

# Towards an International

## Certification in Research Administration

By Jeff Ritchie

By now, the inherent value in obtaining certification in research administration should be well known, but it's always useful to revisit the benefits, both for employers and for recipients.

For those who obtain certification, whether it's the Certified Research Administrator (CRA), the Certified Pre-Award Research Administrator (CPRA), or the Certified Financial Research Administrator (CFRA), they have set themselves apart from the rest of the profession. This is particularly important for those who are seeking advancement at their current institution or who are changing institutions. It's a credential, along with a Master's Degree in Research Administration, which stands out on one's resume.

For hiring managers, an employee with a professional certification is an employee who has demonstrated not only a mastery of the Body of Knowledge, but also (and possibly just as important) a commitment to staying in the field of research administration. People who take the time and effort to obtain certification are demonstrating dedication to their own professional development. Particularly when hiring from outside the institution, where the applicant may be otherwise unknown to the hiring manager, certification indicates a baseline level of professionalism.

But the world of research administration is changing. The world as whole is getting a lot smaller, and it's doing so at an astonishing pace. As few as ten years ago, most research administrators in the US could only wonder with regard to research taking place overseas, but today NCURA has an International Region with representatives from 38 countries. Videoconferencing and cloud storage have made working with a foreign institution nearly as easy as collaborating with an institution in a neighboring state.

A belated welcome to the 21st century!

As these international collaborations have grown

more commonplace, a question that I receive more and more frequently is, "Will the Research Administrator's Certification Council ever offer an international version of the Certified Research Administrator exam?" The answer to that question is the same as the answer to every question in the world of research administration: *It depends.*

Before we can create an exam, there are some logistical issues that would need to be addressed and resolved.

“...certification indicates a baseline level of professionalism.”

The first issue is to determine the audience, the format, and the content of the exam. Should it be an exam for US-based personnel who are collaborating with non-US institutions? Or should it be for non-US personnel who are collaborating with US-based institutions? Those two exams would look vastly different. Or might the exam be a hybrid of sorts, one that covers both US and non-US statutes and regulations, with some areas of common international interest, such as intellectual property and human subjects?

Just to further complicate matters, it should go without saying that “non-US based institutions” is a term that covers an extraordinarily large area. Not to belabor the obvious, but it covers the entire planet with the exception of certain parts of North America. How does one accurately incorporate

the research issues relevant to the European Union, the United Kingdom, the Pacific and Far East, Central and South America, the Middle East and Africa, and Eastern Europe all in a single test?

The answer might be that it won't be a single test; there might be multiple exams that reflect the research issues in different global regions. That approach, however, might prove to be administratively daunting. At RACC we know very well how time-consuming it is to maintain the quality of just three credentialing exams. While adding one additional exam is not a serious issue, adding three or four new exams (and updating their ever-changing technical content) does give one pause.

Where do we go from here? In the near-term, we will gather information, review best practices, and seek guidance from the collective wisdom of the profession. I'd like to take this opportunity to invite your opinions and encourage you to share it with RACC. Any thoughts that you have regarding an international certification exam would be helpful.

If you have feedback you'd like to provide us, you can share it by e-mailing us at [international@racc-cert.org](mailto:international@racc-cert.org). You can also post your thoughts on the NCURA's Global Collaborate Community.

Given the international nature of sponsored research administration both now and in the future, it would seem that a Certified Research Administrator-International (CRA-I) exam would be inevitable. But I should also point out that, geologically speaking, the Grand Canyon was also inevitable – albeit 17 million years in the making!

I certainly hope that it won't take quite that long to resolve these issues and create an international exam. That being said, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. I urge you to contact us at [international@racc-cert.org](mailto:international@racc-cert.org) to share your thoughts. When we have something to report, we'll post it on our website and Facebook page to keep you all informed. ■



Jeffrey Ritchie, CRA, CFRA, is the Director of Sponsored Programs at Lewis University. He has been a member of the Research Administrators Certification Council (RACC) since 2009 and is currently the Board Chair. He can be reached at [ritchije@lewisu.edu](mailto:ritchije@lewisu.edu)