**2023 Diversity Lecture Award Winner**

**University of Florida/J. Crayton Pruitt Family Department of Biomedical Engineering**

The J. Crayton Pruitt Family Department of Biomedical Engineering at the University of Florida (UF BME) is a leader in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) among engineering programs across the nation and the globe. At a time when the opportunity could not be greater, women and historically marginalized communities are vastly underrepresented in the workforce, particularly in engineering careers. The mission of UF BME is to create an environment welcoming to all, based on the understanding that a diverse and inclusive community of faculty, staff, and students will yield the most successful outcomes.

**Christine E. Schmidt**, Department Representative

Distinguished Professor & J. Crayton Pruitt Family Endowed Chair

University of Florida

**Title:** Amplifying Voices

**Abstract**: Gender and racial equity within UF BME have been realized through an *intentional* multifaceted approach to recruit, mentor, and retain diverse team members, including: (1) holistic faculty recruitment, (2) proactive trainee recruitment, (3) creating an inclusive environment, (4) mentoring, professional development, and retention, and (5) communicating excellence and DEI. The department has implemented multi-dimensional programs to build diversity and equity at all levels and create an inclusive community supporting and advocating for diversity. UF BME’s faculty, the highest level of representation, mirrors the demographics of the US population, which is a significant victory. Even more importantly, UF BME faculty and students go beyond the walls of UF to showcase and share best practices with other programs nationally, with the goal of having all BME programs (and perhaps all of engineering) reflect the diversity seen within the community. As part of this talk, approaches used to elevate UF BME as a national leader in DEI will be shared with the BME community.

**Bio:** Dr. Schmidt is a Distinguished Professor, the J. Crayton Pruitt Family Endowed Chair, and former Department Chair for the University of Florida J. Crayton Pruitt Family Department of Biomedical Engineering. Prior to joining UF, Dr. Schmidt was the B.F. Goodrich Endowed Professor at the University of Texas at Austin in Biomedical Engineering and Chemical Engineering.

When Dr. Schmidt stepped down as Department Chair in May 2023 after a decade in this role, the J. Crayton Pruitt Family Department of Biomedical Engineering encompassed 30 faculty, 400 students, and 21 department staff. UF BME graduate and undergraduate programs were ranked 12th and 13th, respectively, among national public programs (U.S. News & World Report). The undergraduate BME program first became ABET accredited in Fall 2019 and the graduate program ranking climbed over 21 spots (public) and almost 30 spots (overall) since 2013. During Dr. Schmidt’s tenure as chair, UF BME launched numerous initiatives to increase the impact and visibility of the department, enhance engagement and enrich the culture of the department by strengthening partnerships, expanding interdisciplinary research and education, and increasing opportunities to translate engineering discoveries to biomedical applications. In particular, UF BME has been devoted to diversity and inclusion. Since 2013, UF BME recruited 22 faculty, with women faculty increasing from 2 to 16 (55% women) and Black and Hispanic faculty increasing from 1 to 7 (24% URM). Additionally, research expenditures per faculty more than tripled and UF BME received >$3M in new gifts and foundation/industrial support for innovative research and educational programs.

Prior to joining UF, Dr. Schmidt was involved in curricula development and administration at UT Austin; she was one of four founding members of UT Austin’s BME Department. She served as inaugural Graduate Program Chair and Graduate Recruiter and served as chair of the faculty search committee. She was instrumental in securing Whitaker Education funding and NSF IGERT training grants as well as implementing college programs to recruit and retain women engineering faculty.