

Alumni Spotlight: April Heyward, '13

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April Heyward isn't just an alumna of the research administration program — she's also an integral part of its history. Heyward was one of the first students who graduated from the program in 2013. Now, she's using her experience to shape the program's future as a member of the research administration advisory board. In honor of National Research Administrator Day, Heyward shared her thoughts on her career, her education, and her time spent at UCF.



Tell us about the EPSCoR/IDeA program and your duties as the program manager.

The Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research is a science-driven, state-based National Science Foundation program. South Carolina has been an EPSCoR state since 1980. As the program manager of the EPSCoR Program in South Carolina, I strive to increase research capabilities, research competitiveness, and the STEM workforce pipeline in South Carolina. I achieve the aforementioned goals by working with the K-12 sector, technical and community colleges, predominately undergraduate institutions, historically black colleges and universities, comprehensive research universities, research institutes, and small businesses in South Carolina. My aim is to engage and expose K-12 students to STEM so they become STEM majors.

What do you love most about your job?

What I love most about my work is the variety in my work. I work with so many different stakeholders across South Carolina. Each stakeholder has different needs and I work to provide resources to meet their needs. For example, a predominately undergraduate institution has different needs than a comprehensive research university. How can I meet faculty at predominantly undergraduate institutions where they are? If they are not able to be research productive during the academic year, then I need to develop a funding program to build research capacity and productivity during the summer when there is more time.

What interested you in pursuing a graduate degree in research administration?

Professional development is very important to me. It is my personal belief that an individual's career is the responsibility of the individual. My career is my responsibility. Where I go in my career is up to me. I was looking at next steps in my educational endeavors as I was approaching a ceiling in my career when I worked in higher education.

Creating my own opportunity was the option I chose. I considered the Master in Business Administration, the Master in Public Administration and the Master in Public Policy degrees. Although these are great programs, it was not the answer for me at that time. My Master of Research Administration allowed me to leave higher education and be promoted two levels up in the state government system upon graduation. Sometimes in order to move up in your career, you have to move out. I have done this twice and so far it is working for me. I am grateful for each career opportunity that I have had as each opportunity is another step in my career journey.

Why did you choose to attend UCF? What does the MRA program have to offer that others don't?

Pursing the MRA at UCF was one of the best life decisions I made. I discovered the MRA program at the 2010 National Council of University Research Administrators Annual Meeting. I submitted my application and received my acceptance letter days before my birthday in 2011.

The program offers a generalist approach vs a specialist approach. Another factor that contributed to moving up in my career was the decision to move from being a specialist to a generalist. The generalist career track provided the most flexibility and options to advance in my career. Generalists have a knowledge base of a wide range of subjects. Specialists are experts in a specific subject. There are times when a specialist has to become a generalist for career advancement. Making the decision to become a generalist allowed me to be promoted twice in my career since graduate school. It also allowed me to turn the career ceiling in to a career floor.

What is your favorite memory of UCF?

This is very difficult to answer. I always love being on campus and being involved with the College of Health and Public Affairs and the School of Public Administration. I spoke at the 2017 Florida Research Administration Conference in January 2017. I loved meeting and interacting with MRA students. In my presentation, I talked about my journey through graduate school. The feedback that I received from the students who are now graduates of the MRA program was that it encouraged them to finish their MRA journey.

What advice would you share with current students in the MRA program?

My advice for current and future MRA students is that you are the CEO of your career and where you go in your career is completely up to you. Your career interests may change and expand. My career interests have expanded and there are positions that I am interested in pursuing that require a Ph.D. I am planning to return to graduate school for my Doctor of Public Administration in the near future.

By Marisa Ramiccio
