

Evaluation of graduate studies in public health in Brazil

The field of graduate studies in public health is currently undergoing a phase of both consolidation and expansion in Brazil. According to data from 2005 recently compiled by CAPES (the National Coordinating Body for Graduate Training) and analyzed by its Evaluation Committee for Public Health, Brazil now has 34 programs, offering at total of 7 so-called professional Master's courses (for in-service health professionals), 27 academic Master's, and 11 PhD courses. In late 2005 there were 1,880 graduate students enrolled in public health (1,137 academic Master's students and 743 PhD students), while 554 Master's and 192 PhD students received their degrees that year. In 2006, 3 new programs began their course activities and 6 more received their initial accreditation.

Brazil is experiencing important trends in graduate studies in public health. A growing number of courses have been created in private schools and universities. Such scenarios are part of the overall expansion of higher learning in Brazil, which has gained specific momentum in public health. The Evaluation Committee has been monitoring these developments in order to ensure that the newly accredited courses have the quality and capacity for their advancement and consolidation. The new proposals for so-called professional Master's courses have been evaluated with special care due to the frequent lack of understanding of their role, i.e., to provide high-level training for non-academic professionals in groups working in the course's area, as well as scientific output compatible with the requirements of an academic Master's course.

Another recurrent and fundamental challenge for graduate studies in public health is to supply training in regions of Brazil where it is still lacking. The expansion of graduate studies to include these regions is a challenge not only for public health, but also for numerous other fields in the Brazilian science and technology system, as evidenced in the National Graduate Studies Plan for 2005-2010.

The combination of social relevance and scientific excellence has provided the underpinnings for reflections on research output in public health. The evaluation shows not only that the field's scientific output has enjoyed an upward trend, but also that various programs are making a clear effort at internationalization. Much progress is still needed, but the fact is that the issue occupies a central place in faculty concerns and institutional life.

On this same issue of scientific output, recent years have witnessed the maturation of the so-called *Qualis-Periódicos* project. In the field of public health in particular, there is a pressing need to further the discussion on parameters for evaluating output in the form of books and book chapters. In partnership with the Forum of Graduate Studies Program Coordinators in Public Health, representatives from the field have sought to define criteria for evaluating this kind of output. This effort has also occurred in other areas within the scope of CAPES, and a discussion on this issue by the interested fields is expected to take place soon, in order to reach definitions for the next triennial evaluation.

The coming year, 2007, is special for the graduate studies evaluation system conducted by CAPES, because the 2004-2006 triennial performance of hundreds of graduate studies programs will be evaluated (with scores). Our expectation is that the evaluation will specifically confirm the successful history of graduate studies in public health in Brazil.

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