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A NEW ERA UNFOLDS FOR RUTGERS

by Carla Capizzi

New leadership at the very top, expansions of Rutgers University’s academic missions, new academic directions, and the task of integrating two very different universities: These are the challenges facing Rutgers in the 2012-2013 academic year. A lot has happened since the end of spring semester, laying the groundwork for a new Rutgers, with impacts to faculty, staff and students alike here in Newark and across the entire university.

Rutgers University’s 20th president, Robert L. Barchi, assumed office Sept. 1 and has announced administrative restructuring that includes creating a provost’s position (chief academic officer) at Rutgers-Newark as well as at Rutgers’ other campuses. The university also is beginning a national search for chancellors in Newark and New Brunswick.

Much of the pending administrative change relates to the integration into Rutgers of most of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, the result of state legislation passed during the summer. The New Jersey Medical and Health Sciences Education Restructuring Act will restore medical education to Rutgers, expand the University’s research capabilities, academic scope, operating costs, and the size of its student population.

The legislation gives R-N a new campus Advisory Board “that is intended to be an advocate for our campus,” according to Interim Chancellor Philip Yeagle. Among other duties, this board will propose a campus operating budget each year to the Rutgers Board of

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R-N and UMDNJ: Working Together

Rutgers-Newark and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) have a long history of joint partnerships, which likely will increase when UMDNJ becomes a part of Rutgers University in 2013. In addition to many research collaborations among R-N and UMDNJ faculty, the following are a few notable endeavors.

Joint PhD Program in Urban Systems
Sponsored jointly by Rutgers-Newark, UMDNJ, and the New Jersey Institute of Technology, the program examines the complex interrelationships within urban environments, including the social, cultural, political, economic, geographic, organizational, and bioenvironmental factors that influence urban populations.

Bachelor of Science in Medical Imaging Sciences
The Rutgers-Newark/UMDNJ program offers undergraduate students a unique combination of a liberal arts education
Social Media and The Brain
The Neuroscience Behind The Hype
by Kathleen Brunet Eagan

A lot is being written about the effects of social media on the brain, how it may be changing the neural circuitry, shortening attention spans and reducing deep thinking and creativity. A group of researchers at Rutgers-Newark, however, point out that as of date there is little hard science to prove how social media may be changing the brain’s neural networks. What is known is that social media is now firmly part of our society and we have the choice to control it or not.

The key point is whether one is in the driver’s seat or is being pulled along by the technology, notes Psychology Professor Mauricio Delgado. “For some people it’s a plus. It all depends on the urge and your ability to control it or shut it off,” he says. Board of Governors Professor Paula Tallal, co-director of the Center for Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience (CMBN), and a pioneer researcher in the science of brain plasticity, adds that social media now is a critical part of training people to function well in society. “Social media is training us for the environment we live in now,” she says. She further notes that it also is a great tool for building communities where none existed before. One example is when students in a large lecture class start texting one another after class and end up forming smaller groups that can interact about the course material and other interests. Breaking people into small groups makes them feel connected, she notes.

The question people need to ask themselves, the researchers say, is whether social media is a benefit or hindrance in their lives. “If it’s starting to cause problems in your daily life…you have to consider whether it’s become a compulsive behavior,” says Delgado.

CMBN Professor Joao Morrell, who studies the neural circuitry that drives motivation, points out that in cases where social media has become a severe addiction that behavior most likely is masking a deeper issue. “It’s something people turn to but it’s not the problem itself,” she says. For those for whom it has become an addiction, it could be an escape from such underlying issues as depression, anxiety or other mental health disorders.

The reasons why social media can potentially become “addictive” appear to be twofold. First, it’s a social reinforcer, says Delgado. The basic principle of social reinforcement is that people are more likely to perform a specific behavior if it is directly followed by something pleasurable, such as a “Like” on Facebook. Second, just as it has been shown with video games, social reinforcers, such as receiving positive comments might be firing up the reward circuitry in the brain. One of the reward circuit’s natural functions is to provide a pleasurable feeling in response to outcomes of behaviors that are necessary for sustaining life, such as eating, to encourage repetition of that behavior.

Addictions can develop when the pursuit of rewards becomes compulsive or obsessive. The good news with social media, says Delgado, is that it’s a behavioral issue and one most people can attempt to control. “It’s not a drug dependency.”

“Just like any behavioral issue, like I drink too much soda, I shop too much, be aware of it and control it. Turn off the alert and vibrate on your phone. Have times when you are not connected to a screen and enjoy the environment and people around you,” says Delgado.

For those who find they are unable to control the social media urge, Morrell’s strong recommendation is to turn to a mental health professional who can help with regulating that behavior. “Sometimes you just need some tools and behavioral strategies to get the most out of life.”
Ronald K. Chen  
by Ferlanda Fox Nixon

Most people know Ronald K. Chen as vice dean, clinical professor of law, and Judge Leonard I. Garth Scholar at the Rutgers School of Law—Newark where he teaches courses on contracts, federal courts, mass media law, and church-state relations. Others are aware of his service for four years as the Public Advocate of New Jersey where he provided advocacy for a number of constituencies and represented the public interest in various legal proceedings. But there is a whole other world of individuals that do not associate Chen with teaching law courses or handling law-related matters. For this group, when they think of Ron Chen, they think of rowing.

Rowing (or crew) is one of the oldest competitions of the Olympics. Like all other sports, it takes skill, intense training, and physical stamina. It is a team sport that requires tremendous group coordination and effort and a strong work ethic. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Chen would be attracted to the sport. He has been an active participant in rowing since his prep school days at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire and his devotion to rowing continued throughout his undergraduate years at Dartmouth College through his years as a Rutgers law student and up to the present.

Chen currently serves as a member of the Board of Directors of the United States Rowing Association, umpire and Masters Commission member of Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d’Aviron (International Rowing Federation) or FISA, and umpire of the home races on the Raritan River of Rutgers University’s rowing team.

“I’ve been serving as a Rutgers umpire for nearly 30 years,” comments Chen. “It’s my way of giving back to the university. I’ll gladly referee races on the Passaic River whenever Rutgers-Newark establishes its own rowing team,” Chen jokes.

Chen brought to Rutgers his sense of teamwork honed over the years from crew. He is the ultimate Rutgers cheerleader and exudes tremendous school spirit. He graduated from Rutgers School of Law—Newark in 1983 and has been a member of the Rutgers law school faculty since 1987. He has served as the associate dean for academic affairs and the acting director of the Minority Student Program. With a passion and commitment for public service law, Chen’s focus areas include voters’ rights, affordable housing, childhood lead poisoning prevention, deinstitutionalization of persons with developmental disabilities, and affordable energy for ratepayers.

From law and rowing Chen has ventured into dance ... sort of. While serving as Public Advocate he was introduced to the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company, which "fuse[s] the dynamic freedom of American modern dance with the grace and splendor of Asian art.” Chen now is a member of the company’s Board of Directors.

Bonita Veysey  
by Ferlanda Fox Nixon

A professor at the School of Criminal Justice since 1998, Dr. Bonita Veysey’s research has covered mental health and criminal justice system interactions, female offenders, adult consequences of childhood abuse, and violence against women. In recent years, however, she has turned her attention to how people are able to shed negative identities and live productive lives, especially ex-offenders.

For many individuals with a criminal record, life does not come to a screeching halt after an arrest. But for most ex-offenders, particularly those of color, the doors to certain opportunities are forever closed to them.

“We really don’t give ex-offenders a second chance,” comments Veysey. “We certainly aren’t comfortable with them being teachers in our schools, babysitting our kids or being our bosses.” That being the case, what should be done to ensure a person remains a law-abiding citizen to position him or herself for maximum self-actualization?

According to Veysey, the goal is to create as early as possible an environment in which the likelihood of criminal behavior is significantly diminished. Results of her research on identity and identity transformation suggests that people are more likely to avoid unlawful conduct when they associate with groups that foster positive self-identities and disassociate from groups that engender negative self-perceptions. This is true, when the association is unconscious as well as a conscious one.

“People unconsciously associate with groups of which they are members, whether the affiliation is based on race, gender, health status, disability, or age,” Veysey shares. “The higher the affinity to the group, the more likely an individual will take on that group’s stereotypes, both negative and positive.”

For young, African-American males, for example, this phenomenon can be damaging, according to Veysey, since society often perceives many of them to be criminals. Consequently, when young, Black men implicitly self-identify with those stereotypes, such negative messaging can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Continually introducing positive messaging and role models, starting as early as the pre-school and elementary school ages, can reduce children’s connections to negative group attributes. Reinforcing positive identities can lead to higher self-esteem and successful adult lives.

The same holds true for ex-offenders. The more they embrace positive roles, the more likely they are to be successful after release. Working with ex-offenders, Veysey documents their stories of redemption to understand how they manage to stay on the straight and narrow path and not otherwise falter.

“Some embrace their criminal backgrounds and incarcerations as legitimate fields of expertise to inspire others, while others try to distance themselves and forget their pasts,” notes Veysey.

With 600,000 ex-offenders re-entering society every year, Veysey’s research can help reduce tremendous burdens on the criminal justice system, ensure safer communities, and promote purpose-filled lives.
Dr. William L. Holzemer, dean of the College of Nursing at Rutgers-Newark, is the recipient of Japan’s Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon, for his outstanding contributions to the development of nursing science and the education of nursing professionals in Japan. The Order of the Rising Sun was the first national decoration awarded by the Japanese government. Established in 1875 by Emperor Meiji of Japan, the Order is given to individuals who have demonstrated exemplary service to the community and contributions to U.S.-Japanese relations.

The first recipients of the Chancellor’s Excellence Awards were honored this fall for their “exceptional contributions to teaching, research or service” at Rutgers-Newark. The Chancellor’s Excellence Awards were created by Interim Chancellor Philip Yeagle to “celebrate the many accomplishments of our faculty, staff and students.” In announcing creation of the awards, he noted, “The Newark campus of Rutgers University is the home of excellence in teaching, excellence in research and excellence in service, second to none in all of Rutgers University.” Recipients receive a small grant supporting their work.

Dr. Frank H. Jordan, Board of Governors Professor of Chemistry, Chemistry department, received the Excellence in Research award. As part of the honor, Jordan gave a public talk at a reception in November. Jordan is considered the world’s foremost expert on the reaction mechanisms of the vitamin thiamine, or B1, used by the body to break down sugars in the diet.

Dr. Paula Tallal, director of the Rutgers Center for Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience, is one of four inventors recognized by the Hall of Fame in 2012. Tallal is considered the world’s foremost expert on language and literacy challenges. Tallal, co-director of the Rutgers Center for Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience, is one of four inventors recognized by the Hall of Fame in 2012.

Dr. William L. Holzemer

Kudos

The New Jersey Inventors Hall of Fame named Rutgers Board of Governors Professor of Neuroscience Dr. Paula Tallal an “Inventor of the Year” for her development of FastForward. FastForward is a series of software programs that strengthens the neural networks for language development in individuals and has helped to bring positive change to more than three million people with language and literacy challenges. Tallal, co-director of the Rutgers Center for Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience, is one of four inventors recognized by the Hall of Fame in 2012.

In September 2012, Mark Griffin, director of Rutgers-Newark’s Athletic and Recreation Department, received the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) Josten’s Male Administrator of the Year award. Presented annually, the award acknowledges an administrator from an ECAC member institution or conference for his or her meritorious service to the ECAC. Griffin has been an active member of the ECAC since his Hall-of-Fame days as a student-athlete at Montclair State University.

Dr. Paul Sternberger, associate professor of art history, Arts, Culture and Media Department, was awarded the excellence in Teaching award, while Jennifer Arena, director of the Writing Program at Rutgers-Newark, was recognized with the Excellence in Service award. Sternberger was lauded for his innovative approach to teaching, curriculum design and mentoring, as well as his dedication. Arena was described as a “phenomenal educator, inspiring leader and an outstanding visionary for the Writing Program.”

Working Toward a Healthier Newark

The Rutgers College of Nursing (CON) is partnering with FOCUS Hispanic Center for Community Development, in a carefully coordinated collaboration of health care professionals from different specialties working together to improve the health of residents in Newark.

According to Dr. Jeffrey Xavong, project director, CON, the project involves an interprofessional Rutgers team from the School of Social Work, the College of Pharmacy, and the International Institute for Peace — working together at the new FOCUS-Rutgers Wellness Center, 449 Broad St.

In addition to providing direct primary and preventive care, “Our goal is to serve as a training ground where health profession students can see first-hand how various disciplines can work together, and to recognize their contributions to patient and family care,” he says. “With the complex and changing nature of the health care system, it’s vital that all professionals work together in a high-quality, comprehensive and cost-effective manner.”

The project is funded primarily through a three-year, $1.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration’s Bureau of Health Profession’s Division of Nursing, which is providing 79 percent of the total budget. Other operating costs are financed through a $200,000 grant from the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey. A series of murals throughout the facility were painted by Newark schoolchildren, under the direction of a Mason Gross School of the Arts graduate student, thanks to a $4,000 Nicholson Foundation micro-grant.

It Takes A Community

We often talk about our Rutgers-Newark “community,” but sometimes it’s good to be reminded about what a community really is. Hurricane Sandy gave us just such a reminder.

While most of our faculty, staff and students were at home watching and waiting out the storm, some critical members of the Rutgers-Newark community — specifically our buildings and grounds, campus safety, housing and dining, and IT staff — were on campus. They were monitoring storm damage to buildings, keeping critical operations going, including back-up generators for servers and research labs, and keeping student residents safe. After the storm had passed, they worked to bring our campus back to a normal state of operations and prepare for the restart of classes on Nov 5.

We don’t have the space to list the names of these good citizens of our community, but we do have space to say Thank You!

Rutgers employees Juan Torres, Edward McCubbin, Peter Kibui, Chad Bryant and William Daleaux at work after Hurricane Sandy.
What’s Going On?

Rutgers University in Newark is a multi-faceted place, reflected year after year by the many and varied events presented and offered to the university community and the general public. Here are but a few highlights for the coming months. For more events and detailed information visit www.newark.rutgers.edu/events.

Feb. 12, 5:30 p.m.
Paul Robeson Gallery
WRITERS AT NEWARK
Rutgers-Newark has become a hot spot for contemporary writers to read from their works and meet fellow and aspiring writers, thanks to the outstanding MFA in Creative Writing program and its dynamic director, Prof. Jayne Anne Philips. Philips will introduce Pulitzer-prize winning novelist Jonathan Franzen and novelist Amy Hempel for the February installment of this year-long program of readings.

Feb. 16, 9:30 a.m.–4 p.m.
Paul Robeson Campus Center
MARION THOMPSON WRIGHT LECTURE SERIES
The annual Marion Thompson Wright Lecture at Rutgers-Newark has a long tradition of engaging the university community and the public in contemporary social and cultural issues, against the backdrop of African-American history. This year’s event honors the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, through an exploration of the ways in which emancipation immediately impacted enslaved African Americans, how the enslaved worked to free themselves, and emancipation’s legacy through the present day.

March 6, 9 a.m.–4 p.m.
Paul Robeson Campus Center
SYMPOSIUM ON WOMEN AND SCIENCE
The Women’s and Gender Studies program offers a spring program with two areas of emphasis: issues of hiring and promotion for women faculty in the sciences, and intersections of gender, sexuality and race in scientific research.

April 4, 5–7 p.m.
Paul Robeson Campus Center
EVENING OF MUSIC & ART
A spring Evening of Music & Art will feature a one-hour concert with the celebrated jazz pianist Stanley Cowell and his trio; followed by a meet-the-artists reception in the Paul Robeson Gallery, and a chance to view the exhibition “There’s No Place Like Home” with the curator.

April 13, 8:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m.
CAMPUSWIDE OPEN HOUSE
The annual Campuswide Open House is a chance for prospective students, friends and families to learn about the many undergraduate and graduate programs available at Rutgers-Newark. Faculty, staff, and current students will be on hand with demonstrations, workshops and tours.

April 17–21
Bradley Hall Theatre
MOLIERE’S TARTUFFE
Moliere’s classic comedy Tartuffe (The Impostor) has been delighting theater-goers for no less than five centuries. Rutgers and NJIT students will make it their own for the Rutgers-NJIT Theatre Program’s final production of the academic year.

A New Era… from cover page

Governors, as well as propose Rutgers-Newark capital projects and bonding to the Board. Beyond New Jersey, the campus’s growing reputation continues to be recognized nationally. U.S. News & World Report’s latest rankings place Rutgers-Newark in the top tier of Best National Universities, at #115 of 281 institutions. For the 15th year in a row, Rutgers in Newark is ranked first in the nation in ethnic diversity among national universities.

Washington Monthly magazine’s August 2012 edition featured R-N among national universities for “Best Bang for the Buck,” a category that shows “which schools get their students over the finish line at a reasonable price.” It also ranks R-N #9 in the U.S. among national universities for “social mobility,” a measure that Washington Monthly uses to “give colleges credit for enrolling many low-income students and helping them earn degrees.”

One of Yeagle’s goals is to “more aggressively seek out those college-ready students for whom we have so much to offer,” while “maintaining the diversity that gives our campus its character.” Toward that end, a new marketing campaign is getting underway, created by a new campus marketing committee, and some campus facilities are being upgraded and modernized, including science labs in Olson and Boyden halls. In addition, the Office of Admissions has been moved into Engelhard Hall, a modern, inviting and centrally located facility.

As part of the campus’s focus on graduate studies, a graduate center has been created in Conklin Hall that clusters the Division of Global Affairs and the American Studies Program next to the Graduate School. What’s more, Rutgers-Newark’s former law and justice center at 15 Washington Street will be, over three years, converted to graduate student housing. The renovated building will also include classrooms and some administrative offices.
More than 250 students are attending R-N courtesy of one of the federal GI Bills, which provide up to 36 months of education benefits for both undergraduate- and graduate-level studies. Enrollment has almost doubled since 2008, when Rutgers began a university-wide initiative to recruit more veterans and provide them with services tailored to their unique needs. The veteran population includes active duty veterans — both those who served stateside and those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan — as well as National Guard members.

As part of the university’s efforts to serve student veterans, each campus has a veteran services coordinator; at R-N it is Gerald Massenburg, associate chancellor for student life. “The number of veterans enrolled at our university has grown, which is a testament to the enhanced delivery of service from the university on behalf of these brave men and women,” he states. Rutgers-Newark is a learning experience for both the vets and their classmates, faculty and staff. Moreover, the student veterans add a new dimension to the overall cultural richness of a campus that already is diverse in terms of ethnicity and religion. “Veterans are welcomed and well-received on campus, by classmates and professors,” says U.S. Army active duty veteran Michele Terreri, who is president of the Rutgers Student Veterans Organization. Many veterans are older, and many are married with children, so the large number of non-traditional students on campus makes them feel at home, she observes. What’s more, Rutgers-Newark is not a party school, which also fits in with many of the veterans’ lifestyles. “Less than .001% of the population sign that contract to give their life and wear the uniform, and everyone does it for a different reason. But I think having someone who has either served or is serving in class is pretty awesome,” states student Lisa Panilla. Lisa was so inspired by the veterans on campus that she herself enlisted in the National Guard.

Alex Neeley, an active duty Marine Corps vet, is earning his MBA at the Rutgers Business School, where 100 veterans are enrolled. He believes that his background helps him bring a “different perspective” to class discussions. He likes the fact that his MBA classmates, like Neeley himself, tend to be older, more serious about their degree and more focused, with real-world experience, all of which make him feel very comfortable. Terreri and Neeley believe that professors appreciate their maturity and focus in the classroom, an observation echoed by Psychology Professor Paul Boxer, who has taught veterans in several classes. “I can vouch for their engagement in coursework, their commitment to doing well, and their work ethic as indicated by attendance and performance.”