In conversation with: Elizabeth Bradley, college master with a global reach

Yale UniversityYale University

Elizabeth Bradley started her career on the faculty at Yale in 1996 and currently serves in a variety of roles at the University, including professor of public health, faculty director for the Global Health Initiative and the Global Health Leadership Institute, and master of Branford College.

Her research focuses on strengthening health systems and has contributed important findings about organizational change and quality of care within the hospital, nursing home, and hospice settings. She has been involved with several international projects including research in China, Ethiopia, Liberia, South Africa, and the United Kingdom.

Bradley spoke recently about her work on campus and around the world, and the many other items on her “to-do” list.

You wear a lot of hats at Yale. What inspires you to reach in so many directions?

I am inspired by the opportunities at Yale. The exceptional energy and talent of the faculty and students provide us with endless opportunities to truly make a difference in the health and well-being of our society. My role at Branford College is also very inspiring. Being part of students’ transition from adolescence to young adulthood is humbling. We have all been there, and to be able to contribute to their growth, hopefully in positive ways, is quite a life-giving experience for me and my family.

What drew you to the field of global health?

I was approached by the leaders of the Clinton Foundation to accompany them on a trip to Ethiopia. Traveling to Ethiopia wasn’t really on my “to do” list at the time, but after my first trip there in 2006 a whole new world opened to me. Because my first global health project involved improving hospital management and studying how to achieve higher quality of care, it hit a sweet spot for me. I felt that, despite the poverty and challenges in the country, I had skills that could be useful. I didn’t realize how important finance, quality improvement, and leadership could be to the success of global health programs. I was also drawn to the professional colleagues I met and the friendships that developed through my travel and work under challenging circumstances. The work feels meaningful, and once I saw Ethiopia, I could not stop thinking about it.

How did you become involved with the Global Health Initiative and the Global Health Leadership Institute?

Over the past several years, student and faculty enthusiasm for global health motivated the University's commitment to foster educational innovation and catalyze interdisciplinary efforts in the field. My involvement was natural as I was already working on interdisciplinary work in public health and was willing to think strategically — other universities were not focusing on leadership in global health; Yale has the capacity and strategic mission that fit with this approach.

Our initial concept was to launch the Global Health Leadership Institute (GHLI). GHLI's key component is our annual conference, which brings together country delegates, faculty, and students to address specific health-related problems a county is facing. The goal is to strengthen the country delegates' leadership capacity while, together, we develop concrete work plans to address targeted health issues. GHLI also works on the ground in a variety of countries, including Ethiopia, Ghana, the U.K., China, and Rwanda.

The GHLI is one element of the broader university-wide Global Health Initiative (GHI), which is led by a faculty committee spanning many disciplines in Yale College and at the graduate and professional schools. GHI plays an important role in fostering educational, research, and program collaborations across schools and departments. A global health educational symposium that GHI will host in March is one of these efforts. The symposium will work on defining a vision for global health education in the future at Yale.

> "Although still a young program, the Global Health Initiative has made significant contributions to expanding opportunities for global health education and scholarship. It is central to unifying the University through new educational opportunities for our students and fostering interdisciplinary research collaboration for our faculty. As a result, Yale is at the forefront of educating the next generation of leadership in global health and improving the health and well being of people around the world. I hope we will continue to build our global health work across the University."
> — **President-elect Peter Salovey**

What makes Yale's global health programs different from those of other universities?

Three key aspects distinguish Yale's global health programs. First, we have an organizing structure that has a central coordination mechanism through GHI while allowing for many different initiatives to flourish. Functioning as a support to GHI, the GHLI leads efforts that may emerge through all kinds of disciplines and departments — economics, political science, global affairs, public health, nursing, medicine, and other fields.

Second, in our educational programs we try to foster both disciplinary focus and interdisciplinary work at the same time. Students can become experts in their selected major or department and also link with an interdisciplinary set of courses

and experiences — either through the Global Health Fellows program at Yale College or the various concentrations and certificates for graduate and professional students. We seek the best of both worlds (disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary breadth), and I think we are starting to get there.

The third distinguishing characteristic of global health at Yale is the focus on leadership development. We try to have students ask the big questions, identify leverage points for positive change, and think about the larger ethical questions that are at the root of human development. Thinking strategically, exhibiting effective and just leadership capacity in complex situations – these are skills we hope students who study global health at Yale master.

What has been the biggest accomplishment to date for the GHI/GHLI?

One of the biggest has been the creation of nearly 30 new courses in global health at Yale. Several undergraduate tracks that involve global health have emerged within the traditional undergraduate majors, and many connections have been forged across the campus including graduate, undergraduate, and professional schools. In addition, 70 internships were funded through GHI, and more than 80 faculty are actively working in global health related areas. Getting such engagement across the University is our biggest accomplishment.

Since the GHLI began, how has the outlook or direction of global health care at Yale changed, if at all?

I think students and faculty better understand how our work can really be translated into policy and practice if we can make the relationships with key leaders in the other countries in which we work. Establishing the relationships is so fundamental, and this is what GHLI does.

How do you see Yale guiding the field of global health in the next decade and beyond?

I hope we will be a flagship university in demonstrating how we can both use our mastery within disciplines and at the same time work across disciplinary lines as a more unified, comprehensive force to address human health in the globe. Many university efforts get splintered and create redundancies, and I hope Yale will avoid those pitfalls.

What inspired you to take on the role of master of Branford College?

I started to teach undergraduates in 2007; from there I became interested in working more deeply with undergraduates at Yale. The master’s role is a unique experience, and every day, I learn something new or do something I have never done before in this role. The opportunity to foster a community where people can grow and learn from each other in a safe and fun way was too good to pass up.

What’s the greatest reward for you — both personally and professionally — from your work at Yale?

Personally, it is of course the relationships and friends. I have grown a lot and learned so much from others here. Professionally, I have been very rewarded by being able to combine research with applied practice and policy. This happens often in my work, and it is a gift to be at the nexus of research and practice.

You are also writing a book; is there anything left on your "to do" list?

As a mom, I of course would like to see my children grow into confident, wise and happy adults. And, I would like to visit Zanzibar!

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