

The Star-Ledger

THE VOICE OF NEW JERSEY

Parents get a chance to be college students for a day

Tuesday, April 01, 2008

BY ROBERT E. WILLIAMS III
Star-Ledger Staff

While visiting his daughter at Bard College on Parents Day, Steven Schragis ran into several other parents reminiscing about their days in college, and found the target audience for his latest program idea.

“We were all saying the same thing,” said Schragis, a Woodstock, N.Y., resident who previously worked as a director for the Learning Annex. “I would rather be going to college than paying for it.”

Recognizing the interest among the baby-boomer generation in “learning for learning’s sake,” Schragis and his business partner, John Galvin, created “One Day University,” a daylong program of college lectures given by popular and highly acclaimed professors from top universities around the nation.

Professors from Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Columbia, Tufts, Brown and other top schools each teach a session to groups of more than 200 people, many 50 and older, mostly college graduates who are retired, or considering retirement in the near future.

The program, which costs about \$250, hosts sessions primarily in the Northeast, offering one-day sessions at colleges in Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey and Maryland.

In these classes, students do not have to worry about tests, grades or homework. They are banned by the program organizers, who encourage a learning environment where students focus only on the experience of interacting with professors and other students on current topics in an academic environment -- for the first time in many years for several of the participants.

At this weekend’s program, students were offered a variety

of courses, including how to listen to classical music, the impact of incarceration on democracy, interpreting art and how neuroscience is used in the judicial system.

“(The program) appeals to people when they get to a point in life when they know it’s a good thing to keep their brains stimulated,” said Schragis, whose sessions take place on the weekends.

Schragis and Galvin started their program more than two years ago, organizing a small group of professors to come to a one-day session in Westchester County. The professors were chosen based on popularity among students on their campuses, and their reputation on their campuses and in their fields of study.

Schragis said he didn’t know then how successful his first session would be.

“No one had really heard of us,” said Schragis of their first One Day University session. “We didn’t know if we would run a second event. But it worked really well.”

Morristown is one of the more popular areas for the program, Schragis said.

One of the students who attended last weekend was Rosalind Doctor of Plainfield.

“I have been retired for three years and was seriously thinking about attending some university courses, but I really couldn’t find what I was looking for,” said Doctor, a former psychologist who has attended several of the sessions.

Doctor, who serves on the board of directors for a couple of nonprofit organizations, said the courses have kept her updated on issues in various subjects, including politics, philosophy, sociology, science and the arts.

“It certainly provides me with a perspective, which enables me to at least ask the right questions,” Doctor said.

