

New Undergraduate Major Tackles Public Health Issues

By Kim-Mai Cutler

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If the number of senior citizens in the United States is expected to double in 30 years, how will national health care systems handle it?

And how will the world finance expensive drugs to treat AIDS in developing countries?

Tough questions for a physician or a biologist alone to answer.

But undergraduates can try their hand at these issues now that the School of Public Health is offering a bachelor's degree program for the first time in four decades.

Given the green light in June, the new major provides course content in both the life sciences and social sciences to take a critical look at health issues.

"What is really resonating with people, especially from the pure sciences, is that public health is bringing applications of scientific discoveries to the people," said undergraduate



advisor Anatole Soyka. "Real world problems are going on."

The major's requirements sport a broad range of choices. Core classes include biology, mathematics and social sciences, and students can

specialize in areas such as biostatistics, epidemiology, and health policy and management. Despite little advertising for the degree, 35 to 40 inquiries have already poured in for the new program—even a prospective student from Ethiopia asked Soyka about the degree.

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New Division of Community Health and Human Development Planned

Faculty from four programs will be joining together over the 2003–04 academic year to form a new division at the School of Public Health: the Division of Community Health and Human Development. The new division will create an alliance of the Joint Medical Program, the Health and Social Behavior Program, the Maternal and Child Health Program, and the Public Health Nutrition Program, in an effort to foster truly interdisciplinary teaching and research on human health and disease.

The division will have an executive council comprising the directors of the participating programs—Professor Sylvia Guendelman (Maternal and Child Health Program), Professor Zak Sabry (Public Health Nutrition

Program), Professor Bill Satariano (Health and Social Behavior Program), and Professor John Swartzberg (Joint Medical Program). Associate Dean Tom Boyce will take the first rotation as chair of the division.

"It is our hope that the division will spawn new courses on human development and public health and on the intersections of biology, behavior, and environment in the genesis of disease and the protection of health," says Boyce.

A central tenet of the division's philosophy will be that most disorders of human health are products of complex interactive processes involving biologically grounded susceptibilities, individual and collective human behavior, and

aspects of the physical and social environments. A further principle will be that such interactions are best understood within a *developmental* framework, examining interchanges among biology, behavior, and environment across the entire course of the human lifespan. The division's teaching and research will also emphasize health promotion and the prevention of disease.

"The formation of the new division will mark Berkeley's School of Public Health as among the first to take seriously the challenge of an ecological model of health," says Boyce. "One more example of 'The Berkeley Difference'!" 