

Public Health Horizons

When Barry Bloom looks around at the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH), he sees an institution that is more internationally engaged, more generous to its students, and home to more prizewinning researchers than when he arrived 10 years ago. Each of these has been a priority for Bloom during his tenure as dean, which will end when a yet-to-be-named successor takes the reins.

The school has new initiatives in bioinformatics and the gene-environment relationship. It has major and growing presences in China and India. And when Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004, the country's government asked HSPH to help bring the country in line with EU environmental regulations; that endeavor grew into a permanent institute that offers educational courses and conferences. Bloom says something even more profound than public-health education happens there: the place brings together people whose paths would never cross otherwise. "Cyprus is one of the few places that people from every country in the Middle East will go to," he says. "In three years, 3,000 people from the Mediterranean-Middle East region have come through."

Bloom says this points to the potential for public health, as a field, to surmount differences through a focus on common problems. This also happens at HSPH itself, where more than a third of students come from outside the United States—up from 22 percent when he arrived. That, in turn, has necessitated increasing financial aid. "The largest contingent is from China," he notes. "We have 10 students here from Nigeria this year. We have an important role in training leadership, but many of those students require a full ride, or close to it."

The school went from offering financial aid to 32 percent of its students in 1999 to 61 percent today, and the average financial-aid package now covers 45 percent of a student's costs, up from just 6 percent in 1999. Still, says Bloom, "It's not anywhere near where it should be."

That will be one item on the to-do list for his successor. Another will be Allston. "It is not formally decided that the School of Public Health will be an anchor tenant" of the new

campus, says Bloom, "but people have been talking that way for the last six years." It would be a welcome change for a faculty currently spread among more than 30 buildings—and for the student body as well. "If you come here at 10 o'clock at night," he says, "you'll see students with their computers sitting in the cafeteria because there's no other place for them to congregate."

During those six years, the faculty has had ample time to ponder how it might benefit from closer proximity to other Harvard schools—business, education, law, and government, for instance. Bloom foresees collaborations on health policy, the economics of health, environmental law, and the role of health in early-childhood education: "We see ourselves as a connector between a presumably heavily science-oriented place in Allston and the rest of the University."

Bloom, the Jacobson professor of public health (soon to be University Distinguished Service Professor), will continue to teach and conduct research in his lab, which focuses on the immune system's response to tuberculosis and mechanisms of vaccine delivery (see page 38). And he hopes to see a renaissance at the Harvard Initiative for Global Health (HIGH), which has been working to generate new momentum since its founding director, Christopher Murray, left for the University of Washington in 2007. Bloom envisions a focus on educational activities—

"Every country in the world needs people who understand health systems"—that complement HSPH efforts, such as its work with the federal PEPFAR program (the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief), through which HSPH partners have opened 23 testing labs in Nigeria alone and trained 18,000 health professionals in Botswana, Tanzania, and Nigeria. Those workers have, in turn, treated 123,000 AIDS patients and distributed anti-retroviral drugs to 78,000 people in the same three countries. This work, more applied than academic science, "worries the hell out of the University," Bloom says, "but my view is—this is the biggest threat to the health of the world since the 1918 flu epidemic. If you want to be a great school of public health, you have to deal with the great public-health problems in the world."



Barry Bloom



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