

A portrait of Lisa Rosen-Metsch, GS's New Dean. She is a woman with long dark hair, wearing glasses and a blue and purple patterned top. She is smiling and sitting in a wooden chair in a lecture hall. The background shows rows of empty wooden chairs and desks.

**GS's New Dean
Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90
Motivates
and Inspires**



Danielle Gorshein '15 is not ordinarily shy. But she was more than a little nervous the first time she met Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90, the new Dean of the School of General Studies.

By Alexander Gelfand
Photos by Sara Fox

And that's understandable. When Gorshein encountered her in 2014, Rosen-Metsch was chair of the Department of Sociomedical Sciences at the Mailman School of Public Health. She was also an internationally renowned scholar whose research on HIV treatment and prevention had shaped federal policy on HIV/AIDS interventions, and changed the way health providers approached HIV testing and counseling.

"She has been a national leader in developing an understanding of how to better meet the needs of vulnerable populations, specifically people with HIV who are also drug users and abusers, in order to contain the epidemic, meet the health needs of that group, and work towards prevention," says Linda Fried, Dean of the Mailman School. And her influence has been felt in other areas, as well. In collaboration with the School of Social Work, for example, Rosen-Metsch established a program on criminal justice and public health that has helped open a national dialogue on incarceration as a public health challenge. As David Madigan, outgoing Executive Vice President and Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, puts it: "Lisa has the kind of scholarly chops that people respect."

Gorshein, meanwhile, was just entering her senior year in the joint degree program offered by GS and the Jewish Theological Seminary—the same joint program that Rosen-Metsch completed a quarter century earlier. And she was looking for a job; something that would satisfy both the requirements of her senior fellowship at JTS and her interest in healthcare.

Yet the thing that Gorshein remembers most vividly from their initial meeting was not how intimidating Rosen-Metsch was, but how warm and helpful she turned out to be.

"I was just astounded by how friendly and welcoming she was," Gorshein recalls. "Lisa took me under her wing and has served as a mentor to me ever since."

It's not unusual for world-class scholars to earn plaudits for their professional accomplishments, and Rosen-Metsch has garnered plenty. What may be less common, however, is for colleagues and students to hail them for being exceptionally decent, caring, and compassionate—qualities that are central to Rosen-Metsch's leadership style.

"She brings a high degree of altruism and commitment, and that matters to people—it motivates and inspires everybody," says Fried, who credits Rosen-Metsch with transforming her department at Mailman not only by strengthening the curriculum, but also by improving student and faculty mentoring, recruiting a new and highly diverse group of young scholars, and creating "the conditions in which everyone could flourish."

Rosen-Metsch herself emphasizes that her decades of research and teaching have all been aimed at making the world a better place—a mission whose origins she traces to her days as an undergraduate at GS. "My time as a Columbia student was truly transformative," she says, echoing a sentiment that she heard from every one of the GS students who interviewed her during the selection process.

Rosen-Metsch herself emphasizes that her decades of research and teaching have all been aimed at making the world a better place—a mission whose origins she traces to her days as an undergraduate at GS.



Rosen-Metsch grew up in Oceanside, Long Island, in a family of teachers—her father taught social studies in Canarsie, her mother science in Far Rockaway. She chose to attend GS because of its unique joint program with JTS, which allowed her to study sociology at Columbia and modern Jewish studies at List College. The program introduced her to social science research and brought her into contact with a number of prominent scholars, some of whom were affiliated with the department she would eventually chair at Mailman. (It also brought her into contact with her husband, Benjamin Metsch, '89.) And it afforded her the opportunity to work with AIDS researchers at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center during the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic—an experience that changed her life.

While researching barriers to HIV testing among gay men, Rosen-Metsch had the opportunity to see how concepts that she was learning about in the classroom, such as the impact of stigma and discrimination, played out in the real world. And being in New York City, a center of AIDS activism, opened her eyes to the power of social advocacy in public health, as she witnessed a grass-roots movement help turn HIV/AIDS from a fatal disease into a chronic one by driving key changes in government policy.

Inspired, Rosen-Metsch devoted her career to understanding the social determinants that drive inequities in healthcare, and developing interventions to address them.

Toward that end, she demonstrated the value of conducting on-site HIV testing at substance abuse programs—work that led the Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Services Administration and the National Institute on Drug Abuse to develop an HIV/AIDS awareness toolkit for substance use treatment providers. She proved that providing costly risk-reduction counseling to everyone who receives HIV testing does not, in fact, reduce sexually transmitted infections; and established that resources could be better spent getting people who were recently diagnosed with HIV into care.

Most recently, she spearheaded a project to develop a mobile HIV clinic targeted at substance abusers in low-income neighborhoods in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where the HIV/AIDS epidemic is largely fueled by injection drug use. “It’s a way of meeting people where they are,” says Rosen-Metsch, who points out that substance abusers are unlikely to seek help at traditional clinics. (Gorshein, who majored in Hispanic studies, helped translate interviews with study participants from Spanish into English, and ultimately co-authored a journal article on the project.)

Given her already full plate, Rosen-Metsch was not looking for a new job. But when Peter Awn announced that he would be stepping down as Dean, Rosen-Metsch approached Madigan to see if she could help with the transition. “As a GS alumna who loves this school, I went to see David to see if I could be on the search committee,” she says. Over the course of their conversation, however, Madigan began to wonder if Rosen-Metsch might be interested in throwing her own hat into the ring.

She was. And when the search committee that she had initially envisioned joining eventually interviewed her, it was obvious

that she had ended up on the right side of the table.

“She just blew us away,” says Madigan. “It was clear that we had the perfect person right in front of us.”

As a GS alumna, Rosen-Metsch understands where the School is headed and what it needs from its next Dean—from continuing to expand its joint programs and strengthening alumni relations, to addressing the housing and financial needs of current and future students. “My main job is to ensure that students for generations to come will continue to have the opportunity to engage in the education and experiences that GS has to offer,” she says.

But she also has a unique ability to connect with the GS student body—an ability that is rooted both in her intimate knowledge of the School, and in her fundamental warmth and humanity.

“She’d be a fabulous Dean at any school,” says Madigan. But because the student body at GS is so diverse, he adds, it’s especially important to have someone “who can connect with all kinds of people at all different stages of life—and Lisa can do that.”

Gorshein, who now works at a research firm here in New York City, agrees, and suggests that Rosen-Metsch will help build an even stronger sense of social cohesion on campus.

“Lisa’s warmth, and her consistent commitment to connecting people, will be the thread that weaves the fabric of the GS community together,” she says.

For her part, Rosen-Metsch is looking forward to advancing the mission of the college that has had such a powerful impact on her own life and career.

“There really is nothing like the School,” she says. “In and of itself, by its very nature, it is changing the world.”

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**David Madigan,
Executive Vice President
for Arts and Sciences**