Georgia Health Policy Center Scholarship: A Review and Five-Year Strategic Plan for Research
2020 Progress Report
Research Overview

For more than 20 years, the Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) has lived its mission of integrating research, policy, and programs to advance health and well-being. It is at the intersection of the problem-solving and research cycles that the center sees its greatest opportunity to contribute to both practice and academia. GHPC remains actively committed to further increasing its research output and strengthening its research partnerships across the Georgia State University community and beyond.

In 2015, GHPC completed its strategic research assessment and resulting Research Strategic Plan. The center’s executive leadership team — the CEO and directors — have primary responsibility for the implementation of the plan.

The Research Strategic Plan has three major areas of focus: capacity, infrastructure, and financial strategy. Each area has specific action steps. But, broadly:

- Research capacity will be increased through expanded research faculty appointments, strategic engagement with faculty from other academic or research units, development of research-focused staff mentorship, and alignment of GHPC research growth with other college and university strategic initiatives.
- Research infrastructure will be strengthened by encouraging a focus of publication efforts toward the revised target journal list, clarifying and promoting scholarship goals for existing staff and new hires, and promoting a culture of research through recognition of research productivity.
- Research financial strategy will include examining the use of limited GHPC funds to incentivize staff research productivity and seeking research grants to support applied research projects tied to our programmatic work.

As 2020 came to an end, the center began a comprehensive assessment of its progress toward meeting its five-year goals. What follows is a report on progress made for calendar year 2020. This, in conjunction with progress reports from the past four years, will inform the evaluation of achievements and the goals for the next iteration of the five-year strategic research plan (2021-2025), planned for release in the first half of 2021.
2020 Steps Toward Fulfillment of GHPC’s Five-Year Research Plan

Research Capacity
GHPC is committed to expanding its research capacity over this five-year period by taking steps at all personnel levels: students, staff, and faculty. The ultimate goal of expanding research capacity is to increase the percentage of published peer-reviewed papers that are directly related to project work. In order to increase opportunities for school and university collaboration, GHPC will expand the use of research faculty appointments for center staff most interested in research leadership and production.

2020 accomplishments in the area of building research capacity include:

- Ongoing discussion around defining research products and metrics of research productivity, including for teams with a more community-based practice and resulting products. This may possibly include changing the umbrella term research to capture efforts under scholarship.
- Continuing to build a centerwide approach to mentorship and supervision that expands staff’s research capacity and productivity. Activities on some of the center’s largest teams include:
  - The population and global health team added research discussion to regular team managers’ meetings. Senior members continue informal mentoring on research and evaluation design, paper development, conference abstract and presentation development, and research proposals.
  - The Atlanta Regional Collaborative for Health Improvement team has undergone trainings to advance its skills in evaluating complexity.
  - The rural health team established special subteams to (1) conduct a study of a subset of rural grantees to deepen understanding of the drivers of long-term sustainability and impact of grant-funded programs and (2) conduct research on the key factors impacting rural health and well-being, with a focus on achieving health equity. The team plans to develop a book on technical assistance and some papers out of these efforts.
The Center of Excellence for Children’s Behavioral Health (COE) instituted a Monitoring and Evaluation Workgroup where staff working on or interested in evaluation are meeting monthly to improve the research and evaluation capacity through interactive learning sessions, to build a skills/experience matrix to support cross collaboration, and to develop evaluation guidebooks to implement and utilize best practices in monitoring and evaluation and to support quality assurance. Additionally, the COE has a research, evaluation, and dissemination monthly meeting in which COE team members present developing products for feedback and guidance. This helps to ensure the team is engaging in knowledge sharing and capacity building.

- Expanding use of research appointments, with Chris Parker being appointed as an assistant research professor within the dean’s office of the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies.
- Supporting pursuit of terminal degrees, with seven staff using the Georgia State University Tuition Assistance Program.
- Expanding relationships with affiliated faculty, both internal to Georgia State University and at external universities, to increase collaborative research. This includes meeting with several new economics faculty members with a health focus to their research and engagement of an interdisciplinary group from across the university to study the CARES Act.
- Using the center’s 25th anniversary as an opportunity to partner with schools across Georgia State on public-facing lectures and to build networking opportunities with other faculty.
- Working with 16 graduate research assistants in calendar year 2020.
- Glenn Landers, Karen Minyard, and Angela Snyder are participating on three dissertation committees through the departments of Public Management and Policy, Economics, and Computer Information Systems.
- Aligning GHPC research capacity with the Andrew Young School’s strategic priorities through active planning and participation in the school’s initiatives. Ann DiGirolamo is on the New Technologies and Marginalization implementation group for the Digital Landscape Initiative, Angela Snyder is working on the Open Access workgroup and the Georgia Child and Family Policy Lab, and Glenn Landers is on the Digital Landscape Initiative Design Team. Additionally,
center-directed work on the COVID-19 pandemic illuminated how some of GHPC’s priorities around equity and access to care through technology coalesce around some of the Andrew Young School’s strategic initiatives.

- Meeting monthly through GHPC’s research seminar —
  - The directors with project portfolios are taking turns providing the agenda and research products for monthly seminars, thereby involving more staff in monthly meetings and showcasing research and progress. Each team presents approximately three times per year.
  - New or re-engaged faculty and researchers are presenting a profile of their research portfolio and agenda.

**Research Infrastructure**
The building of research infrastructure at GHPC will ultimately be addressed through hiring and through research recognition and incentivization. In 2020, the center made progress toward this goal:

- Ongoing effort to raise awareness and reinforce expectations for research productivity through performance evaluations and implementation of the career ladder for research staff. The career ladder is being revisited to be inclusive of outputs focused on the practitioner community.
- Continuing an implementation science workgroup that meets quarterly to discuss frameworks and models that may promote the translation of project-based work into scholarly presentation and support cross-collaborative learning.
- Participating in the Realist Network of the Americas and the planning of the International Conference for Realist Research, Evaluation, and Synthesis 2020, which was postponed due to COVID-19.
- Planning the redesign and launch of the GHPC Stewardship program (formerly the Leadership Development program), which when launched will include modules on the GHPC model of engaged research for new staff.
- Establishing a competencies workgroup, led by Annette Pope, to foster skills that enable staff to effectively work in GHPC’s applied research environment.
Meeting with a six-member research strategy workgroup, representatives of the directors’ project portfolios, to prioritize goals for 2020 and plan for external review of the execution of the 2016-2020 Research Strategic Plan.

Growing external recognition of GHPC as a leader in engaged scholarship by promoting GHPC peer-reviewed publications and presentations through the Andrew Young School’s Policy News in the ATL (formerly Dean’s E-news), as well as through the GHPC website, social media, partner newsletters, and other university communications channels, as appropriate, externally. Internally, staff are encouraged to present published research or conference presentations at all-staff meetings to highlight research accomplishments and enhance knowledge sharing. Remote working disrupted other aspects of internal research recognition.

Financial Strategy
Progress in the areas of research capacity and infrastructure can be accelerated by a financial strategy that supports academic research output while keeping in mind that GHPC is currently funded primarily through grants and contracts. For 2020, GHPC continued to align its financial strategy with the Research Strategic Plan:

- Funding buyouts for directors with academic faculty appointments to support time for research activities. Specifically, GHPC funds support 10% of Glenn Landers’ and Chris Parker’s time for research, the School of Social Work supports 10% of Ann DiGirolamo’s time, and Public Management and Policy continues to fund 25% of Angie Snyder’s time.

- In calendar year 2020, GHPC exceeded its goal of submitting two research-focused grants per year by submitting 11 research grants and receiving two new awards, plus maintaining five previously awarded, ongoing research grants. Please note that submissions and grant decisions may or may not occur in the same year.

- The leadership teams continue to consider options for incentivizing research using GHPC’s limited discretionary funds.
About the Georgia Health Policy Center

GHPC provides evidence-based research, policy analysis, and translational services for communities and decision-makers. The center focuses on solutions to complex issues facing health care today, including behavioral health, child health and well-being, community health systems development, global health, health and health care financing, health in all policies, health system transformation, long-term services and supports, maternal and child health, population and global health, and rural health. GHPC works at the local, state, and national levels to improve health at the community level. Today, GHPC is at work throughout Georgia and in more than 200 communities in all 50 states and internationally, helping communities achieve health improvement.

GHPC by the Numbers

- 25 years of service
- 86 staff members
- Works in 50 states, and internationally
- 80-plus active contracts
- ~100 diverse clients
  (Based on calendar year 2020)

Staff

With growth in the number of contracts and projects the center has undertaken, there has been continued growth in center staff. The size of GHPC has more than tripled over the past 10 years, from 24 staff members in 2011 to 86 as of Dec. 31, 2020.

GHPC Funding

In fiscal year (FY) 2020, GHPC received approximately $14.7 million in external funding from 80-plus active grants and contracts. The vast majority of the center’s funding (approximately 95%) comes from sponsored awards. The FY 2020 mix is consistent with the center’s recent funding history. The sponsored funds are used to complete the awarded projects’ goals and objectives, while the funding that comes from university and state contributions is used for the center’s nonsponsored project work, including salary support.
GHPC’s sponsored funding has grown from nearly $4.4 million in FY 2010 to $14.7 million in FY 2020.

Sponsored revenue is received from both public agencies and private partners. The funders also represent a mix of local, state, national, and, to a lesser degree, international work.
The following breakdown of research output reflects continued documentation of the center’s research productivity. In the appendix there is a full list of GHPC publications for 2020. Table 1 illustrates total research-related outputs between 2010 and 2020.

Table 1. Number of Peer-Reviewed Publications, Presentations, Posters, and Books, 2010-2020

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*Publications include peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and book chapters.

** While these counts include abstracts that were accepted, even when conferences were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is possible that the pandemic continued to impact submissions and the number of conferences.

There is ongoing interest in evaluating the relationship between GHPC contracts and publications. Of the 14 publications in 2020, 10 were tied to a GHPC grant or contract. This suggests that GHPC staff and faculty are not completely reliant on grants to produce research outputs.

Table 2. GHPC Publication Breakdown, 2010-2020 (Books, Book Chapters, Peer-Reviewed Publications)

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*The target journal list was revised in 2017.
We also continue to see publications with affiliated faculty co-authors. GHPC has taken active steps to strengthen partnerships with affiliated faculty to boost research productivity. Some contracts are associated with more publications than others.

### Table 3. GHPC Grants and Contracts Associated With Publications, 2010-2020

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<th>Contracts Associated With 3 or More Publications</th>
<th>Contracts Associated With 2 Publications</th>
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<td>Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation</td>
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<td>Robert W. Woodruff Foundation</td>
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<td>Philanthropic Collaborative for a Healthy Georgia (3)</td>
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<td>Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (3)</td>
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<td>Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute</td>
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**Next Steps**

GHPC is undertaking its five-year, comprehensive assessment of progress toward meeting its strategic research goals. Next steps for 2021 to 2025 will emerge from this ongoing evaluation.
Appendix: 2020 GHPC Peer-Reviewed Articles, Books, and Book Chapters

* Denotes that the publication has an affiliated faculty co-author


