges of science		
4	Exploratory analysis	Data and behavioral exploration	5
5	Causality and inference Hypotheses and falsifiability	Research proposal	6
6	Experiments	Experimental design	7
		Experimental results	9
		Final report	11

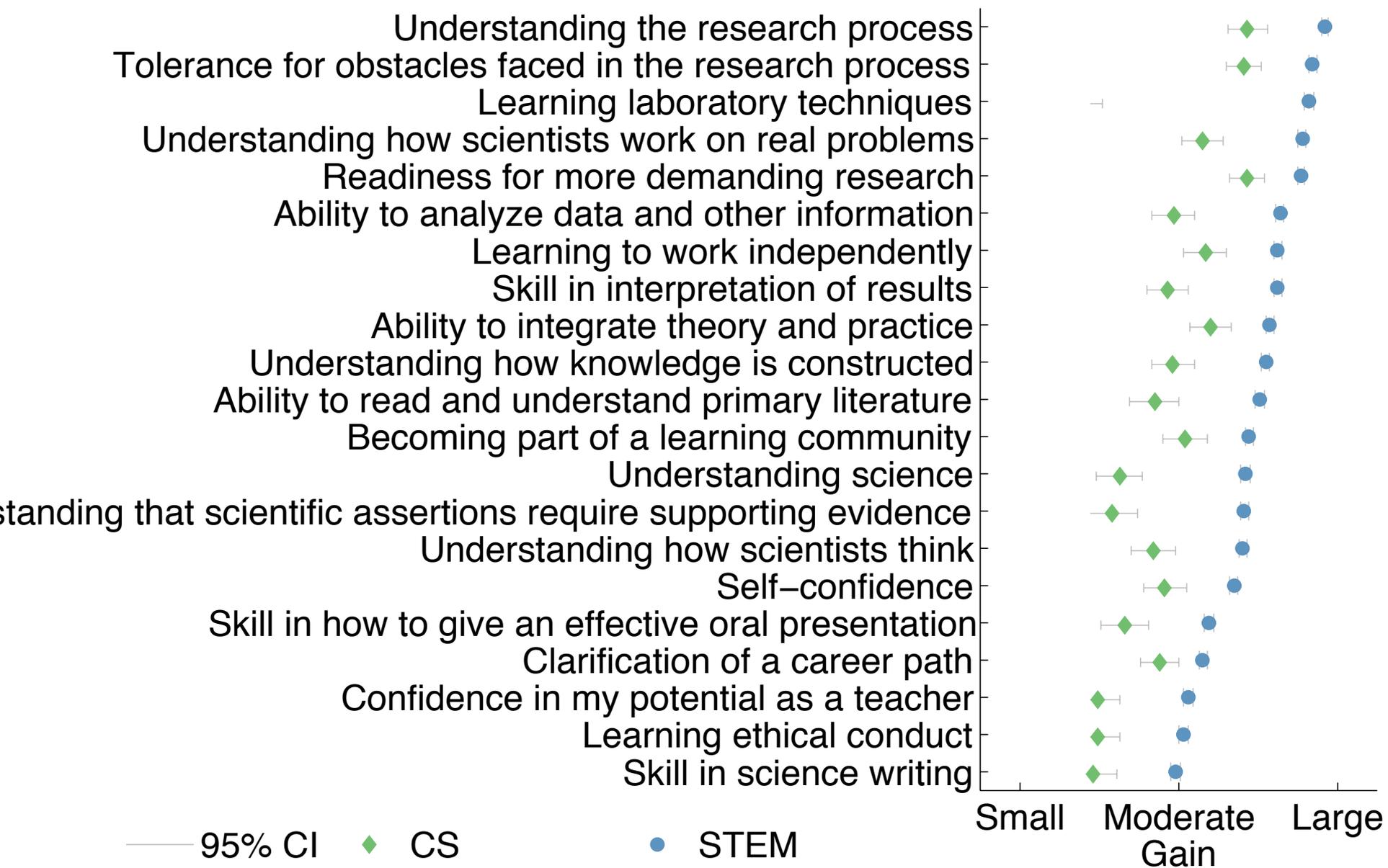
Initial questions for ‘strong inference’

- **Ontology** — What is the task, system, and environment? What are the relevant entities, relations, and variables?
- **Behavior** — What sort of behaviors does the system exhibit when performing these tasks in these environments?
- **Theory** — What general theoretical frameworks exist now to predict, explain, and control this behavior?
- **Hypotheses** — What hypotheses could you form based on those theories? What type of hypotheses are these? Can you push yourself higher on the ontological ladder?
- **Falsifiability** — How falsifiable are these hypotheses? How could they be sharpened to be more falsifiable?
- **Multiple hypotheses** — Can you devise additional hypotheses that address the same behavior?

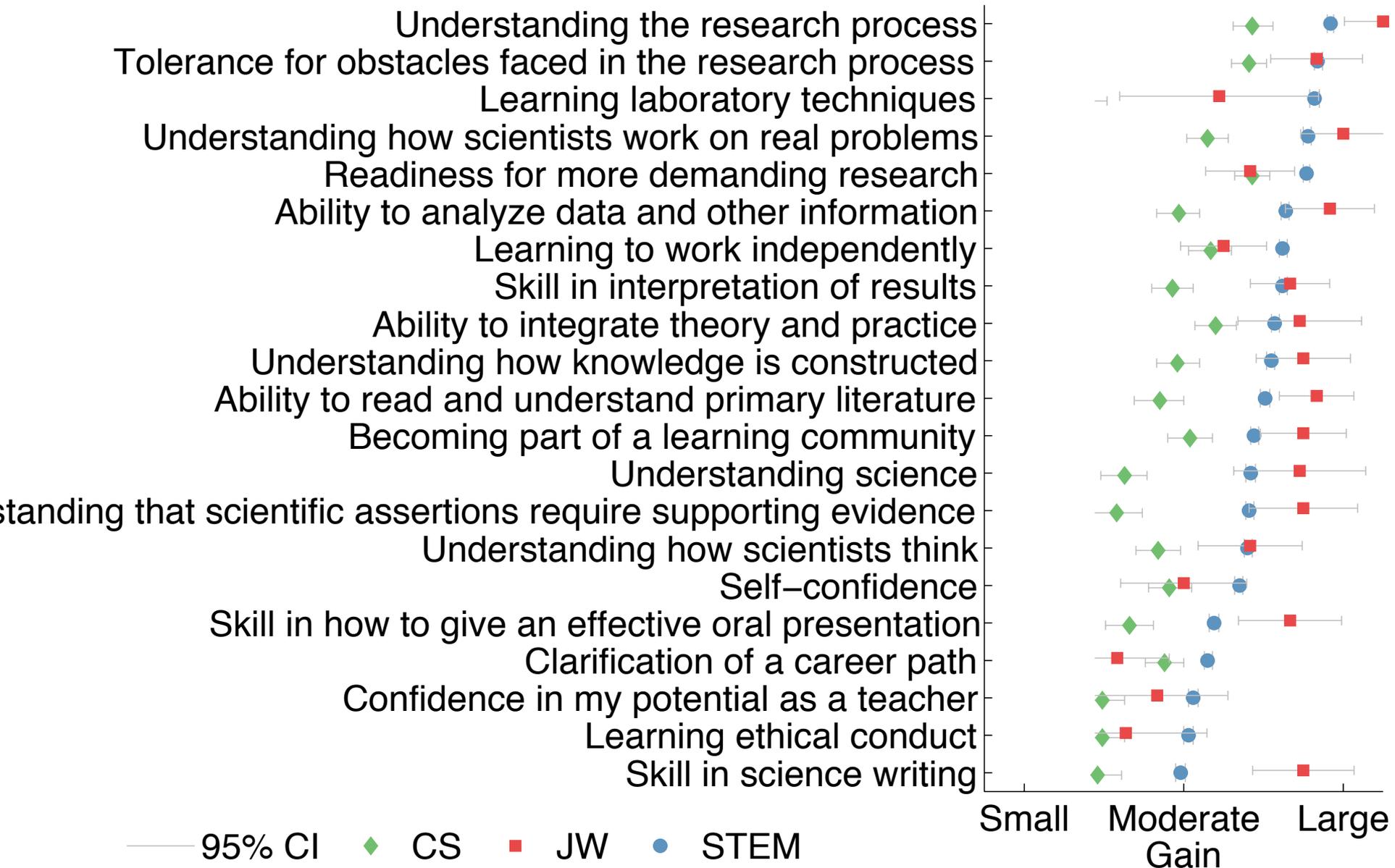
Regular Activities

- Daily email summary to group
- Monday milestones: team planning
- Weekly review: individual reflection
- Scholarly community: Weekly dept. presentation

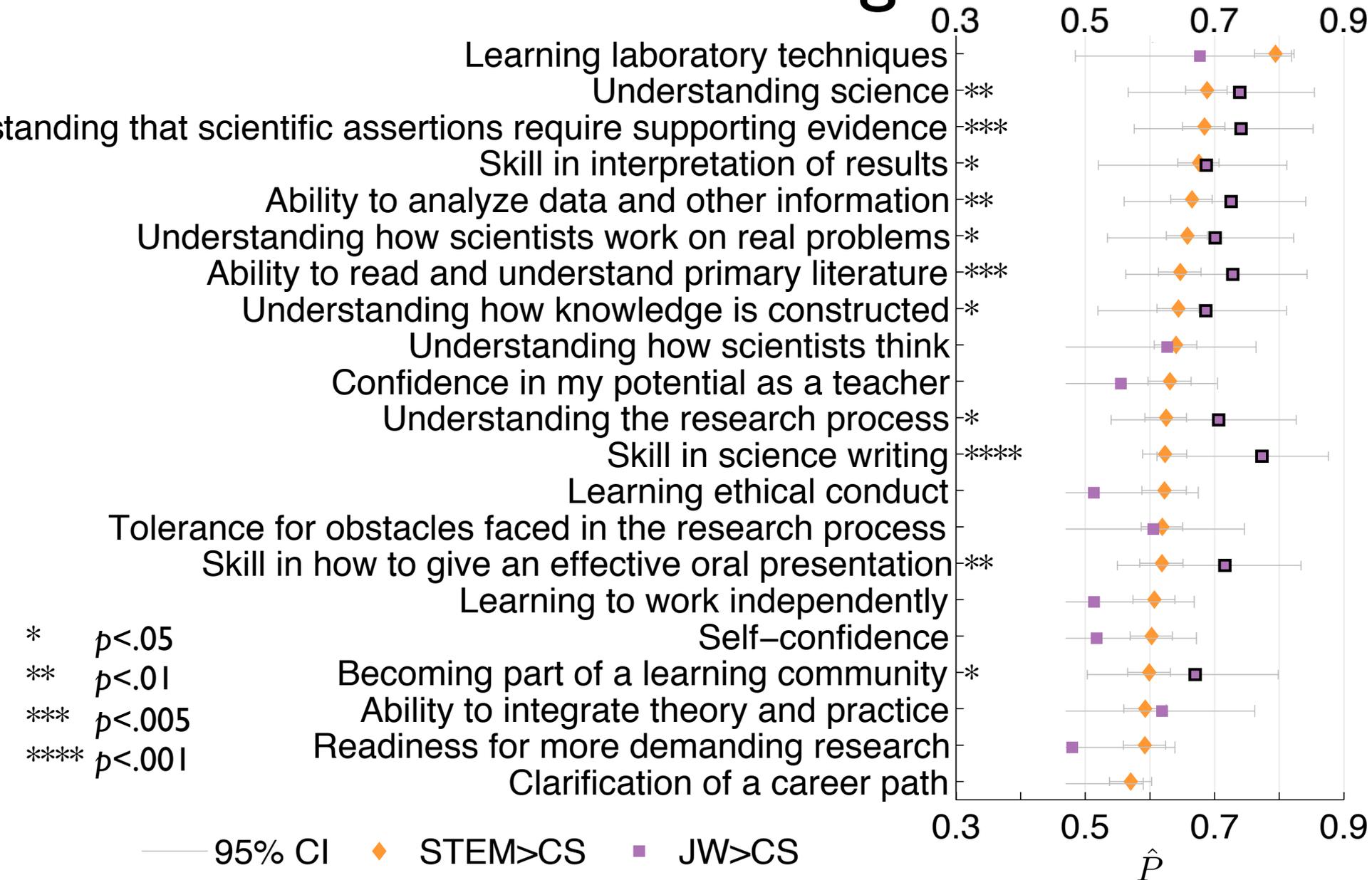
Benefits / Learning Gains



Benefits / Learning Gains



Benefits / Learning Gains



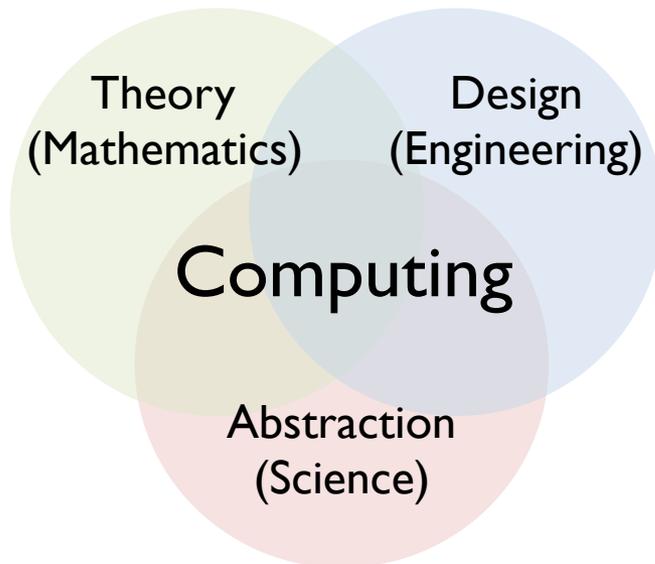
Triangulation

- Not mentor: No differences on SURE mentor question
- Not institution: SURE benefits over other CS REUs at Grinnell
- Several student co-authored publications
- Half pursued some graduate education

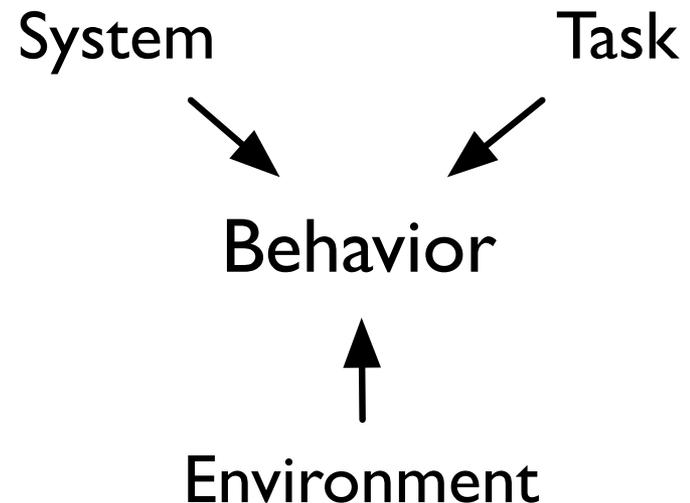
Conclusions

- CS students rate research experiences lower than STEM students
- Emphasizing computing as science may help narrow the gap

MIND THE GAP



[Denning et al.]



[Cohen]

