On Campus

Wafaa El-Sadr Leads Columbia World Projects

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El-Sadr visits an ICAP-supported health facility in western Kenya. (Georgina Goodwin)

Wafaa El-Sadr ’91PH, a Columbia public-health expert who is widely credited with having transformed HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs in resource-challenged communities, has been named director of Columbia World Projects, an initiative that mobilizes researchers to collaborate with governments, nonprofit organizations, and businesses to address pressing global issues.

A professor of epidemiology and medicine as well as a University Professor, which is the highest rank Columbia bestows upon its faculty, El-Sadr is the founding director of ICAP, a global health center based at the Mailman School of Public Health. ICAP’s

2,400 staff members partner with health authorities and other collaborators in low- and middle-income countries to incorporate the latest public-health research into HIV/AIDS programs. They have been instrumental in turning the tide against the disease in many parts of Africa, Latin America, and Asia over the past two decades. ICAP staffers have also frequently pivoted to help underserved communities fight other diseases, including Ebola and, more recently, COVID-19.

President Lee C. Bollinger, in announcing El-Sadr's appointment, said that her experience in "bridging academic and real-world divides in the service of solving human problems" positions her well to direct Columbia World Projects. The initiative, which was previously led by journalism dean emeritus Nicholas Lemann, has provided legal, financial, fundraising, and logistical support to faculty members pursuing ambitious projects in areas like sustainable energy, election security, sanitation, and maternal health.

"Wafaa is a gifted epidemiologist and public-health leader whose expertise and values align exactly with the University's vision for Columbia World Projects," said Bollinger, who notes that El-Sadr will continue to direct ICAP. "We could not be more pleased that she has agreed to take on this new role."

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