



Starting Small and Growing: The Profession of Research Administration and Graduate Higher Education Opportunities

By Thomas J. Roberts, Daniel Compo, and Jennifer Shambrook

Prior to World War II, extensive scientific research at colleges and universities was minimal with the exception of agriculture related research initiatives that were funded by the federal government and managed by individual scientists (Beasley, 2000). As World War II became imminent, university and industrial scientists were organized to apply their scientific and engineering expertise to the war effort. In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Dr. Vannevar Bush as director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD). Bush was a distinguished scientist who is credited with laying the groundwork for the establishment of the National Science Foundation. Bush argued that the federal government should significantly invest in science and ensure free rein of investigation by scientists into topics of their choice. These influential sentiments were paramount to the expansion of research and development activities at colleges and universities throughout the United States.

After World War II research activities at colleges and universities began to steadily increase. External support for research in higher education institutions grew exponentially during the 1950's and 1960's (Spriesterbach, 1975). As a result, colleges and universities were forced to pay more attention to the development of mechanisms for identifying funding sources, developing and submitting proposals, receiving awards, monitoring expenditures, and submitting reports to various sponsoring agencies. In 1959 a small group of university administrators recognized that it was time to look beyond business and fiscal matters and into the broader aspects of research administration (Wile, 1983). According to Wile, the first official meeting of the National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) was held on January 26, 1960 at the University of Chicago with forty-five (45) persons attending representing forty (40) institutions from across the country. As a result of this meeting, the formal creation of NCURA can be associated with the birth and formalization of the profession of research administration.

Fast forward to 2015 where the professional field of research administration is comprised of thousands of people representing the majority of higher education institutions around the world. While the profession began with very few research administrators, it has grown to encompass thousands of people with constantly changing, increased, and varied responsibilities. As a result, professional organizations and institutions have created a number of different training and educational programs focused on serving the research administrator. In the Roberts (2005) study research administrators overwhelmingly reported positive or extremely positive experiences with professional development

opportunities offered through NCURA and the Society of Research Administrators International (SRAI). Such opportunities have grown with the expanding professional field and have been responsive to the constantly changing environment, regulatory requirements, technological advancements, demand, and need.

In 1993, and in conjunction with the SRAI, the Research Administrators Certification Council (RACC) was formed and still exists today. The primary purpose of RACC is to certify that an individual through experience and testing has the fundamental knowledge to be a professional research or sponsored programs administrator (Research Administrators Certification Council, 2015). Between 1993 and 2005 five-hundred and one (501) research administrators achieved certification with a seventy-one percent (71%) pass rate (Roberts, 2005). Since 2005, RACC created two additional forms of certification focusing specifically on pre-award and financial matters. All included, there are currently 2,407 active RACC certifications in some form (Research Administrators Certification Council, 2015).

Some postsecondary institutions had the foresight to recognize the need to establish formal certificate and/or Master level degree programs to serve those employed in the professional field of research administration. In 2005 Cleveland State University initiated a Master's Certificate program in research administration with the help of a grant award from the SRAI, and in 2007 the Medical University of South Carolina initiated a Master of Science in Research Administration program. Both programs were short lived due to low enrollments, logistical confinements, and bureaucratic barriers. Establishing formal certificate and/or degree programs at institutions of higher education is often time consuming. Accomplishing implementation of new graduate degree programs can be especially difficult due to detailed justification requirements, significant research and analysis, approval requirements at various levels, and scrutiny throughout the process. Smith & Torres (2011) detail the process for the University of Central Florida in establishing a new Master of Research Administration degree program.

In 2008, the NCURA issued a call for proposals for *Planning Grants for a Master's Degree in Research Administration*. In response to technological advancements, and since the profession comprises primarily working adults located all over the world, there was a requirement for any

proposed program to be offered in a complete virtual format. The planning grant call for proposals was followed in the fall of 2009 with a call for *Implementation Grants for a Master's Degree in University Research Administration*. NCURA ultimately made one award of \$45,000 to the University of Central Florida.

As demand for Master level degree programs in research administration grew, so too have the number of programs being offered by institutions of higher education. Some programs existed prior to the NCURA call for

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proposals and continue to exist today. If you have an interest in advancing your education through earning a Master level degree at an institution of higher education, the tables below provide basic information about each program as a starting point for exploration.

Currently, seven postsecondary institutions in the United States offer Master level degree programs in research administration. Five of the programs are focused on the broad aspects of research administration (Table 1), and two of the programs have a specific clinical focus (Table 2). All of the degree programs require approximately thirty-six (36) credit hours or the equivalent of forty-six (46) quarter credit hours.

In collecting the data presented in the tables below, each institution was contacted in the early months of calendar year 2015 and again in November 2015. The primary purpose for contacting each of the listed institutions was to confirm that the data collected is accurate, the basic elements of

Table 1: Postsecondary Institutions Offering Master Level Degree Programs (Broad Focus)

| Institution & year program established | Contact Information | Delivery Mode | Estimated Cost to complete | Students Enrolled | Students Graduated |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Emmanuel College (Not reported) | Jeff Seo seoje@emmanuel.edu | Face-to-face & on-line | \$24,112 | Not reported | Not reported |
| University of Central Florida (Fall 2011) | Dr. Jo Ann Smith Jo.Smith@ucf.edu 407-823-3945 | On-line | \$25,775 | 64 | 46 |
| Central Michigan University (Fall 2011) | Denise Schafer Schafer1dr@cmich.edu | Face-to-face & on-line | \$18,360 | Not reported | Not reported |
| Rush University (Fall 2012) | Dr. Bill Hendy Chs_admissions@rush.edu 312-942-7120 | On-line | \$27,232 | 34 | 16 |
| Johns Hopkins University (Summer 2014) | Dr. Marianne Woods Mwoods9@jhu.edu 202-663-5987 | On-line | \$41,544 | 73 | None to date |

Table 2: Postsecondary Institutions Offering Master Level Degree Programs (Clinical Focus)

| Institution & year program established | Contact Information | Delivery Mode | Estimated Cost to complete | Students Enrolled | Students Graduated |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Walden University (Fall 2007) | Margaret Ann Skelton Margaret.skelton@waldenu.edu | On-line | \$28,215 | Not reported | Not reported |
| George Washington University (Not reported) | Max Matthews mjmatthews@gwu.edu | On-line | \$19,872 | Not reported | Not reported |

each program, and to provide general information for interested individuals to begin their own review and assessment of each program. There is no endorsement or institutional preference toward any institution listed. The order in which institutions are listed is based solely on what is believed to be the program initiation date for each currently existing program in reverse chronological order. It should be noted that each institution listed is different in terms of Carnegie Classification and/or specific academic area in which the Master level research administration degree program is offered. Interested individuals are strongly encouraged to engage in their own research to determine admission requirements, regional institutional accreditation, specific program details, and the overall best fit for them.

The contact information presented is the most current available found by the authors. Delivery mode represents the way in which the degree program is offered by an institution (Face-to-face and/or on-line only). The estimated cost to complete the degree is based on the current advertised tuition cost per credit hour and/or quarter hour at the particular institution. The estimated costs reported are believed to be an accurate estimate of the actual cost to complete the entire degree program as of November 2015. Tuition costs often change, and interested individuals are strongly encouraged to conduct their own research to determine the actual current cost at a particular institution. Finally, the number of students enrolled and number of students graduated represents what has been reported to the authors by institutional contacts.

In summary, the intent of this reporting is to provide a starting point for interested individuals to engage in their own research pertaining to Master level research administration degree programs offered. A simple internet search using the name of the institution coupled with “master degree in

research administration” will reveal more details in regard to each program.

In conclusion, the professional field of research administration began small, but has evolved into an extremely important and large group of dedicated individuals, professional organizations, and institutions worldwide. The 2015 Demographic Profile of a Research Administrator (Shambrook, 2015) indicates that more research administrators possess a Master level degree than a Bachelor’s as their highest degree earned. In order to compete for the best jobs in the future, current trends indicate that it may be beneficial to possess at least a Master level degree. The growth of the profession has led to the creation of graduate level degree programs focusing specifically on research administration. There are currently seven such Master level degree programs offered in the United States. As the profession continues to grow, it may be in the best interest of many to engage in their own research and explore the many educational opportunities available. ■

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Dr. Roberts has twenty-eight (28) years of experience in higher education and has served various types of institutions including comprehensive, doctoral granting, medical school, and major research university environments. He authored the first doctoral dissertation focusing specifically on the field of research administration, published numerous peer reviewed manuscripts, and has given dozens of conference and other invited presentations. Dr. Roberts may be contacted at troberts@fgcu.edu



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