Harvard to Focus on Bioethics and Technology

BY KATIE ZEZIMA

BOSTON, Nov. 29—Harvard Law School announced Tuesday the creation of a center to study legal issues raised by advances in genetics, health care and technology.

The center will study and hold symposiums on issues like genetic manipulation, patient treatment and end-of-life care, said Einer Elhauge, who will be its faculty director.

"It's clear these problems aren't going to go away," Professor Elhauge said, "and with new technology we face bigger issues in the future that require thoughtful interdisciplinary legal analysis."

The center is financed by a $10 million gift from the Carrell and Milton Petrie Foundation and Joseph H. Plimly, a partner with the Manhattan law firm Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, and a 1968 graduate of Harvard Law.

It will be fully operational by fall 2006 and will have five full-time faculty members. It will also draw faculty members from other departments and schools at Harvard, including the philosophy department and School of Medicine, keeping in line with its broad focus.

Such studies in technology and bioethics are becoming a trend in legal education.

"A lot of these topics are reorienting the imagination of the next generation of law students," said Arturo Caplan, director of the center for bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania, which offers a joint degree program with its law school. Dr. Kaplan said interest in the subject has been generated by myriad high-profile issues where the law is murky, including stem cell research and the liability of drug makers.

"There's just a lot of things you can develop with the law and talk about what ought to be the case where there is no settled common law or legislature yet," he said.

A number of other law schools have opened centers for health care law, including Stanford, St. Louis University, the University of Houston and Seton Hall University. The University of Minnesota offers a joint degree in law and the biological sciences, and the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University offers courses on the law and science. Tufts University in Philadelphia is focusing its new law school, slated to open next year, solely on technology and health issues.

Harvard officials say they expect the center to enroll students as well as eight fellows, people who are either pursuing graduate work or mid-career professionals. Each fellow will be paid $40,000 annually.