Florida Research Administration Conference Hosted at UCF Draws More than 1,800 Attendees

ORLANDO, Jan. 28, 2022 – UCF hosted more than 1,800 research administrators this week during the annual Florida Research Administration Conference.

The conference, aimed at sharing good practices and giving research administrators the latest skills and information on trends that impact the industry, drew participants from 47 states and D.C., the U.S. Virgin Islands, Canada, Ghana, Guam, India, Israel, Japan, Nigeria, Portugal, Qatar, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.K. The conference usually occurs in person at UCF, but out of an abundance of caution concerning COVID, the week-long event was held virtually this year.

From Jan. 24 to 28, 62 plenary and concurrent session speakers from around the nation, India, Portugal, and the U.K. (representing 25 institutions and organizations) presented talks. Topics ranged from pre-awards and master agreements with industry to compliance, cybersecurity, and research law. Six hours of professional development were offered each day. Sessions were led by nationally recognized thought leaders in research administration, including the incoming President of the Society of Research Administrators International, Gloria Greene, an assistant vice president at the University of Alabama at Huntsville.

UCF is a recognized leader in research administration, having one of the first Master’s in Research Administration programs in the nation.

“It was our biggest event yet,” says Jennifer Shambrook, the director of sponsored research at UCF, FRAC founder and lead organizer. She began organizing FRAC in 2014 in an effort to bring professional development to research administrators who are unable to attend the larger, professional society events. “It takes a lot of effort, collaboration and support and I want to thank everyone who helped put on this year’s event. Without the volunteer efforts of the speakers here, from across the country and around the world, this conference would not have been possible.”

When funding for travel in 2014 was tight, Shambrook began planning a free program. She reached out to other state university systems for collaboration and over the years the program has grown. Similar conferences cost about $700 per person to attend, she says.

In current economic times, many institutions do not have financial resources available for their research administration staff to attend conferences. FRAC is possible because all speakers donate their time and UCF staff contributed their time over and above their normal duties. The program was offered free over Zoom as public service to the research community.

Research administrators are the folks who work with investigators to get grants and contracts prepared and submitted to public and private sponsoring agencies and then set them up and manage them, once they are awarded. It’s a huge job that includes multiple functions from reviewing proposals to ensure they meet the agencies requirements to verifying budgets, reviewing human resources criteria, identifying intellectual property concerns, ensuring infrastructure is in place for the work to be done and reviewing to make sure the sponsored award is conducted in a way that aligns with local, state, and federal regulations.

“I don’t think people realize how complicated the process is,” says Shambrook, who’s worked in research administration for the past 35 years. She was recognized with the 2021 Herbert Chermside
Award from the Society of Research Administrators International, the most prestigious award in the research administration world. “So much has changed. Research administrators play a key role in the ability for our faculty to conduct research and make an impact on the world.”

This was the 8th Annual FRAC conference.

“There’s real value in sharing best practices and collaborating with others about how to address new challenges,” says Elizabeth Klonoff, Vice President for Research at UCF. “The fact that our research administrators put this on year after year and draw so many people demonstrate we have among the best in the nation. The well-respected expertise is critical to the research enterprise at UCF.”