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Speakers challenge NYU students to become social entrepreneurs

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(U-WIRE) NEW YORK -- The link between social ideas and entrepreneurship is the only effective path to social change, a speaker said at an event that kicked off the Social Entrepreneurship speaker series at New York University's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service on Friday.

The series, "Social Entrepreneurship in the 21st Century," features a selection of activists and social entrepreneurs who have launched programs addressing challenging societal issues. Social entrepreneurship is the emerging concept of applying the skills and creativity typically associated with business strategies to solve broad social issues.

Bill Drayton, the founder of Ashoka, a global association of social entrepreneurs, spoke about the field in his address. Ashoka assists individuals in social changes in the environment, education, human rights and other areas of human need.

Drayton spoke about his organization and gave examples of different social entrepreneurs who have set up programs in various parts of the world. He also announced that one of Ashoka's members had just been awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for social entrepreneurship program earlier that day.

"I take that as a measure of the maturation of our field, when 25 years ago nobody had any idea what social entrepreneurship meant," Drayton said.

Drayton is also the founder of Youth Venture, which assists teams of young people in starting and leading their own social ventures. He also spoke about the "Be a Changemaker Challenge" organized by Youth Venture and the **Reynolds** Program, and invited all NYU undergraduate students to compete for grants of up to \$1,000 to launch their own social ventures.

"If you think there are more problems than solutions today you are probably right," Drayton said. "But if you teach the world and everyone in it to be a change-maker then you won't have to worry about these things."

The series will present a number of prominent social entrepreneurs through January 2007 from the public and professional sectors. Among these speakers will be Wendy Kopp, the founder and president of Teach for America, the corps of college graduates who commit two years to teach in cities around the country.

The event was organized by the **Catherine B. Reynolds** Program in Social Entrepreneurship, which was created last June with a \$10 million donation from the **Reynolds foundation**, a national philanthropic organization. The money was awarded in fellowships to 17 graduate students and in scholarships to nine undergraduates this year. The students who received the money have demonstrated both academic excellence and interest in social change, according to the **foundation** committee. The scholarships for \$20,000 and fellowships for \$25,000 go toward their final two years at the university.

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