

## Rutgers Professor Named Inaugural Winner of Baldrige Foundation Award for Leadership Excellence

Brent Ruben, School of Communication and Information Distinguished Professor and executive director of the Center for Organizational Leadership, is recipient of education sector award

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Brent Ruben, Distinguished Professor, Rutgers School of Communication and Information, and executive director of the Center for Organizational Leadership at Rutgers.

When the [Baldrige Foundation](#) decided to extend its model for organizational performance excellence in business to health care and education in the 1990s, Brent Ruben led the effort to adapt the renowned organizational assessment, planning and improvement framework to universities and colleges.

Ruben, Distinguished Professor in the [School of Communication and Information](#) at Rutgers University-New Brunswick and executive director of the [Center for Organizational Leadership at Rutgers](#), knew universities could benefit from adopting some of the best business practices. But he also knew the Baldrige language and approach would need to be tailored to higher education for academic professionals to see the value and put them into practice.

"I had all along thought the higher education criteria should be a bit different," said Ruben, author of *Excellence in Higher Education Guide: A Framework for the Design, Assessment, and Continuous Improvement of Institutions, Departments, and Programs*.

"For the Baldrige framework to be adopted and used by leading research universities, I believed it was important that it address all elements of the mission of these colleges and universities – teaching and learning, but also research and service/outreach," Ruben said. "I knew it would also increase the value of the

approach if it aligned with the standards used by accrediting agencies. *Excellence in Higher Education* was created to meet these needs."

Ruben will be honored this month as one of the inaugural winners of the Baldrige Foundation Leadership Excellence Awards for his contributions to the education field. He will be the sole recipient of the first Baldrige award of its kind for the education sector on April 10 in Baltimore. The awards recognize outstanding leaders in all of the Baldrige award sectors: education, business (manufacturing, service, small business), non-profit, government, health care and cybersecurity.

The *Excellence in Higher Education* approach has been used at nearly 50 schools, departments and institutes at Rutgers, and at nearly the same number of universities nationwide, including University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Ruben, who has written extensively on applying the model to education, says higher education professionals can learn from the best business practices. "It doesn't mean we are a business in the same way but that we have organizational challenges in common and we can learn from the experience of business, health care, and other sectors," he said.

Working with Denis Hamilton – then vice president of process excellence for New Brunswick-based Johnson & Johnson and now a faculty member of the Rutgers Business School – Ruben gauged which business concepts and processes could be adapted to higher education. The benefits at Rutgers and beyond include enhanced methods for planning and innovative approaches to assessment. More idea sharing between the academic and services sectors of the university, and better communication between department chairs, unit leaders and employees, also emerged, Ruben said.

"Brent Ruben is one of those important academics who combines scholarly brilliance with a passion for making a real-world impact. He has spent a career refining what we now see as translational science in the area of leadership and organizational communication. And this has been a huge benefit to the School of Communication and Information, Rutgers University, and the community more broadly," said Jonathan Potter, dean of Rutgers School of Communication and Information. "I am delighted that the Baldrige Foundation is celebrating his value in this way."

Named after U.S. secretary of commerce Malcolm Baldrige, who served from 1981 until his death in 1987, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award program was established by the U.S. Congress in 1987 to promote U.S. corporate effectiveness. The model provides an organizational assessment process that combines scholarly concepts of organizational theory and behavior with successful organizational and leadership practices.

In addition to the Baldrige award ceremony in April, Ruben will be honored at a May 1 event at Rutgers celebrating the first-ever award cosponsored by Rutgers-New Brunswick chancellor Debasish Dutta and Barbara Lee, senior vice president for academic affairs.

"Professor Brent Ruben's innovative approaches to organizational excellence illustrate the kind of impactful research that our faculty are conducting every day," Dutta said. "His contributions to the higher education field have benefited universities and colleges across the nation."

P. George Benson, chair of the Baldrige Foundation, will also attend the Rutgers event celebrating the award. Benson served as dean of the Rutgers School of Business from 1993-1998. While at Rutgers, the business school was one of the early adopters of the *Excellence in Higher Education* assessment and planning framework. After leaving Rutgers, Benson became dean at the Terry College of Business at Georgia Tech, and more recently served as president of the College of Charleston.

"We at Rutgers are very proud of Brent's passion for working with departments, schools and universities to help them improve their effectiveness and to strengthen the skills of their leaders," said Barbara Lee, senior vice president for academic affairs. "Brent's award from the Baldrige Foundation is well deserved, and it is particularly appropriate that he is its first recipient."