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UCF Fires Three For 'Inappropriate Assistance' to Doctoral Student

The University of Central Florida is firing the director and two staff members of its Institute for Simulation and Training (IST) after a "lengthy investigation found they were involved in helping a student obtain a doctoral degree in exchange for grant funding and with inappropriate assistance from faculty advisors and others," UCF Interim President Thad Seymour Jr. announced. "The university also is starting the process of revoking that doctoral degree as a result of the investigation's findings." Seymour added that an IST interim director had been appointed. Documents released by UCF under open records laws and provided to *RRC* indicate concerns arose in 2016, and in 2018, an external law firm conducted an investigation into the three individuals and the student (whose name was withheld). The law firm's report also contains redactions, including the source of the grants at issue. According to the documents, at IST, "some doctoral students were also employed by sponsors who oversee grants. Students who were also grant managers had the power to influence funding for the ongoing grants, including one grant in the case involving the Ph.D. student that was up for renewal."

Specifically, the student "appears to have delayed funding until his dissertation was completed and defended." UCF said a "small number of faculty on that dissertation committee and students provided inappropriate assistance for that student's dissertation. The investigation also found plagiarism was involved." In addition to the three IST terminations, UCF is "reviewing graduate degrees awarded in that program and providing additional education and training on conflicts of interest to IST faculty and staff." Seymour said UCF is addressing other related concerns, including strengthening information security, but noted that the investigation itself "found no cybersecurity breaches."

Link to UCF announcement