



אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון בנגב
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev



School of Public Health
Faculty of Health Sciences

A new school that is ready for today's world



"We're breaking down borders," Prof. Nadav Davidovitch M.D., Ph.D. says about BGU's newly created School of Public Health. "We've developed

all the ingredients over the past 20 years and now we're adding new ones to create the largest, most interdisciplinary and community-oriented school of public health in Israel and beyond."

After two years of strategic planning by the Faculty of Health Sciences bring together under one roof the graduate programs in public health, epidemiology, sociology of health, gerontology, health systems management, and emergency medicine. The result is the only school of public health in Israel that integrates all relevant disciplines for public health research and teaching, from epidemiology and biostatistics to sociology, anthropology, health economics, disaster management, public health ethics, health technology assessment, and more.

Prof. Davidovitch, former chair of the Department of Health Systems Management – a program shared by the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Guilford Glazer Faculty of Business and Management – was chosen to head the comprehensive new school. He is a public health physician and epidemiologist with a Ph.D. in sociology.

Davidovitch relishes the expanding vistas he sees for translating academic research



to global and community health needs. "We want excellence in research, but also in our social mission to connect science with policy," he says. "We're training students who'll be future public health leaders and healthcare professionals in Israel and abroad—people involved in their communities who also see the global picture. Our graduates will understand both local and global contexts and be prepared to operate within both."

The School offers graduate and doctoral degrees. Students from all health disciplines can now easily cross school boundaries to take courses of interest. Additional courses that are impractical for individual departments and programs to mount are planned. Courses already in place are big data, advanced mixed methodologies (quantitative and qualitative) and grant writing.

Additional innovative learning will include courses that incorporate online teaching in partnership with a growing roster of universities, including the University of Michigan, Drexel University, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the University of Toronto. A joint Ph.D. program in global public health with Drexel and Yale's School of Public Health is under development. And, internship and faculty exchange programs are already active with the University of Michigan and Drexel, among others.

Global meets local

An integrated school of public health "takes us in both directions—global and local," Davidovitch says. "Global health issues are in all our backyards. We can't deal with problems like the Zika virus and influenza pandemic just in one place. We need to understand and address them at both local and global levels. Issues like food and nutrition are local but they're also influenced by global forces. Preparing for climate change and refugees is high on the agenda for many places. We have such grave discrepancies between countries that coordination is critical."



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At the same, Davidovitch says, “we’re very much attuned to the needs of our community—the Negev. You can’t ‘copy and paste’ universal solutions. We can learn a lot from the experience of other countries, but must address the local context: the barriers, the roots of inequalities, the incentives you can give to promote a program in each place.” The new school’s interdisciplinary nature aligns with how public health professionals must deal with today’s major challenges. “We can go from cutting-edge genetic research to anthropology to epidemiology to health economics. To deal with resistance to influenza vaccine, for example, we must analyze stakeholder perceptions, bring in data, perform qualitative as well as quantitative research, and connect with policy makers.”

Having a significant impact on public health policy is intrinsic to the School’s mission. Accordingly, strategic



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partnerships are being strengthened with organizations including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institutes of Health, the World Health Organization, American and European public health organizations, and of course, Israel’s Ministry of Health and the various health funds.

The School brings together full-time academic faculty with clinical and adjunct instructors from the field. Many come to their new roles with close connections to major professional and government institutions. Davidovitch, for example, is chair of the Association of Public Health Physicians in the Israeli Medical Association and a member of the executive committee of the European

Public Health Association. Other faculty members have held senior positions in the Israel Ministry of Health. Another partner is the Negev Now Coalition, a group of seven Jewish North American federations supporting the Negev. The Coalition collaborates on a course called Healthy Place-Making, which challenges students to engage with communities in planning physical activity and sources of sustainable food, and are fun to live in.

Students also work with non-governmental organizations in Jewish and Bedouin communities in Beer-Sheva, Dimona, Ofakim, Rahat, and beyond “to bridge between academic research and impact on the community.” A major goal of Davidovitch’s research is to reduce health inequalities in the



Negev, especially among minorities and immigrant populations. He looks forward to the advances that further cross-disciplinary collaboration will foster.

BGU's new School of Public Health also collaborates closely with Soroka, Barzilai and Assuta University Medical Centers, the Advanced Technologies Park, a variety of BGU academic departments, and its Medical School for International Health. A graduate program in English focusing on global health will expand the global health summer course.

The future perspective

Along with an ambitious vision for the future, two years of groundwork have enabled the School's planners to forge a set of bylaws to determine how it will operate. "We're already doing many of the things we've planned," Davidovitch says, "but now we want to do them in interdisciplinary ways. At this point we're thinking about the new faculty we want to recruit, people who can see the global picture within the different disciplines." Recruiting more students interested in global health, health promotion and

health policy is also a high priority. To help grow the international component, courses will be taught in English. Another plan is to expand current programs that award a combined Ph.D. and M.D. degree.

"This is an exciting moment. Everybody is very enthusiastic," Davidovitch says. "We know that we are stronger together. The new School meets all our faculty's goals—to do cutting-edge scientific research, help shape public health policy and improve the quality of life of people in this community and around the world."



The School offers the following degree programs, including Masters and PhD:



Public Health



Sociology
of Health



Gerontology



Emergency
Medicine



Epidemiology



Health
Systems
Management

and special combined MD-MPH and MD-PhD degrees.

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