

University of Colorado Colorado Springs  
Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Integrity  
Academic Year 2025-2026 Responsible Conduct of Research(RCR) Mini-Conference

**Responsible Conduct of Research**  
**AY 2024-2025 Responsible Conduct of Research Mini-Conference Evaluative Report**  
**August 18, 2025**

**Background**

UCCS Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) programming is housed within the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Integrity (OSPRI), an office dedicated to the promotion of ethical research practices through education and oversight. RCR training at UCCS aligns with federal requirements from funding agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) and is designed to support research integrity and compliance across all research disciplines by imparting knowledge and skills training across the nine “bucket” areas that comprise RCR. These buckets, which are commonly emphasized in federally funded research training programs, are essential for fostering ethical research practice and include:

- **Conflict of Interest/Commitment:** Pertains to personal, financial, or professional interests that interfere or appear to interfere with objective research.
- **Research Misconduct:** Concerned with issues such as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and non-compliance with research standards.
- **Publication/Authorship/Peer Review:** Addresses ethical practices in publishing and reviewing to ensure credit is given appropriately and quality is maintained.
- **Social Impacts of Research:** Emphasizes the ethical obligation to ensure research benefits society and upholds integrity, responsibility, and transparency.
- **Safe Research Environments:** Promotes harassment-free, inclusive settings, protecting individuals from discrimination and supporting ethical practice.
- **Mentorship:** Focuses on clear, mutually agreed roles in mentor-mentee relationships, with attention to standards, time, and responsibilities.
- **Collaboration:** Highlights ethical conduct and communication in joint research efforts across disciplines and institutions.
- **Data Sharing and Management:** Covers best practices and regulations for managing and sharing research data responsibly, including open data requirements.
- **Human Subjects and Animal Welfare:** Stresses ethical, legal, and regulatory considerations for protecting human and animal research subjects, centered on principles like respect, beneficence, and justice.

## Responsible Conduct of Research at UCCS

Beginning in Academic Year 2022–2023, the UCCS OSPRI began providing its annual RCR training content in the context of an annual half-day program held at the start of the fall semester. The annual RCR “mini-conference” traditionally features four rotating educational sessions that participants attend throughout a half-day gathering. Each educational session centers a specific bucket, with many sessions addressing multiple buckets. The goal each year is to provide meaningful learning across the RCR buckets, thus enhancing participants’ knowledge of ethical issues in the conduct of research and preparedness for engagement in responsible scholarship. This report summarizes findings from the 2025-2026 annual RCR mini-conference, which took place on August 18, 2025. A UCCS faculty fellow oversees RCR programming each year. The RCR faculty fellow organizing the AY 2025-2026 mini-conference was Dr. Shannon Johnson of the College of Public Service, Social Work Department.

### The 2025 RCR Mini-Conference

#### Sessions and Presenters

All UCCS faculty on NSF and HIH sponsored grants were invited individually to attend the AY 2025-2025 RCR mini-conference, along with the UCCS students engaged in research projects with these faculty. The conference was also advertised on the Faculty/Staff list service, graduate student list service, and RCR webpage. There were ultimately 43 participants at the conference’s, as gauged by completion of the pre- and post-test surveys.

The AY 2025-2026 RCR conference featured four workshop sessions, each lasting 45 minutes. Respondents were divided into four groups at the start of the conference, and presenters then rotated through the small groups so that each group ultimately attended all four workshops. The sessions strategically targeted the RCR bucket areas in order to impart comprehensive knowledge or RCR across the UCCS community. The four sessions delivered are listed below along with the presenters for each.

- **Mentoring Matters: Navigating Research Mentoring Expectations**
  - Jennifer Poe, MA; Director of the Center for Student Research; Lecturer, UCCS Psychology Department
- **To AI or Not to AI: Using AI Tools in Research**
  - Jessica Kirby, PhD, Associate Professor, UCCS Health Sciences
  - Joshua Garland, PhD, Associate Research Professor, Arizona State University

- **Avoiding Predatory Publishers**
  - Norah Mazel; Director of Learning, Research, and Engagement; UCCS Kraemer Family Library; Assistant Professor
- **Beyond Protocol: Cultivating Care, Trust, and Safety in Research Practice**
  - Shannon Johnson, PhD, LCSW, MPP; Associate Professor, UCCS College of Public Service; Social Work Department Chair)

## Participants

43 participants completed the pre-survey for the AY 2025-2026 mini conference on August 18, 2025. Roughly 90% of participants were UCCS students (90.7%, n=39), with 72.1% (n=31) identifying as undergraduate students and 18.6% (n=8) as graduate students. The remained 9.3% percent of participants were UCCS faculty [7.0% tenure-track (n=3) and 2.3% (n=1) non-tenure track].

Nearly two-thirds of the sample (65.2%; n=28) reported no to minimal previous training focused on RCR search topics, while 30.2% (n=13) reported a moderate degree of previous training, and 4.7% (n=2) reported a substantial amount of previous training. When asked about participation at a past UCCS RCR training, 0 participants reported any previous involvement in RCR programming.

## Descriptive Findings

A pre-test/post-test approach was used to assess participants' interest in RCR topics, knowledge about RCR issues, and comfort-level with session topics both before and after the conference. The pre-test/post-test approach allowed for comparison of changes in participants' interest, knowledge, and comfort levels based on participation in the conference.

### *Pre-Conference Assessment*

Responses were measured on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 to 5. 43 participants completed the survey items, with minimal missing data. There was a relatively high overall interest in conference topics prior to the event, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.21 (SD = .861) on an item assessing participants' interest in RCR topics prior to the first session ( 1: not interested, 5: passionate). However, mean self-rated knowledge across specific RCR domains tended to be in the low-to-moderate range, with a mean score of 2.05 (SD=0.95; 1: not at all knowledgeable, 5: extremely knowledgeable) on an item assessing participants' overall knowledge of the nine RCR budgets. 74.4% (n=32) of participants characterized themselves as not at all or only slightly knowledgeable about the nine bucket areas at the start of the day.

While self-rated knowledge was variable within the individual buckets prior to the day's event, mean scores well between a score of 2 and 3 in all cases (2: slightly knowledgeable, 3: moderately knowledgeable). Table 1 summarizes descriptive statistics for a series of questions that asked participants to self-rate their knowledge pertaining to each of the RCR buckets. The mean of averages across items was 2.51.

**Table 1. Knowledge of RCR Buckets at Pre-Test**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Publication, authorship, and peer review	43	2.21	1.08
Collaboration	43	2.3	1.15
Data sharing and management	43	2.44	1.14
Human subjects and animal welfare	43	2.51	1.06
Mentorship	43	2.51	1.22
Conflicts of interest/commitment	43	2.56	1.03
Safe research environments	43	2.63	1.11
Social impacts of research	43	2.63	1.05
Research misconduct	43	2.84	1.13

The lowest mean for pre-conference knowledge was lowest in the publication, authorship, peer review (M=2.21, SD=1.08) and the collaboration (M=2.3, SD=1.15) buckets, with more than 60% of participants reporting little to no pre-existing knowledge in each of these respective buckets at the start of the day. In contrast, knowledge at the start of the conference were highest in the research misconduct bucket (M=2.84, SD=1.13). Only 39.5%

(n=17) reported little to no pre-existing knowledge in this bucket at the start of the day, with 25.6% (n=11) characterizing themselves as very or extremely knowledgeable in this area.

At the start of the conference, participants were also asked four questions that assessed their level of comfort with tasks relevant to the four sessions provided at the conference (1: not at all comfortable; 5: very comfortable). Descriptive statistics for these questions are summarized in Table 2. Mean responses suggested a moderate degree of comfort pre-conference across the board, with average of means of 3.31.

**Table 2. Pre-Conference Comfort within the Primary Buckets of the RCR Conference Sessions**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Comfort navigating effective mentor–mentee relationships	42	3.48	1.065
Comfort using generative AI ethically in research and publication	43	3.07	1.261
Comfort assessing legitimacy of publishers and academic journals	43	3.33	1.063
Comfort identifying strategies to enhance safety of research environments and teams	43	3.37	1.024

### ***Changes from Pre- to Post-Conference***

A post-survey was administered at the end of the conference to assess for changes in participant’s reported sense of interest in, knowledge of, and comfort within the RCR buckets between pre- and post-test time points. Post-test assessment results suggest that participants developed a stronger interest in RCR topics on average over the course of the day, as evidenced by an increase of .6 points in the mean score on overall interest in conference topics from 3.21 (SD = .86) pre-conference to 3.81 (S.D. = .66) post-conference. Participants’ sense of overall knowledge of the nine RCR buckets also increased over the course of the day, rising from a mean score of 2.05 at the start of the conference (SD=0.95) to a mean score of 3.44 at the conference’s end (SD = .65; 1: not at all knowledgeable, 5: extremely knowledgeable).

Descriptive statistics for a series of questions assessing participants' knowledge pertaining to each of the individual RCR buckets are summarized in Table 3 for both the pre-conference and post-conference, to allow for easy comparison. The means of averages across the nine items increased by .83 points from 2.51 at the pre-test to 3.34 at the post-test (1: not at all knowledgeable; 5: very knowledgeable).

**Table 3. Self-Rated Knowledge within RCR Buckets: Changes from Pre- to Post-Conference**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Before Mean (SD)</b>	<b>After Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Change</b>
Mentorship	2.51 (1.222)	3.54 (0.803)	1.03
Publication/Authorship/ Peer review	2.21 (1.081)	3.49 (0.837)	1.28
Safe research environments	2.63 (1.113)	3.49 (0.932)	0.86
Human subjects and animal welfare	2.51 (1.058)	3.43 (0.987)	0.92
Research misconduct	2.84 (1.132)	3.39 (0.803)	0.55
Collaboration	2.30 (1.145)	3.38 (0.924)	1.08
Data sharing and management	2.44 (1.140)	3.11 (1.149)	0.67
Conflicts of interest/commitment	2.56 (1.031)	3.11 (1.022)	0.55
Social impacts of research	2.63 (1.047)	3.08 (1.010)	0.45

Findings also suggest an increase in knowledge with all of the individual RCR buckets, with the greatest increases in knowledge occurring in several of the buckets that were a primary target of the conference’s session (e.g., mentorship; publication, authorship, and peer review; and collaboration, all of which evidence an increase of greater than 1 full point between the pre-conference and post-conference time points.

At the end of the conference, participants were also asked the same four questions that were posed at the start of the conference to assess their level of comfort with tasks relevant to the primary buckets addressed by the four sessions at the conference. Descriptive statistics for these questions are summarized in Table 4 for both the pre-conference and post-conference time points to allow for easy comparison.

**Table 4. Degree of Comfort with Task within RCR Session Buckets: Changes from Pre- to Post-Conference**

Variable	Before Mean (SD)	After Mean (SD)	Change
Comfort navigating effective mentor–mentee relationships	3.48 (1.065)	4.36 (0.798)	+0.88
Comfort using generative AI ethically in research and publication	3.07 (1.261)	3.97 (1.028)	+0.90
Comfort assessing legitimacy of publishers and academic journals	3.33 (1.063)	4.14 (0.692)	+0.81
Comfort identifying strategies to enhance safety of research environments and teams	3.37 (1.024)	4.00 (0.840)	+0.63

There was an increase in the mean on all individual items across the board. Additionally, mean responses at the post-test suggest an increased degree of comfort post-conference across the board, with the average of means scores on these four items increasing by .81 points, from 3.31 to 4.12 (1: not at all comfortable; 5: very comfortable).

### ***Qualitative Feedback***

Participants reported valuing the interactive learning experience and group discussions they had across sessions. Many appreciated the comprehensive overview of RCR topics, noting that the conference provided a strong foundational understanding of key issues. Participants particularly highlighted the sessions on ethical AI use and predatory publishing as well-matched to their interests and learning needs.

At the same time, participants expressed a desire for greater depth of learning. Several individuals noted that the sessions were brief and thus remained more surface level than they would have liked. There was a clear desire for a deeper dive into AI-focused content specifically. Participants recommended the development of follow-up modules and more practical guidance on integrating concepts from the conference into day-to-day research team practices. They also expressed interest in more scenario-based and story-driven learning opportunities that demonstrate how to navigate real-world dynamics and ethical challenges within research teams. One participant additionally noted interest in stronger attention to the broader social impacts of research.

### ***Recommendations***

Recommendations for future years include maintaining attention to the topics that have proven most popular among participants in recent years (e.g., ethical use of AI; navigating mentorship relationship) while also striving to integrate stronger coverage of content areas that have been less centered in recent conference years (e.g., data sharing and management; conflicts of interest and commitment; research misconduct). Based on participant feedback, additional potential actions to consider include lengthening available sessions and offering follow-up learning modules after the conference. One possibility might be to host three sessions rather than four over the course of the half-day, allowing for deeper discussion and application within each session, with a focus on scenario-based illustration of how ethical principles operate within real research team environments. Meanwhile, offering follow-up training modules or supplemental learning resources post-conference may serve as a meaningful opportunity for ongoing professional development, responsive to participants' clear desire continued and advanced learning.

## Conclusion

The 2025-2026 RCR mini-conference was effective in reaching UCCS community members with limited prior exposure to RCR topics, as evidenced by high student engagement (over 90% of participants) and the low mean levels of reported knowledge of and comfort with RCR at the pre-conference time point. A comparison of pre- and post-test responses clearly demonstrates that the day's sessions effectively increased participant's interest in research ethics, along with their knowledge of and sense of comfort with issues and tasks within the nine RCR buckets. The RCR Mini-Conference remains an essential and effective tool for advancing research integrity at UCCS.

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