

History of the Georgia Psychological Association **William F. Doverspike, Ph.D.**

In 1946, a small group of psychologists met to discuss writing legislation that would create a licensing law for the emerging profession of psychology. On August 27, 1947, this group of psychologists incorporated the Georgia Psychological Association (GPA). One of GPA's founders, Hermon Martin, Ph.D., served as its first President (1946-47). The group also included Atlanta psychologist Robert Hughes, Ph.D., who served as GPA's second President (1947-1948)¹, and Athens psychologist Austin S. Edwards, Ph.D., who later became GPA's fourth President (1949-50). Three years after its incorporation, with assistance from the American Psychological Association (APA), the new state association began to formulate plans for legislative action in obtaining a licensing law. In 1950, GPA's Legislative Committee formulated a brief précis of the proposed licensing bill to be used in an educational campaign to create favorable public opinion for its passage. At the GPA Annual Meeting, final plans were made to secure enactment of the bill by the Georgia General Assembly. On February 21, 1951, "the Georgia legislature approved House Bill No. 255, an "Act Creating and Establishing a State Board of Examiners of Psychologists" (Young, 1951, p. 477).² In 1951, with passage of Act No. 276, Georgia became the second state in the country to enact a licensing law for psychologists.³ Governor Herman Talmadge announced members of the State Board of Examiners of Psychologists. On July 13, 1951, the first Georgia applied psychologists, including the initial founders of the movement, were licensed as Applied Psychologists.⁴

In the early 1960s, GPA was still firmly rooted in the academic community, which supplied most of the organization's officers (Moore, 1996).⁵ By the late 1960s, GPA's membership grew and became more politically active. There was debate and disagreement within the profession as to whether psychologists should seek insurance reimbursement for providing psychotherapy. While psychologists in other states were battling with insurance companies for recognition as independent providers, GPA achieved its legislative goal of requiring insurance companies to reimburse licensed psychologists for psychotherapy services—a benefit that many contemporary psychologists and their clients take for granted.⁶ Since the enactment of this legislation in the 1970s, psychologists have become the mental health providers of choice for insurance companies, managed care panels, and preferred provider organizations.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, GPA's success in creating direct access to third-party payment resulted in economic independence from the profession of psychiatry.⁷ By the 1980s and 1990s, GPA's advocacy efforts expanded hospital privileges for psychologists, improved mental health parity in health insurance, and increased the role of psychologists in providing expert testimony in the courts. GPA's legislative activities resulted in the creation of dozens of laws related to patient's rights, consumer protection, freedom of choice, and protection of the practice of psychology. These laws provide access to psychologists under health insurance plans (1972), freedom of choice of providers without physician referral (1976), diagnosis and treatment of mental and nervous disorders added to statutory definition (1980), hospital privileges for health service provider psychologists (1983), authorization for emergency admission of mentally ill persons (1988), authorization for psychologists to evaluate dangerous persons for involuntary commitment (1991), authorization for psychologists to evaluate competency for probate courts (1993), authorization for psychologists to write orders for nurses in hospitals (1996), improved mental health parity in health insurance (1997),

establishment of the “best interest of the child” rather than mandated joint custody in divorce litigation (1999), a Georgia Insurance Commissioner directive that mental health be treated like any other illness when offering point-of-service (POS) coverage (2000), authorization for psychologists to provide court-ordered mental evaluations of persons in custody or under the legal control of a party (2001), clarification of the definition of psychological testing (2016), and so on. A search through the Georgia Code using the LexisNexis® database reveals that the word “psychologist” appears in 164 separate places in state laws.

At the dawn of a new millennium, the profession of psychology found itself facing new challenges: addressing the complexities of an increasingly multicultural society; providing interventions to face the threat and consequences of domestic and global terrorism; and managing the privacy, security, and storage of electronic protected health information (EPHI). Research psychologists design studies to expand the increasing body of knowledge in the field of neuroscience, and academic psychologists teach a new generation of students for whom psychology has become the most popular major on college campuses. Private practitioners find themselves coping with the increasing biologicalization of the mental health field, incorporating clinical trials and other scientific evidence into treatment protocols, and developing new standards to improve service delivery and quality in the emerging field of telepsychology.

On April 23, 2019, HB 26 was enacted into law, making Georgia one of the first seven states to enter into an interstate compact known as the Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact (PSYPACT).⁸ This legislation amended Chapter 39 of Title 43 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (OCGA), creating a new law (39-32-22) that requires criminal background checks for licensure, establishes and provides for the privilege to practice telepsychology, provides for the temporary authorization to practice by psychologists, and authorizes the State Board of Examiners of Psychologists to administer the compact. According to Janet Orwig, Chief Executive Officer of PSYPACT, as of March 5, 2021 Georgia had a total of 149 psychologists who held Authority to Practice Interjurisdictional Telepsychology (APIT) certificates and there are 15 states have enacted PSYPACT (Litton & Orwig, 2021).

Today, professional psychology is alive and well in Georgia. Still connected to their academic roots, GPA members serve as faculty members in all five of Georgia’s psychology doctoral training programs. Known as the educators of the mental health professions, GPA members volunteer an average of one media event per week and provide dozens of continuing education workshops throughout the year.⁹ Dedicated to providing professional care to others, GPA members provide hundreds of hours of pro bono services to the public each year in addition to tens of thousands of hours of professional services.¹⁰ Each year, the GPA Referral Service receives over 1,000 calls from prospective clients, who are also able to locate psychologists through GPA’s online referral service.¹¹ Before it was discontinued in 2014, GPA’s official publication, the *Georgia Psychologist*, was recognized as one of the top five state psychological association newsletters in the country (Doverspike, 2009). Registered September 25, 2000, GPA’s website domain (<http://www.gapsychology.org/>) provides information to members on a continual basis. A digital version of the *GPA Newsletter* is provided to members on a monthly basis. The GPA Ethics

Committee provides advisory consultations to psychologists, physicians, attorneys, and the general public.¹² In an age of legal complexities, GPA's Legal Service Plan is utilized by over 100 psychologists.¹³

The GPA Legislative Committee continues to monitor legislation on a variety of societal concerns including improved mental health parity, greater access to mental health care for indigent children, and statutory immunity from liability for licensed psychotherapists who issue third party warnings of foreseeable danger and terroristic threats.

Beginning with the nation's second psychology licensing law in 1951, GPA's activities over half a century have changed the face of psychology in Georgia. Without the forethought and planning of its pioneers, the field of psychology may have remained only a scientific discipline confined to the ivory towers of academia. Instead, the birth of the profession paved the way for doctoral psychologists and training programs to thrive, even as the pioneers of the profession became points of historical reference forgotten by most of us. Current professors of psychology now see their graduates conducting research and providing services in areas that their predecessors could have only imagined.

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Footnotes

1. GPA's second President was Robert Hughes, Ph.D., who was unable to serve his term (1947-48) due to a diagnosis of tuberculosis, resumed his leadership as GPA's 11th President (1957-58). According to former GPA President (1980-1981) Archer Moore, Ph.D, Dr. Hughes taught psychology at the University of Georgia and he later became the first psychologist to work in full-time private practice in Atlanta (Reminiscing, 1996). GPA's first woman President was Emily Dexter, Ph.D., who served as GPA's 8th President (1953-1955), although she is not listed as having ever been a licensed Applied Psychologist.
2. According to Young (1952), "On February 21, 1951, the Georgia legislature approved House Bill No. 255, an 'Act Creating and Establishing a State Board of Examiners of Psychologists.' This Board is to consist of three members to be appointed by the governor. The bill states that 'one member of the Board is to be chosen from and shall be a member of the faculty, with the rank of assistant professor or above, of the accredited colleges and universities in the state, and two members shall be licensed applied psychologists or qualified for licensure under the terms of the act.' After the original members of the Board have served, all subsequent appointments are to be for three-year terms. All appointments to the Board by the governor are to be made from a list of qualified members of the Georgia Psychological Association to be furnished to the governor by said association" (p. 477). Special appreciation is extended to Roger K. Thomas, Ph.D. for bringing this article and other information to my (WFD) attention.
3. In 1945, Connecticut was the first state in the country to pass a law for the licensing of psychologists. This information was provided by personal communication via email sent to the author on 04-28-2017 by Carol Webb, Ph.D., ABPP, then Chief Operation Officer of the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards (ASPPB).
4. According to Young (1952, p. 477), "The members of the first State Board of Examiners of Psychologists are: Austin S. Edwards, University of Georgia, Athens; Hermon W. Martin, Emory University; Laurence W. Ross, Union Bag and Paper Co., Savannah." In order to determine who would be issued the first license, Dr. Hermon Martin and Dr. Austin Southwick Edwards, who was the first chair of the Department of Psychology at the University of Georgia, agree to decide the matter on the basis of a coin toss. On July 13, 1951, Dr. Edwards was issued psychology license PSY000001 and Dr. Martin was issued psychology license PSY000002. On this same date, licenses were also issued to Laurence Ross (PSY000003), James Blanks (PSY000004), Euri Belle Bolton (PSY000005), and Laurence Bryan (PSY000006). James Edward Green, Sr. (PSY000007) does not have a license issue date listed. By the end of 1951, a total of 26 psychologists, including four women, had been licensed. The first women licensed psychologists included Euri Belle Bolton (1951: PSY000005), Florence Mary Young (1951: PSY000019), Christine Wyatt Felts (1951: PSY000020), and Grace Marie Freymann (1951: PSY000027). According to

Roger K. Thomas, Ph.D. (Professor Emeritus, Behavioral and Brain Sciences, Department of Psychology, University of Georgia), a University of Georgia faculty member named Florene Young, Ph.D. served as 1959-1960 President of GPA (<https://www.gapsychology.org/page/pastpresidents>) and she once served on the Georgia licensing board (R. Thomas, personal communication, August 12, 2021). Florene Young appears to be the same person identified as Florence Mary Young (Athens, Georgia), whose Georgia license was issued on July 13, 1951 and expired on March 31, 1980 (<https://verify.sos.ga.gov/verification/>). If so, then the name difference (with the addition of the “c” to Florene) may have been the first typographical error of the state licensing board.

5. In 1962, GPA was comprised mainly of academic psychologists. According to GPA N. Archer Moore, Ph.D, GPA’s 34th President (1980-81), meetings were frequently held on college campuses, with the only noticeable privilege being that psychologists were allowed to “go to the head of the line” in the student cafeteria (Moore, 1996, p. 83).
6. According to Bernard C. Murdoch, Ph.D., GPA’s 23rd President (1969-70), in 1969 every member of GPA served on at least one committee (Murdoch, 1969). By the late 1970s, GPA’s membership had grown to approximately 200 psychologists.
7. *Virginia Academy of Clinical Psychologists v. Blue Shield of Va.*, 624 F.2d 476 (4th Cir. 1980), *cert. denied*, 450 U.S. 916 (1981). It was in 1980 that the nation witnessed a U.S. Supreme Court decision in a civil action that was known as the Virginia Blues case, which affected the future financial viability of the profession of psychology. The Virginia Academy of Clinical Psychologists (VACP) filed a lawsuit against Blue Shield of Virginia because the insurance company refused to provide direct payments to clinical psychologists for outpatient psychological services rendered to the company’s subscribers unless those services were ordered, supervised, and billed by a physician. VACP alleged that the insurance company’s refusal violated the Sherman Act and Virginia’s freedom-of-choice legislation. VACP alleged that Blue Shield of Virginia failed to pay claims for psychotherapy provided by licensed psychologists even when the policy would pay for the same services provided by licensed physicians. In response to the lower court’s ruling in favor of Blue Shield, VACP appealed the case to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit and prevailed. Blue Shield’s petition for writ of certiorari to the U.S. Supreme Court was denied. For additional information, see Resnick (1985).
8. Here is how PSYPACT (2019, p. 1) process works: (1) PSYPACT legislation is enacted by a state legislature. Upon enactment, the state officially joins PSYPACT. (2) Each state appoints a representative to serve as that state’s Commissioner. The PSYPACT Commission is the governing body of PSYPACT and is responsible for writing the Bylaws and Rules of PSYPACT. (3) Psychologists licensed in their Home State can obtain authorization to practice under PSYPACT from the PSYPACT Commission. A psychologist’s practice under PSYPACT can occur in two ways (which are not mutually exclusive): (1) Authority to Practice Interjurisdictional Telepsychology requires the ASPPB E.Passport to practice

telepsychology into a Receiving state (which must be a Compact State that has enacted PSYPACT legislation), and (2) Temporary Authorization requires the ASPPB Interjurisdictional Practice Certificate (IPC) to conduct temporary practice (i.e., temporary practice that must be in-person, face-to-face, and limited to 30 days) in a Distant State.

9. Estimates based on 2011 data, which included 29 workshops at Central Office plus 20 workshops at Annual Meeting (Personal communication, Amy Dietrich, March 29, 2012).
10. Estimates obtained from GPA Central Office (2007).
11. Estimates obtained from GPA Central Office also include website hits to Referral Service (2007).
12. Estimates obtained from GPA Ethics Committee (2007). Estimates for 2011 were 22 ethics advisory consultations (Personal communication, Amy Dietrich, March 29, 2012).
13. Estimates based on 2011 data, which included 102 Low Cost Legal Consultation Plan in Fiscal Year 2011-2012 (Personal communication, Amy Dietrich, March 29, 2012).

Resources

Former GPA Presidents

<https://www.gapsychology.org/page/pastpresidents>

Georgia Psychology License Verification

<https://verify.sos.ga.gov/verification/>

Active Licenses in Georgia (by occupation and profession)

<https://sos.ga.gov/plb/activelicenses.htm>

Verification of PSYPACT Authorizations (APIT and TAP)

<https://www.verifypsypact.org/>

About the Author

Dr. Doverspike has served as GPA's Editor Emeritus since 2008. He is a former President of GPA (2003-2004), former member of the GPA Ethics Committee (1995-2008), and an active GPA member since 1979. The author was born the same year that the Georgia General Assembly passed Georgia's first psychology licensure law (1951).

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