October 29, 2010 (USF Tampa) – The Graduate School will be honoring Dr. Rony Francois as a *Celebratory Alumni Award Recipient*. The Award, established as part of the Graduate School’s 30th Anniversary Celebration honors graduate student alumni for outstanding professional accomplishments and service as a role model for present and future graduate students and scholars.

M. Rony François, M.D., MA, M.S.P.H., Ph.D., serves as the Director of the Division of Public Health (DPH) for the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH). Dr. Francois has worked in preventive medicine and public health for 14 years. Dr. Francois is a native of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. As Director of the Division of Public Health, Dr. François oversees programs responsible for disease control and prevention and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Public Health’s essential services include assessing the health status of the population; establishing and implementing sound public health policy; informing and educating people so they have the resources and skills necessary to live healthy; investigating, identifying and preventing environmental conditions that adversely affect health; linking people to needed health services such as family planning and immunizations; and conducting surveillance and research on influenza, foodborne pathogens and many other harmful conditions.

Prior to joining DCH, Dr. François served as the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Public Health at the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals where he was responsible for the direction and management of the state’s public health programs with a budget of about $330M. Under his leadership in 2009, the Louisiana Immunization Program was ranked second in the nation by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Dr. Francois is also the immediate past Secretary of Health and State Health Officer for the State of Florida where he was instrumental with agency accomplishments such as having the second highest immunization rate in the nation for two-year olds, decreasing the prevalence rate of cigarette use by 60 percent among Florida’s middle school students, reducing perinatally-acquired HIV cases from 172 to 5, and developing the state’s first strategic plan for public health preparedness.

Dr. François brings perspectives from academia and the private sector. Dr. François served as an Assistant Professor and Director of the Public Health Practice Program at the University Of South Florida College of Public Health, and worked as the Site Medical Director for Corporate Health Dimensions at Citigroup in Tampa for over seven years. In addition, he has served on several state and federal scientific panels contributing to important policy decisions that addressed public health issues. Dr. François served as a U.S. Presidential delegate to the swearing in of the President of Haiti and has headed official public health missions to the Bahamas, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.

With an extensive academic background including a Master of Arts in Exercise Physiology from the University of Central Florida, a Doctor of Medicine degree, a Master of Science in Public Health, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Toxicology/Public Health degree all from the University of South Florida, Dr. François is passionate about the
public’s health and is a strong advocate for providing quality health services for all. Fluent in French, Creole, and limited Spanish, Dr. François is also an inventor. He has worked as a teacher, cardiac rehabilitation exercise physiologist, and has played professional soccer. He was named All-American in 1982 and inducted into the UCF Athletics Hall of Fame in 2005 for his accomplishments in soccer.

The Graduate School is pleased to honor Dr. Francois for his outstanding accomplishments. Dr. Francois will receive his award at a presentation on October 29, 2010. He is the third recipient of this award, with the first presented in May 2010 to Chief Gil Kerlikowske, grad alum from Criminal Justice Administration who now serves as the Director for Drug Policy and Control for the Obama Administration. The second recipient was Mrs. Sonja Garcia, grad alum from Library and Information Science and former USF librarian and BOT member. Mrs. Garcia received her award September 9, 2010. The Graduate School will recognize additional outstanding graduate alumni over the course of the 2010-2011 academic year, culminating on the official anniversary date of March 4, 2011.

For more information on this award or the presentation, contact Carol Hines-Cobb at 813-974-4239 or chines-cobb@grad.usf.edu