



Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia  
"Creating A More Educated Georgia"

# **Administrative Committee on Public Health University System of Georgia**

**Three Year Progress Report  
Fall 2004 – Spring 2007**

*...fostering intercollegiate and interdisciplinary cooperation and strategic direction to improve the health and wellbeing of all Georgians and to position the University System of Georgia to become one of the national leaders in public health education, research and service.*

**Final - September 2007**

**Administrative Committee on Public Health  
Board of Regents, University System of Georgia**

Progress Report - July 2007

prepared by:

Sandra Stone, PhD, *Committee Chair*  
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Planning  
Valerie A. Hepburn, PhD, *Committee Advisor*

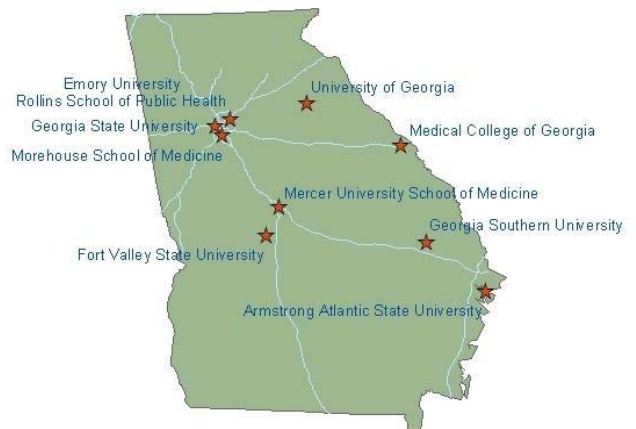
In 2004, the University System of Georgia (USG) embarked on an ambitious effort to develop an expanded network of graduate public health education and research programs with a goal to become one of the national leaders in public health. Three new institutions joined three existing institutions to offer graduate degree programs across the state. At this time, the Board of Regents created the Administrative Committee on Public Health (ACOPH) to serve as a strategic planning advisory body and to foster intercollegiate and interdisciplinary cooperation, assistance and growth. The Committee's goal has been to ensure planning and cooperation so that all six public health programs will prosper in their respective areas of emphasis and responsibility. The ACOPH has endorsed a mission statement that reflects the actions of the Board of Regents in adopting the strategic plan for public health in January 2004:

*...fostering intercollegiate and interdisciplinary cooperation and strategic direction to improve the health and wellbeing of all Georgians and to position the University System of Georgia to become one of the national leaders in public health education, research and service.*

The state institutions having graduate public health programs and participating on the Committee are:

Armstrong Atlantic State University, Savannah  
Fort Valley State University, Fort Valley  
The Medical College of Georgia, Augusta  
Georgia Southern University, Statesboro  
Georgia State University, Atlanta  
The University of Georgia, Athens

In addition to the USG institutions, three private Georgia universities offer graduate public health degrees. The Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University is the state's first accredited school of public health. Morehouse School of Medicine and Mercer University offer the MPH degree through accredited programs. While the universities collaborate on various projects, the private institutions are not members of the ACOPH.



Each USG institution is represented on the ACOPH by its respective provost or his or her designee and the dean or chair of the public health school or program. The Committee has been chaired by the USG's vice chancellor for academic affairs and planning. During the 2006-2007 academic year, the Committee met on two occasions: October 23, 2006 and April 13, 2007. In both instances, all of the member institutions were represented.

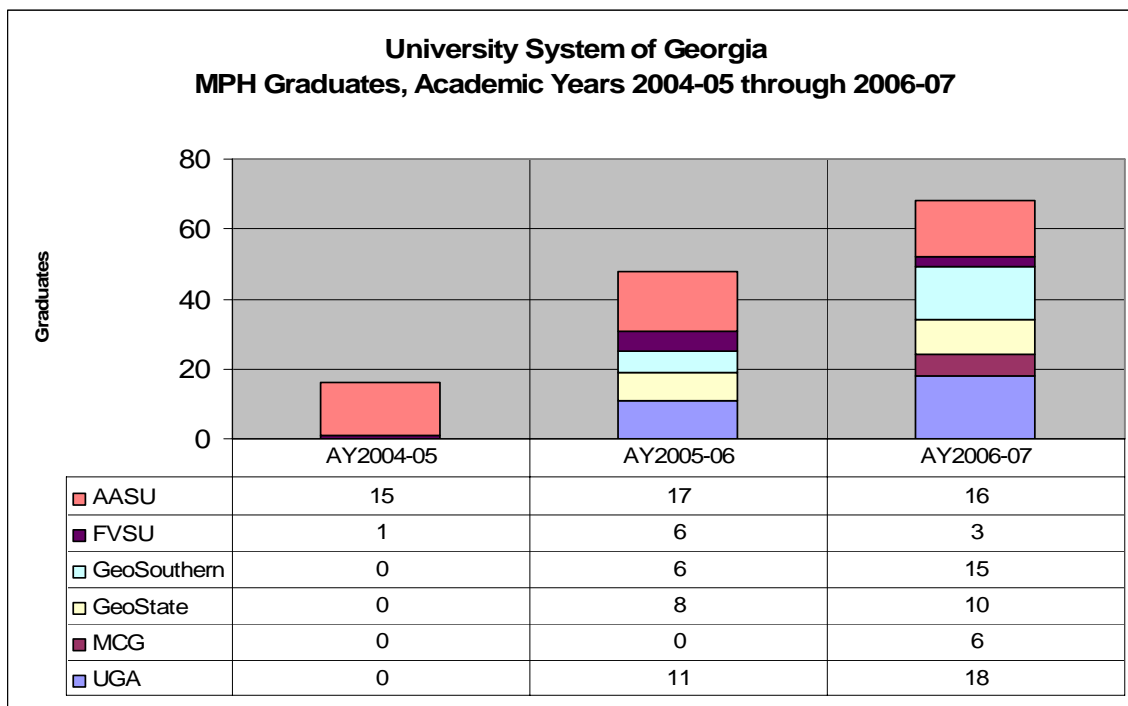
In establishing a significant academic public health presence, the Board of Regents acknowledged a growing awareness that Georgia has important education, research, and service requirements in public health that are unmet. The Board issued a clarion call to position the University System of Georgia to become a national leader in this field. The six institutions are working individually and collectively to respond to the state's challenges and to promote the system's advancement. To do so, the institutions have focused considerable attention on faculty and student recruitment, securing and maintaining accreditation, and attracting research funding and service partnerships. Each institution has a distinct and important mission, and these fairly discrete roles help to ensure that the colleges and programs are complementary versus competitive in their foci. Student preparation and teaching is the primary consideration for all of the institutions, with the three research universities incorporating major emphasis on nationally recognized scholarship and the regional and state universities adding breadth in public service.

Prior to the launch of the USG's initiative, the scope of "public" public health education in Georgia was fairly limited. In 2004, three USG institutions were providing graduate public health education: Armstrong Atlantic State University (AASU), Fort Valley State University (FVSU), and Georgia Southern University. AASU was graduating some dozen students annually and, in 2001, had secured program accreditation from the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). CEPH is the sole national accreditation body for public health academic programs; AASU has been the leader among Georgia public institutions in earning and maintaining accreditation. In 2007, AASU was reaccredited for a seven (7) period, the maximum provided by CEPH. AASU is the only USG institution approved to offer the MPH through a distance learning format.

During the early part of the decade, FVSU and Georgia Southern were operating small MPH programs with a handful of graduates each year. FVSU's focus has and continues to be environmental health. Georgia Southern's early focus had been community health education and biostatistics. For many years, the University of Georgia had offered undergraduate and graduate degrees in the public health disciplines of environmental health sciences and health promotion. However, these academic departments were not linked together and neither offered the MPH degree.

Since 2004, the USG's public health academic enterprise has grown significantly. Georgia State was the first of the three newly approved MPH programs to accept students, beginning in fall 2004. Georgia State now has the largest MPH student enrollment, already producing more than 2000 credit hours annually. Georgia Southern secured an endowment to create a named school, now called the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health (JPHCOPH). JPHCOPH has expanded its MPH offerings to include the five public health disciplines and was approved in early 2007 to offer the doctorate in public health (DrPH) in three specialty fields.

After establishing the MPH degree across the five core areas of biostatistics, epidemiology, environmental health, health promotion, and health policy, the University of Georgia (UGA) was approved as a College of Public Health in 2005. UGA offers the PhD in health promotion and environmental health and added an additional doctoral program, the DrPH, in 2006. UGA has the largest public health program in the state, with nearly 400 students in undergraduate, masters and doctoral programs. The Medical College of Georgia (MCG) established its MPH with focus on the emerging discipline of informatics. The program is intentionally small, with certain specialized classes offered through distance learning technologies and integrated with MCG's existing health sciences professional degree programs.



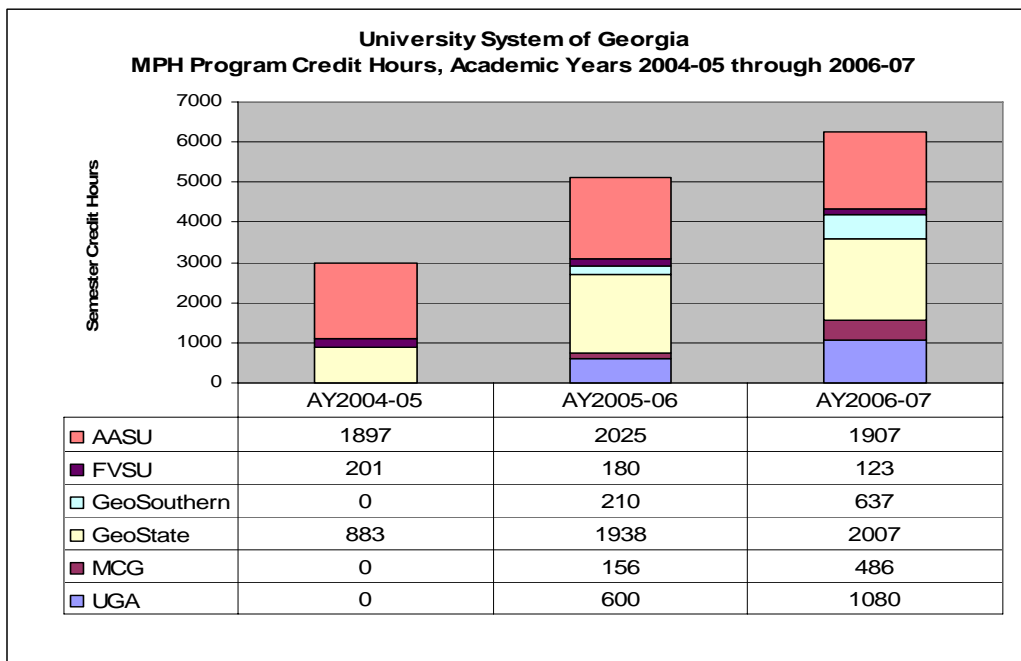
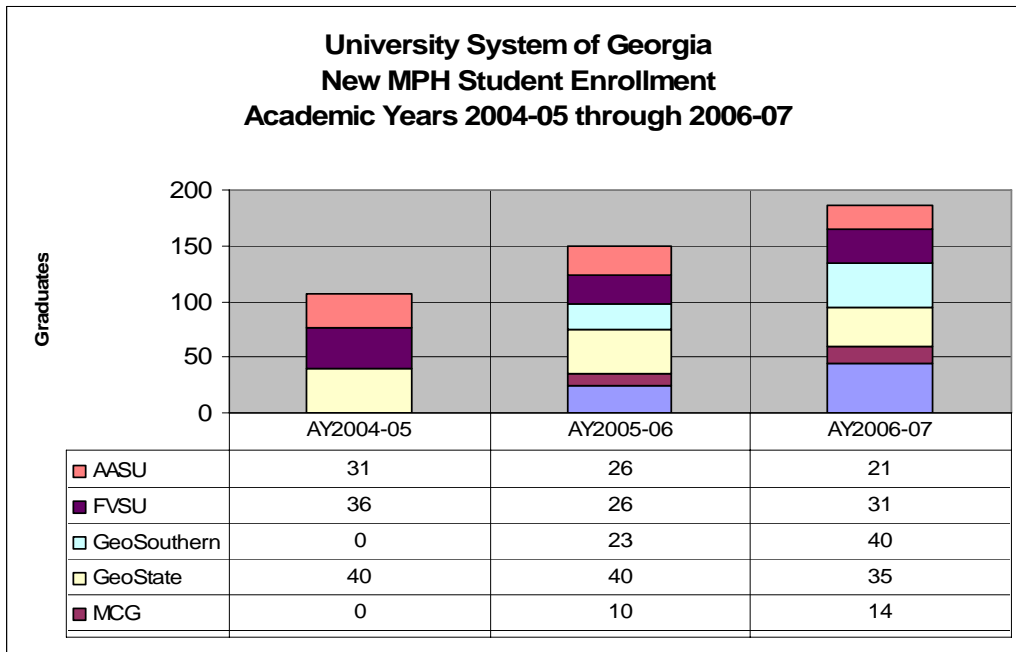
Over the past three academic years, the graduate public health programs have made great strides. Each program has submitted annual institutional progress reports to the Committee, which are incorporated by reference herein. The number of MPH graduates has increased by 325% since 2004, with nearly 70 new MPH graduates completing their studies in the 2006-2007 academic year. By 2008, the USG expects to be producing more than 100 new MPH students annually. Enrollments in the Georgia Southern and the UGA new DrPH programs are anticipated to net an additional cadre of doctorally-prepared public health professionals.

Demand for graduate public health education continues to grow, as evidenced by the rise in applications to and enrollment in graduate public health programs along with steady increases in credit hour production. Nearly 500 applications\* for enrollment in MPH programs were received

\* Note: This count may represent certain duplication, as some students may have applied for enrollment at more than one institution.

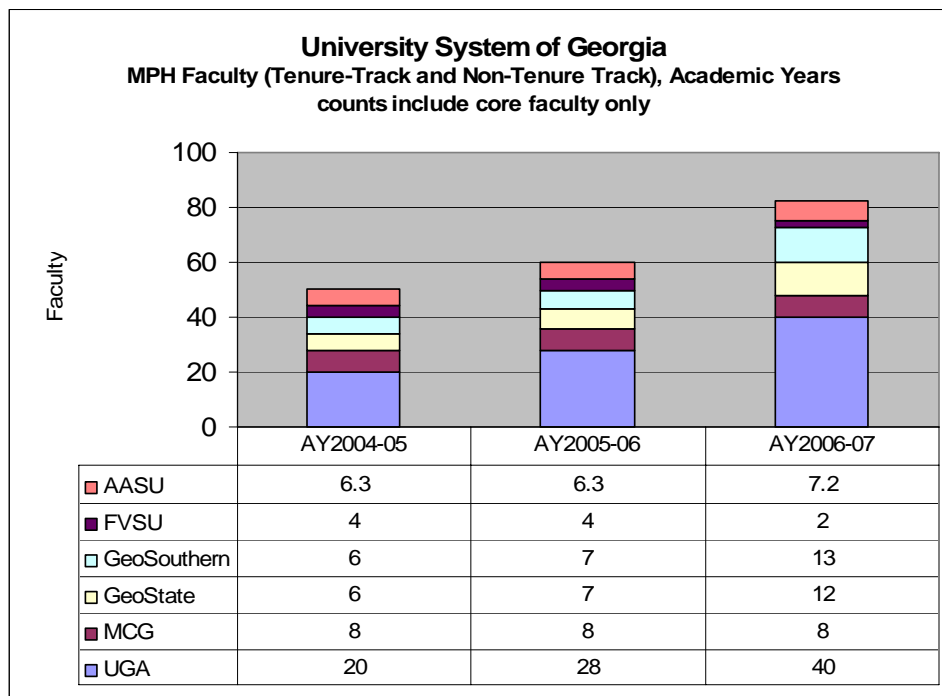
in the 2006-2007 academic year, representing a 57% increase over the 2004-2005 academic year. MPH enrollment is approaching 200 students annually, representing an 80% increase over the 2004-2005 academic year.

By spring 2007, graduate public health students were generating more than 6,200 credit hours annually. The institutional requirements for completion of the MPH vary. Depending upon the institution, between 42 and 53 semester hours of credit are required for the degree.



The USG institutions are making great strides in attracting new students and the growth of the academic programs is impressive. While expanding enrollment, the institutions have kept their attention to educational quality. Georgia State is the first of the new programs to secure five – year accreditation from CEPH, making it and AASU the two public institutions with accreditation status. UGA is now an applicant for accreditation as a school and will submit its self-study in summer 2008. The other institutions are planning for their accreditation activities. FVSU and MCG are working to address accreditation requirements within the confines of their small faculty and student numbers. MCG expects to secure accreditation in the coming academic year. Georgia Southern is investing the time and resources necessary to seek school accreditation by the 2010-2011 academic year.

The number of public health faculty in Georgia has grown by nearly 60% over the past three years. In the 2006-2007 academic year, the graduate public health programs included some 80 core public health faculty. A sizeable number of new hires are expected to join the system during the 2007-2008 academic year. Many of the institutions also involve adjunct faculty, external experts and other college and university faculty in the public health academic mission. In addition to their educational contributions, all of these faculty members bring research expertise, external funding relationships and the professional skills to contribute to the improvement of Georgia’s health status.



The portfolio of institutional offerings is specialized and expanding. Georgia Southern is expanding its reach to rural communities, with the goal of addressing both workforce and research needs. UGA has plans to offer several innovative joint degrees and graduate certificates

in the coming years. MCG is providing much of its course content through web-based instruction and the program is now heavily subscribed by clinicians. Georgia State has developed a specialization in urban health research which is being nationally recognized. AASU continues its strong emphasis on community health education; the program is well known for its impressive array of education-practice partnerships. FVSU fills an important role in providing graduate education focused on environmental health, attracting students from middle Georgia and throughout the state.

The institutions report significant applicant demand and student satisfaction as well as strong opportunities for community engagement. In addition, the programs have built strong relationships with their public health practice partners and are seen as resources in improving Georgia's health status. Moreover, the state has the opportunity to capitalize on research and service learning opportunities.

In AY2006-2007, UGA secured some \$4 million in external funding, ranging from federally funded behavioral research to state supported environmental science studies. Georgia State now serves as editorial home to two nationally recognized journals in the fields of epidemiology and health education, and the university garners nearly \$2 million in research and service funding annually. Georgia State also has become a graduate school destination of choice for Fulbright Scholars, with the university welcoming its third group of international graduate health professionals in 2007.

For Georgia Southern and AASU, community-based service and research have been the key areas of focus. Considerable emphasis is given to program evaluation and needs assessment in south and coastal Georgia, in communities which previously have had limited access to professional research and programmatic expertise.

There are challenges that accompany the aggressive growth of the graduate public health programs across the USG. Institutions identify accreditation and resource demands are key areas of concern. Federal health research funding appears to be waning, which may pose future problems particularly for the doctoral programs and research institutions. All institutions struggle with the need to develop a full complement of service learning opportunities for faculty and students. The Committee recognizes the importance of the institutions working together to address many of these areas. Service learning, web-based technology and international studies offer promise for cross-institutional partnerships.

Recruitment of qualified faculty remains a challenge for each of the institutions, regardless of size and scope. Nationwide, there has been tremendous growth in the public health academic arena. Newly established public institutions are finding it difficult to compete with the salaries and research support offered through long-established and endowed private and public institutions. The challenge is particularly apparent for institutions in recruiting minority faculty. Physical space limitations and resource rigidity create further constraints for the programs.

The University System of Georgia values the role and the contributions of all of the system's public health programs. The USG further recognizes the critical importance of public health education and research to the wellbeing of Georgia's citizens and communities. Steady progress

is being made by each of the institutions, and the USG recognizes and commends the dedication of each of the university's leadership, the accomplishments of the faculty and the contributions of the students. The growth of public health education among Georgia's public universities is certainly viewed as a positive step for the system, yet the challenge of balancing institutional demands and inter/intrastate programmatic competition for students and resources must be acknowledged and addressed. The independent work of each institution should be supported along with the collective efforts of the overarching public health education, research and service initiative represented by the Administrative Committee on Public Health.

In the coming academic year, the Committee hopes to secure at least minimal level of funding to support several projects across the public health academic programs. Funding has been obtained from a private foundation to offer an annual statewide graduate public health student conference, to be held in conjunction with the Georgia Public Health Association and the three private public health academic institutions. The conference should provide an outstanding opportunity for cross-institutional learning, student research recognition and career placement for those interested in public health practice in Georgia. The USG is submitting a grant proposal to fund a public health workforce study to be conducted through the system's health and medical programs unit. The USG's office of academic affairs and planning is seeking support for an annual master teacher in public health workshop, to bring together all system public health faculty for focus on emerging research and promising advances in pedagogy.

For the ACOPH and the USG, the coming year brings the opportunity to begin to stabilize and solidify the field of public health academics following three years of tremendous growth. Academic quality, service contributions and research excellence are key values for the state's public health education system. Moving forward and working together, each of the institutions has the opportunity to reach its individual goals while contributing to the collective good of the system and the state of Georgia. The ACOPH is pledged to supporting the realization of this mission.