

RUTGERS-NEWARK FORMS CENTER TO ASSIST STATE'S NONPROFITS

Will offer courses, research, consulting

Peggy McGlone, March 16, 2005

In an era of increased government oversight and decreased public confidence, nonprofit corporation leaders have a new resource at Rutgers University-Newark.

At a conference yesterday, the school announced the formation of an academic center that will offer courses, research and consulting services to help nonprofits weather these challenging times. Housed in the School of Business, the new Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Leadership is intended to strengthen, study and support the state's active nonprofit sector, which includes more than 25,000 health care, educational, arts and social service agencies, as well as foundations that fund their work.

Central to the center's research will be a biannual Leadership Index, a partnership with The Star-Ledger that will measure the confidence of the heads of the state's nonprofit organizations, said James Abruzzo, who co-directs the center with Alex Plinio. Taking a regular pulse of the nonprofit will offer valuable insight into its challenges.

"The Index will measure and track the confidence of the leaders of the sector to better understand what's on (their) minds," Abruzzo said. The inaugural survey will be conducted in the spring.

In the fall, the center will offer its first graduate course, part of the Rutgers M.B.A. curriculum, and it will begin classes for a certificate for mid-career professionals, Abruzzo said.

In addition, the center will convene lectures dealing with issues that affect nonprofits, from increased government oversight to decreased government funding.

Yesterday's inaugural event offered a sample of these various activities. Attended by about 75 nonprofit executives, board members and Rutgers faculty and students, the program included a snapshot of New Jersey's nonprofits, a discussion of the challenges organizations face and a keynote lecture on "Emotional Intelligence and Leadership" by best-selling author Daniel Goleman ("Emotional Intelligence").

Researcher Mary Ellen Capek offered an overview of the New Jersey nonprofit landscape, which includes more than 22,500 nonprofit corporations and 2,345 foundations. New Jersey ranks 10th in the nation in the number of nonprofits, and its foundations rank third in the amount of funds they distribute -- some \$1.6 billion in 2002.

The sector is rapidly growing, Capek said, and more than one-fourth of its leaders are expected to retire by 2010. "What we have is a huge number of organizations with a huge pile of money and big shift in leadership about to happen," she said.

Deborah Hechinger, president and CEO of Boardsource, provided an overview of the national trend toward accountability within the nonprofit sector.

Hechinger, whose Washington, D.C.-based organization works to improve the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations, discussed such topics as proper board governance, CEO salaries, financial reporting and federal initiatives to regulate nonprofits.

Finally, Goleman outlined his research into emotional intelligence and how qualities such as self-awareness, empathy, motivation and social skills are vital to good leadership.

"Dr. Goleman believes leadership can be trained, can be developed, and that is central to our philosophy at the center," said Abruzzo in his introduction of Goleman, who is co-director of a program based at Rutgers' School of Applied and Professional Psychology in Piscataway.

The center is supported by Rutgers and by grants from the New Jersey-based Victoria, Prudential and Geraldine R. Dodge foundations.

"I've been in the nonprofit sector for 35 years and there are few opportunities for leadership development, for learning and nurturing," said Catherine McFarland, executive officer of the Victoria Foundation. "The Victoria Foundation sees this as a catalyst for leadership development in the communities we serve."