



**Making Connections:** Among the events that UCWBG offered in the past year were the annual "Linking Professionals to Nonprofit Boards" (above) and a five-week session examining leadership, which appealed to alumnae including **Katherine Puffer, '03 (XP-72)**, (below, left) and **Belita Smith, '00 (XP-69)**, (below, right).



# Where Smart Women Meet

By Patricia Houlihan Photos by Dan Dry

A whole generation has passed since the 1970s, when a woman in an office was presumed to be a secretary. Now Chicago GSB alumnae hold senior positions at firms around the world. So why are they still drawn to the University of Chicago Women's Business Group 25 years after it was created?

"We continue to feel the need to band together to help each other," offered **Teresa Seipel, '82**, the 2005 president of UCWBG. "What we do differently than other alumni organizations is move toward that intersection of your personal and professional life a little bit more."

Men are welcome at UCWBG events, and Seipel emphasized this point. "This is *not* a women-only group," she said. "UCWBG is an organization *for* women, not necessarily *of* women."

Women entering the workforce as professionals in the 1970s encountered great obstacles. Just getting hired could be an issue if a woman had young children. Many women were offered entry-level positions regardless of their experience or education. But some women with an eye on the executive suite were armed with an MBA from Chicago GSB. **Mary Cipriano, '77**, was a manager at Abbott Laboratories. **Agnes Roach, AM '71, MBA '80**, was an internal consultant for Inland Steel. They weren't trying to be trailblazers, but they were.

The workplace was changing in many ways then. The concept of networking was becoming popular, but there was no alumni club just for GSB graduates. So in 1980, a handful of alumnae decided to create an organization just for themselves. On November 13, about 100 women gathered for the first time as UCWBG at the University Club in downtown Chicago.

"There was the joy of discovering someone else who was like you—who had goals, was trying to improve herself, and was forging ahead where it was not common for women to be," Cipriano said. Roach agreed. "There weren't that many women in professional positions within any given company, where they could easily keep in touch," she said.

Another 50 alumnae who didn't attend the first meeting paid membership dues, and the group was launched, meeting quarterly. The popularity of UCWBG did not surprise the organizers. "At that point in our lives, we never expected to fail at anything," Cipriano said with a laugh.

## Feature Women in Business

From the beginning, Roach said, “We wanted to have a professional image. We were not a social group, and not a ladies’ group. We were not going to have programs on how to raise your children.” Instead, monthly presentations focused on consulting, finance, and marketing. Many of the speakers were men.

Successful alumnae and top female executives in Chicago were an especially big draw. “It was great. They were role models, and it gave us the inspiration to continue on the road we were going,” Cipriano said. Many shared more than their professional stories. “They were completely candid about what didn’t work for them, how they felt at the time, how they

### Connecting to the Network

There are different avenues for making connections to women in business through Chicago GSB.

The **University of Chicago Women’s Business Group (UCWBG)** offers a variety of opportunities for alumni and students to network with high-powered professionals and connect with Chicago GSB and Chicago-based executives and organizations. Events range from the annual “Linking Professionals to Nonprofit Boards” to monthly informal lunches and panel discussions that feature successful business leaders. This year, UCWBG commemorates its 25th anniversary with the Women’s Summit (see “UCWBG Special Events,” page 45).

To get involved with students, contact **Chicago Women in Business (CWIB)**. Active at the Hyde Park campus since hosting the first annual conference in 1986, the group seeks to help members develop professional and personal skills and build relationships with corporate recruiters, faculty, alumni, and other female students. For information on the student group, visit [gsbwww.uchicago.edu/student/cwib/](http://gsbwww.uchicago.edu/student/cwib/).

An alumnae group that spun off CWIB in 2002 offers additional options for those who want to network. The goal of **Chicago Women in Business Alumnae Network (CWIBAN)** is to help Chicago GSB recruit and admit female students, provide a global communication network for alumnae, and promote women in business worldwide through community service. To find out more, visit [ChicagoGSB.edu/alumni/clubs/specialint/cwiban/](http://ChicagoGSB.edu/alumni/clubs/specialint/cwiban/).—P.H.

became resilient enough to continue the battle,” said **Kathy Flanagan, ’82**, who served as UCWBG president in 2004.

With Roach and **JoAnn Hinz, ’79**, who served as inaugural co-chairs, the group found a variety of ways to reach out to members. Roach created the first alumni newsletter, and later a second newsletter that focused purely on job openings. UCWBG also established the first alumni roundtables, hosting panel discussions on specific topics.

By the 1990s, even though women had become a notable presence in corporate America, alumnae continued to turn to UCWBG for support. “In the 1990s, there was acceptance of our expertise and contribution,” recalled Flanagan. “But being there in large numbers and professional-track positions was not going to ensure that women were advanced to senior positions.”

Additionally, alumnae were starting to talk about themselves as working mothers, so a mothers group was formed. Members also wanted to network in small groups, so some suburban special interest groups have been formed. But a woman’s unique experience in the workplace dominated discussions. “When it comes to being heard in a meeting, having your influence be felt, having your kind of leadership be recognized, women still encounter those challenges,” Flanagan said.

To help women polish their leadership skills, UCWBG expanded its own board of directors and let members organize events. “It allows you to take some risks in a leadership role that you may not get at work because it’s not part of your job,” said **Christine Cantarino, ’92**. “And I think you’re willing to take more of a risk because you’re just a volunteer.”

Helping run UCWBG’s “Linking Professionals to Nonprofit Boards” event led to a job change for **Gail Luxenberg-Gruen, AB ’79, MBA ’00**. “It was the first time I had served on a board, and I learned the give-and-take involved,” said Luxenberg-Gruen, who served as vice president of programs. “It was more of a management and time commitment than fundraising. And I loved working with these intelligent women and picking up their skill sets.” Having board experience helped Luxenberg-Gruen land her current position of vice president at American Friends of the Hebrew University. “If I had never served on a board and understood how it worked from that point of view, I would never have been considered for this job,” she said.

Her involvement with UCWBG also gave her access to such successful women as Penny Pritzker, who was keynote speaker at the nonprofit boards event in 2002. Being able to talk to the top women in business is enormously gratifying for members, Flanagan said. “We’re really focused on building

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—Kathy Flanagan

connections in leadership,” she said. “It’s our greatest contribution—establishing a community where you can connect with senior women in the highest positions in the country and others in the business community for career advancement.”

Membership ranges across all ages and all levels of experience. “We have women who’ve been in the workplace for 20 years, women at the midpoint of their careers, and women who’ve just come out of school and bring that ‘sky’s the limit’ enthusiasm,” Flanagan said. “It gives real power to the network.” It also gives members a venue to get real-world advice from outside their own firms. “You can talk to mentors and say, ‘I have to lay off several employees tomorrow. How do I deal with this?’” said Cantarino.

It’s also the reason UCWBG now offers a wide range of events, from informal lunches in downtown Chicago to an annual tea. The members are unabashed that the group hosts such traditionally female-oriented events. But, they emphasize, events are always open to men, and some do attend, even though the events focus on a woman’s experience. “At a resume workshop, we talked about how you handle coming into and out of the workplace,” said Seipel.

Membership in UCWBG is growing, with 325 members, and given the prevalence of women’s groups, she said, it shows the organization is successfully meeting a need. At the Women’s Summit at the Mid-America Club October 6, members will look ahead, with topics ranging from how to exercise political clout to exploring free market potential for minority groups through microfinance. “The Women’s Summit is our most ambitious event ever,” said **Barbara Flom, JD ’86, MBA ’02**, incoming president for 2006. “We want UCWBG to be visible and relevant to the entire Chicago business community, and we invite everyone to discuss some of the defining issues of the next 25 years.”

Of course, there will be time for networking, too, said Seipel. “We’re the organization that makes connections easy.” ■

### UCWBG Special Events

The University of Chicago Women’s Business Group will host a pair of events this fall that will offer alumni unique opportunities:

**October 6, 2005**

**Women’s Summit**

3:30–9 p.m.

**Mid-America Club**

**200 East Randolph Street, Chicago**

**Kateryna Yushchenko, ’86**, first lady of Ukraine, will be the featured speaker at the UCWBG’s annual business meeting. “The purpose is to bring together our members, as well as women throughout the city, to talk about where we’re headed as women leaders,” said **Teresa Seipel, ’82**, president of UCWBG. The summit will begin with breakout sessions on such topics as entrepreneurship and microfinancing, positions of power, and effective mentoring and creating vision, and will be followed by cocktails, dinner, and the keynote speech.

**November 17, 2005**

**Linking Professionals to Nonprofit Boards**

7–9 p.m.

**Mid-America Club**

**200 East Randolph Street, Chicago**

For the fifth year, UCWBG will bring together representatives from a wide range of organizations around Chicago, allowing alumni to match their individual skills and interests with more than 65 nonprofit groups and learn about nonprofit board opportunities. The keynote speaker will be Pamela Strobel, executive vice president and chief administrative officer of Exelon. Breakout sessions, networking, and hors d’oeuvres will be part of the event, with a question-and-answer session to follow Strobel’s presentation.—P.H.

**ON THE WEB** For information on the University of Chicago Women’s Business Group, visit [UCWBG.org](http://UCWBG.org).