

New School to Confront Global Challenges

By Debra Bradley Ruder '80

Brown's planned School of International and Public Affairs will advance the University's commitment to research and teaching on critical global issues.

As the world faces daunting challenges, from poverty to cyberthreats to natural disasters, Brown is establishing a new School of International and Public Affairs to expand innovative research and teaching on pressing economic, political, social and policy issues. The move fortifies Brown's commitment to advancing knowledge and preparing the next generation of global policymakers and leaders.

The Corporation of Brown University approved the school's creation in May 2024, launching a yearlong strategic planning process to formalize its academic, operating and leadership structures before its planned opening in July 2025.

Supported by faculty from wide-ranging academic fields, the school will educate both undergraduate and graduate students. It will build on the success of Brown's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, which promotes a just and peaceful world through social science research, teaching and outreach. Watson will transition into the new school, and its faculty, staff and scholarly activity will form the school's bedrock.

"The School of International and Public Affairs will provide graduates with deep knowledge of policy and highly developed analytical skills that will enable them to serve their communities, the nation and the world," said University President Christina H. Paxson. "Integrating study and practice is critical to confronting policy and social issues during a time of momentous global challenge."

Watson — founded in the 1980s as the Cold War waned and later named for former IBM president and U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union Thomas J. Watson Jr. '37 — has expanded significantly over the past decade as part of Brown's strategic priority to invest in scholarship that supports peaceful, just and prosperous societies, noted Provost Francis J. Doyle III.

"Brown has become a leader in international and public affairs, and the new school will create a nexus for the campus-wide pursuit of global knowledge, educational leadership and informed solutions to complex societal problems," he said.

Edward Steinfeld, the outgoing Howard R. Swearer Director of the Watson Institute, stressed the need to continue growing the University's impact on domestic and global affairs, bolstered by its distinctive culture of collaboration. Establishing a dedicated school, he said, "allows us to scale up what we've begun [at Watson] and broaden our engagement, including with the incredibly talented network of Brown alumni who are engaged in policymaking in the United States and around the world."

Enhancing Teaching and Research

Under planning for years, the School of International and Public Affairs will join Brown's four existing schools: the Warren Alpert Medical School and the schools of engineering, public health and professional studies.

Creating the school will enable Brown to sustain its thriving undergraduate concentration in international and public affairs and strengthen its already-robust master of public affairs program, University leaders say. Among other benefits, it will allow Brown to consider new master's-level certificates and offer more policy-focused training for doctoral students.

Brown's newest school is expected to enhance undergraduate education by expanding and deepening access to scholars, scholarship and practitioners in international and public affairs. It will support hands-on learning experiences to help students develop professional skills through policy simulations, research labs, field work and other activities, as well as increase opportunities to interact with diplomats, journalists, elected government officials and others in related careers.

For Brown faculty, the school will be a home for scholars specializing in national and global

topics including the costs of war, inequality, human rights and humanitarian challenges, cybersecurity, and the politics of climate change.

"The school will promote innovative scholarship that crosses a wide array of fields of study through joint appointments with academic departments, fellows programs, research centers and academic initiatives," according to Doyle. In addition, it will position Brown to continue attracting top-tier faculty and research funding.

Wendy Schiller, the Alison S. Ressler Professor of Political Science, is serving as interim Watson director while Brown searches for the school's inaugural dean.

"Launching the new school," Schiller said, "is an opportunity to shine a light on Brown's excellence in international and public affairs, consider areas where we will grow, and amplify our voice in the policy world."

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— Professor Wendy Schiller

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THE WATSON INSTITUTE, LOCATED ON THAYER STREET, HAS EXPANDED IN SIZE AND SCOPE IN RECENT YEARS AND WILL TRANSFORM INTO BROWN'S SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS IN 2025.