

STUDENTS WITHOUT BORDERS

Emerson College President Lee Pelton poises his students for art, travel and human understanding.

By Jared Bowen
Portrait by Adam DeTour

Lee Pelton has worldly plans for his students. Within just four years, the Emerson College president aims to create a “borderless campus”; his students will have their pick of international campuses from Switzerland to Sydney. “There are those who want to build walls, and there are those of us who want to build bridges,” he says. Always unassuming (and always dapper of dress), the man governs like a poet. Spend just a moment with Pelton, who has presided over Emerson for seven years, and you’ll wonder why all college presidents can’t come fully kitted out with a doctorate in English literature from Harvard University. With the internationally focused ArtsEmerson and the newly reopened Emerson Colonial Theatre, he’s ensured arts remain at the core of both the campus and the city. By next fall, he’ll have transformed the school’s expanse on Boylston Street into something akin to a Parisian boulevard (there are designs to widen the sidewalks and populate them with trees, kiosks, planters and benches). Also topping his agenda: getting students to put down their screens long enough to look up in the world for some “human understanding.” He carries that goodness from his downtown office to his seats on many of the city’s top boards. “I love Boston,” he says. “I want to do everything I can do to help the city grow and thrive and develop.”