SPERTUS INSTITUTES A NEW IDENTITY
Chicago organization reinforces its commitment to adult Jewish education and nonprofit leadership development with new identity:
Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership

Among upcoming programs highlighting leadership focus,
New York Times bestselling author Nate Silver to speak May 19

(January 28, 2013) In an organization-wide effort to sharpen its mission, Chicago’s Spertus Institute changes its name today to Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership. The new identity accentuates the nearly 90-year-old institution’s commitment to providing dynamic learning opportunities for adults. These opportunities are rooted in Jewish wisdom and culture and designed to enable both personal growth and the development of community leaders.

“At the heart of Spertus’ mission is a single core belief that has characterized the Jewish people for millennia. Simply stated, we believe that a learning community is a vibrant community. As a result, we strive to offer programming that is diverse, expansive, compelling, and inspiring,” said Spertus President and CEO Dr. Hal M. Lewis.

“Vibrant communities also require strong leaders, and today’s challenging times call for sophisticated professional options for nonprofit leaders to strengthen their skills,” he continued. “For this reason, at Spertus we are intensifying our efforts to be the place for leadership training and development in the nonprofit sector, on both the volunteer and professional level, within and beyond the Jewish community. We have laid the groundwork with our graduate and professional offerings and our spectacular public programs on topics of importance for today’s leaders.”

Spertus Institute currently offers accredited graduate-level degree programs in areas that are critical to the Jewish and broader communities: Jewish Studies programs that immerse students in diverse Jewish content, Jewish Professional Studies programs that enhance the contributions leaders bring to Jewish organizations, and Nonprofit Management programs that prepare students for leadership roles in organizations that serve community needs. While Spertus has long been recognized in these areas, new program initiatives have been fostered in recent years, responding to today’s needs. These include the Certificate in Jewish Leadership, a professional development program Spertus launched in partnership with Northwestern University in December 2011. The new program combines Jewish scholarship with leading ideas from the contemporary business world to enhance the effectiveness of Jewish leaders. A unique and essential aspect of the program is its focus on the mentoring of students by seasoned leaders—an important component that will be expanded in future offerings.

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In recent years Spertus has also expanded its Master of Arts in Jewish Professional Studies beyond Chicago, now serving students in Pittsburgh and Canada. Going forward, Spertus will introduce innovative academic concentrations to teach leadership to educators, youth workers, camp counselors, and early childhood professionals. Curricula are being developed for new programs in social entrepreneurship and lay leadership training, with announcements of new initiatives expected in the spring. Additional opportunities for internships and mentoring within current Spertus programs will further sharpen Spertus’ signature blend of theory and practice in nonprofit leadership education.

“The addition of the words ‘and Leadership’ following ‘Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning’ highlights our conviction that a vibrant Jewish community and a world-class city require first-rate education and training for organizational leaders. Spertus is educating and training executives and volunteer board members, as well as fundraisers, programming specialists, clergy, educators, and academics with the skills they need to transform nonprofit organizational life now and for generations to come,” added Lewis.

Along with offering new professional programming geared towards leadership development, Spertus has been enhancing its roster of public programming both at its South Loop location at 610 S. Michigan Avenue and in the Chicago suburbs. In conjunction with the new identity, it was announced today that New York Times bestselling author Nate Silver (The Signal and The Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail — But Some Don’t) will headline a Chicago speaking presentation at Spertus on May 19. With his appearance at Spertus, Silver joins an impressive line-up of speakers whose work inspires new thinking and offers real-world application, illustrating key aspects of Spertus programming across the board. Upcoming programs at Spertus include September 11th Victim Compensation Fund Director Kenneth Feinberg on March 10 and AHAVA North America CEO Elana Drell Szyfer on May 5. These programs follow other similarly high-level offerings, including an appearance by bestselling author Jonathan Safran Foer earlier this month.

Like the individuals in this public program series, participants in the Institute's leadership programs are utilizing their skills to foster meaningful advancements in their respective communities. These newly minted leaders include Tom Samuels, membership and program coordinator for Evanston’s Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation (Master of Arts in Jewish Professional Studies and Certificate in Jewish Leadership, 2012), and Brenda Palms-Barber, executive director of North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN)’s Sweet Beginnings job training program for formerly incarcerated individuals (Master of Science in Nonprofit Management, anticipated graduation, 2013).

“What’s happening in Jewish America is a renaissance. It’s inclusive, pluralistic, organic, and dynamic. The Spertus Master of Arts in Jewish Professional Studies degree is fantastic, because it informs the ways I interact with the community,” said Samuels.

Palms-Barber, under whose leadership the NLEN received a MacArthur Foundation Award for Creative and Effective Institutions and a 2012 Chicago Neighborhood Development Award, called the skills she has gained through the Spertus program critical to her work. “Nonprofit leaders today need the professionalism of a corporate CEO and the flexibility of an entrepreneur, but these skills need to be combined with a real understanding of the unique opportunities and challenges of the nonprofit sector. Spertus recognizes this and its Nonprofit Management program is designed to meet these needs.”

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The diverse list of local, national, and international nonprofit organizations served by Spertus Institute graduates and students includes the Alzheimer’s Association, Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema, Chicago Housing Authority, Illinois State Senate, Jewish Federation of Canada-UIA, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, Jewish National Fund, The Night Ministry, United Neighborhood Organization, and United Way, among many others.

For more information on Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership and its offerings, as well as to purchase tickets for any of the upcoming programs, visit spertus.edu or call 312.322.1773.

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Spertus offers dynamic learning opportunities, rooted in Jewish wisdom and culture and open to all. Graduate programs and workshops train future leaders and engage individuals in exploration of Jewish life. Public programs—including films, speakers, seminars, and concerts—take place at the Institute's Michigan Avenue facility, in the Chicago suburbs, and online. For more information, please visit spertus.edu.

The appearances by Kenneth Feinberg, Elana Drell Szyfer, and Nate Silver (as well as the recent appearance by Jonathan Safran Foer) are made possible with the support of the Harvey L. Miller Family Foundation and other generous donors.

Spertus Institute is a partner in serving the community, supported by the JUF/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago.