

Research Certification Prep Study Groups: Encouraging Professional Certification for CRO Staff

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1. Background

As part of professional development expectations, all University of Florida Health Cancer Center (UFHCC) Clinical Research Office (CRO) staff are required to attain ACRP and/or SOCRA certification within two years of eligibility. In 2022, the UFHCC CRO implemented Research Certification Test Preparatory (RCP) sessions for eligible staff. These sessions offer opportunities to explore exam options, identify study resources, and discuss professional goals. These sessions are also open to other interested UF staff.

2. Goals

- Increase first-time pass rate of CRO staff taking a clinical professional certification exam
- Increase staff knowledge of certification opportunities, providing resources and tips
- Connect eligible staff for co-mentoring and professional networking

3. Solutions and Methods

UFHCC RCP sessions are offered biannually in early spring and fall to coincide with testing windows. Sessions meet weekly for 1 hour over 4 weeks. CRO staff are invited based upon their eligibility status. Other UF research community members may attend.

Sessions begin with an overview of professional certification options and how to determine which certification best fits employee goals. Curriculum includes:

- Session 1: Introductions, meet others with similar professional goals
- Session 2: Studying strategies and creating a study plan while working full-time
- Sessions 3 and 4: Sourcing available resources for studying and practice questions
- Recently certified guest speakers (SOCRA or ACRP) attend meetings to discuss studying methods and useful resources

A Canvas (Learning Management System [LMS]) course was created. Six online practice quizzes based on exam topics were created. These quizzes offer test-taking in the same modality as the actual exam. Tips are provided for successful practice-exam setups to de-stress test-takers inexperienced with online exams. These practice quizzes were reviewed during the live sessions.

4. Outcomes

In 2022, 12 eligible staff members were identified, and four others requested to join. Fourteen attended at least one of the sessions. Seven enrolled in the online course, with 2 completing all offered quizzes and 2 completing 0 quizzes. The others completed 1-2 quizzes each. Of the 14 attendees, 3 UFHCC staff members took a certification exam, and 100 percent passed.

Attendees received a poll after the sessions (27 percent response rate) to gather information about their experience with the RCP. Seventy-five percent of respondents attended the fall session, and 25 percent attended both. Fifty percent of the respondents attended all 4 sessions, 25 percent attended 3 sessions, and 25 percent attended 1.

Attendee feedback suggested offering sessions at different dates/times and to “advertise” by including endorsements from previous attendees in the invitations. While manager support for these sessions was evident in the invitation stage, it was suggested that supervisors advocate for participation.

Reasons for not taking the exam included feeling unprepared or no time to study. Sixty-seven percent of respondents indicated that sharing study tips was most helpful while 33 percent felt access to practice questions was most beneficial.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Based on feedback, future RCP sessions will focus on time management tips to prepare for the certification examination along with supervisor encouragement for participation. Program feedback will be solicited following each session to improve completion compliance.