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Global Health redefines 'collaboration'

By **Marsha Rule**

News & Community Relations

The UW Department of Global Health is stretching the boundaries of academia and redefining what "interdisciplinary collaboration" means. And, it's inviting every academic discipline to be involved in helping to improve the world's health.

Last week, the department issued a campuswide request for proposals (RFP) to identify, stimulate and nurture the development of additional new or emerging interdisciplinary initiatives and centers that link research, education/training/mentoring and service to reduce health disparities.

"The question now is how can we push beyond the current limits and bring together new sets of perspectives and ideas," said Dr. Judith Wasserheit, vice chair of the department.

To foster new ideas, the department is gathering proposals for two to five initiatives and two to four centers and offering seed money (up to \$150,000 over three years for initiatives and up to \$750,000 over five years for a center) and other support. **Concept papers are due June 30** and funding will begin by April 2009.

The department, a joint venture of the School of Medicine and the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, was launched with a full-time chair, vice chair and administrator in January 2007 through major support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the state of Washington, and the UW. Its mission is to "close the gap between the world's 1 billion people who experience relatively good health and the 5 billion who experience much lower levels of health."

"The goals of the department are to address the causes of, and provide solutions for, disparities in health around the globe," said Dr. King Holmes, the William H. Foege endowed chair of the department. Since the department's inception, its leaders have looked beyond the six schools of health science (medicine, public health, nursing, social work, pharmacy and dentistry) to expand the scope of global health to all 17 schools and colleges at the University.

Teaming up for solutions

"Emerging infectious diseases, drug resistance, economic disparities, global climate change and world conflicts transcend national boundaries," said Wasserheit. "Solutions to these challenges require interdisciplinary, holistic approaches that link research, education and training and the implementation of effective services and programs."

The department is pioneering a new spirit of collaboration at the University.

Last year, in the fourth year of the worldwide Global Social Entrepreneurship Competition, run by the Michael G. Foster School of Business, the school teamed up with Global Health to add two awards for projects addressing the social good of improved health.

From a competition of 80 teams from 14 countries, the Global Health First Prize went to a team from the UW and Harvard University for Help for Malaria, a plan to provide free rapid diagnostic tests and sell inexpensive drug regimens in Burkina Faso.

"We're looking for projects that will have a financial and social return on investment," said Debra Glassman, faculty director of the Global Business Center in the School of Business. "We're looking for projects that can be sustainable in developing countries."

The department also worked with a local chapter of Engineers Without Borders on an international conference, "Sustainable Engineering & Global Health," held on campus.

One of the panels was on how to assess the health outcomes of a humanitarian project, such as installing modified stove and water treatment systems.

"Most of the world doesn't have decent infrastructure. People will be sicker if they don't have clean water, a place to go to the bathroom without cross contamination, decent housing and decent food," said Susan Bolton, a UW faculty mentor for Engineers Without Borders.

Global health learning opportunities can be found just about anywhere. Randall Kyes, research professor in psychology, is head of the Division of International programs at the Washington National Primate Research Center. He conducts collaborative field courses and research on primates in a number of countries, including Indonesia, Nepal, China, Bangladesh, Thailand, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mexico.

"The Department of Global Health offers unique opportunities for students to become involved in field training and research through our existing international programs," Kyes said. "We engage in a variety of primate-related field studies involving population surveys, behavioral ecology, conservation biology, genetic assessment and bi-directional pathogen transmission between human and nonhuman primates. These areas of study are clearly relevant to anyone studying global health."

[enlarge](#)


Clare McLean

Drs. Stephen Gloyd, Judith Wasserheit and King Holmes, who lead the UW Department of Global Health, want students, faculty and staff across the University to join together to create an epicenter for global health discovery, learning and service.

The School of Nursing has had a history of cultural interchanges and learning opportunities and now has faculty with joint appointments in nursing and global health. "We have study abroad programs in nursing and a seminar series called 'Bringing it Home' that helps students integrate what they've learned abroad," said Dean of Nursing Nancy Woods.

"Students review cultural beliefs about health and illness. They look at how high technology doesn't guarantee good health care; they look at the advantages of living in a place where they have a good chance of living a long and healthy life. The school also has the richness of the international students and visiting scholars who work with faculty. The School of Nursing offers and receives the richness of multicultural perspectives."

Early in the department's formation, Holmes and Wasserheit met with deans and leaders of the UW's 17 colleges and schools to determine where there were natural program alliances. They found that almost every college and school had programs that were relevant to the goals of global health, including including language courses, student exchange programs, as well as faculty conducting research and teaching throughout the world. Many of the programs operated departmentally, with little connection to each other.

The department has helped bring some of these disparate programs together and is now poised to strategically leverage existing efforts in global health with some new innovative projects.

RFP seeks initiatives

The department's new "Request for Proposals for Inter-School/ Departmental Initiatives, and Interdisciplinary Discovery, Learning and Service Centers," places high priority on applications that propose innovative, interdisciplinary approaches in one or more of three broad domains: Reduction of major disparities in health; implementation, delivery and scale-up of science; and sustainable, innovative programs that target better understanding or improvements in global health by addressing community-level factors (such as water, sanitation, housing and education) and/or global determinants of health (such as climate change, population, economic development and globalization and information management).

"We want to use the resources that we have to provide incentives for ideas and conversations between groups that previously have not been working together around global health, but have synergistic interests and skills," Wasserheit said.

Currently, the department includes five centers and institutes -- the Center for AIDS Research, Health Alliance International, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, the International Clinical Research Center, and the International Training and and Education Center on HIV -- which have raised projected annual funding that totals approximately \$120 million for 2008-2009 through federal and foundation grants and contracts to support the operation of their programs. Through the RFP, the department is seeking to provide seed funding for additional institutes and centers that will become self-sustaining through federal, philanthropic and other sources of support.

Copies of the RFP are available on the Department of Global Health Web site at <http://depts.washington.edu/deptgh/>.

The department is not only changing the way schools think about collaboration -- it has been a catalyst for a changing administrative infrastructure that is emerging at the UW.

Global Support Project

The Global Support Project, led by UW Associate Vice President/ Controller Ann Anderson, is a gateway for global health administrative resources across campus. The Global Support Project has taken a major role in coordinating and centralizing administrative, human resources, fiscal, risk management and other resources commonly associated with international projects (www.washington.edu/admin/finmgmt/globalsupport).

The creation of the Global Support Project is another demonstration of the UW's commitment to becoming a leading global university.

"I think one of the very exciting things that we can boast about here is that, at a leadership level, President Mark Emmert and Provost Phyllis Wise made a commitment to transforming the University of Washington into a premier global university -- a leader in global health and other related global issues," said Wasserheit. "To go through the self-examination and change process required to create the systems that are necessary to support outstanding global research, education and service -- that is huge!"

Global Health Resource Center

On campus, many global health activities are coordinated through the Global Health Resource Center, run by Daren Wade.

"The GHRC is essentially a clearinghouse of information for global health activities at the UW and coordinates global health exchange programs and events," Wade said. "We help students connect to opportunities to develop skills that will be beneficial in their future careers in global health."

The GHRC holds major speaker events, coordinates the Department of Global Health lecture series, conducts a film series called World Health Cinema, and hosts an international health conference every other year. Wade also hosts an international health seminar every quarter.

So how can students get more involved?

"Every single day there's a global health event on campus," said Anna Larsen, a sophomore who works as a student assistant to the Global Health Resource Center.

"Students can join the GHRC listserv to find out more, she said. To subscribe, go to <http://mailman1.u.washington.edu/mailman/listinfo/globalhealth>.

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