Spencer Frankl, dean of Boston University’s Goldman School, dies

Was longest-serving dean of any dental school in the U.S.

Spencer Frankl, dean of the Goldman School of Dental Medicine at Boston University for more than 30 years and the longest-serving dean of any dental school in the country, died peacefully after a battle with cancer. Frankl led the school and its faculty to a position of prominence among the nation’s schools of dental medicine.

“There are very few academic leaders who will have the impact on an institution that Spencer Frankl had on the Goldman School of Dental Medicine at Boston University,” says BU President Robert A. Brown. “Spencer’s leadership is visible in the high level of quality of instruction, clinical care, community service, and research programs of the school. He leaves a lasting legacy at Boston University.”

Jeffrey W. Hutter, the senior associate dean at BUGSDM, says Frankl was a special person who touched many lives.

“He will be truly missed,” says Hutter. “He was an inspiration to us all and always brought out the best in each of us. I have told our students who have expressed their condolences to me that Dean Frankl will live on within each of them, and thus they should strive to do as well as they can in their studies and their chosen profession.”

Over four decades, Frankl, who had announced in July that he would step down as of July 1, 2008, expanded BUGSDM’s degree programs, adding a seven-year D.M.D. program for undergraduates, and oversaw curriculum revisions to keep the school at the forefront of research, education, and technology use. In 2000, GSDM became one of six dental schools in the United States to replace traditional textbooks and classroom materials with digital texts.

He also helped sharpen the school’s focus on experiential learning and community involvement, partnering with Boston Medical Center and national organizations to offer dental care to the city’s low-income and underserved populations. A grant from the National Institutes of Health helped fund the Northeast Center for Research to Evaluate and Eliminate Dental Disparities (CREDD) at GSDM, and funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation established the New England Dental Access Project to recruit and train minority dentists.

Frankl graduated from Temple University School of Dentistry in 1958 and completed a postdoctoral residency in pediatric dentistry at the Children’s Hospital Medical Center in Washington, D.C., in 1959. In 1964 he was recruited from Tufts by the school’s founding dean, Henry M. Goldman, to create the department of pediatric dentistry, joining the faculty as an associate professor. He was promoted to full professor and held various administrative titles within the school, including assistant dean for dental health affairs and associate dean. He also became the chief of the pediatric dental service at Harvard University-affiliated Beth Israel Hospital.

As GSDM associate dean, Frankl initiated, planned, and developed the D.M.D. program, which began in 1972. He secured a $1.1 million federal construction grant to enlarge the school’s physical plant to accommodate the program. In 1976, he was appointed dean of graduate dental affairs and in 1977 he was installed as dean and deputy director of Boston University Medical Center.

During his 50 years as dean, the school’s physical space more than doubled, and there have been numerous facility upgrades, including the 2005 renovation of the pediatric patient treatment center.