

The power of collective generosity

Fifty years on, the Medical Records Administration Class of 1974 continues to make an impact.

Four years ago, members of the MRA Class of 1974 showed their gratitude to UIC by establishing a \$25,000 endowed scholarship fund.

Now, in honor of their 50th anniversary, they want to double their commitment by inviting other health information sciences alumni to join them in increasing the scholarship fund to \$50,000.

“Let’s do this for the next generation and in recognition of the good lives we’ve had as a result of our UIC degrees,” said Lou Ann Schraffenberger ’74 BS MRA, one of the scholarship fund organizers and donors.

The first scholarship was awarded last fall to a student who is earning a bachelor’s in health information management while he works full time as a respiratory therapist.

“Students need our help,” Schraffenberger said. “They are working and going to school, taking out student loans and trying to graduate. A scholarship of \$2,000 can make a real difference.”

The Class of ’74 has always been a close bunch. Many of the 17 former classmates gather every year to catch up. They’ve attended each other’s weddings, became godmothers to one another’s children and supported each other through career changes, loss and cross-country moves. To this day, they can diagram exactly where each person sat in the classroom.

“We’ve stuck together through the years,” Schraffenberger said. “So when someone brought up the idea of a scholarship from our class, we were intrigued.”

Could the former classmates raise \$25,000 to establish an endowed scholarship fund in support of current HIM students?

The answer was a resounding “yes,” thanks to the generosity of seven alumni: Schraffenberger, Elizabeth Zielke Allan, Susan Evans, Jane Clayton Malone, Judith Lampinen Miller, Karen Reiter Patena and Delight Kawakami Tanakatsubo.

“It would be tremendous if we could reach \$50,000 for our 50th anniversary,” Schraffenberger said.



The class of 1974 on one of the last days of class in May 1974. Standing (left to right): Babette Rosenfeld Kreiter, Margaret Flette Skurka, Susan Evans, Stephanie Johnson Donnell, Elizabeth Zielke Allan and Elizabeth Dangel Kumpost. Middle (left to right): Denise Rohrer Hartigan, Marla Alper Brichta, Susan Vyborny Blyskal, Judith Lampinen Miller, Karen Reiter Patena and Delight Kawakami Tanakatsubo. Sitting (left to right): Jane Clayton Malone, Lou Ann Schraffenberger, Sylvia Publ and Carol Petrie Liberty. Not pictured: Cheryl Kula Rymark. Photo: Judith Lampinen Miller

A ‘golden time’

When the group graduated with degrees in medical records administration, the precursor to the HIM degree, they entered a booming job market.

“It was a golden time in our profession,” Evans said.

Rita Finnegan, department head for their yearlong degree program, did not “tolerate fools,” Evans remembered. “She ran our class with an iron hand. It was a demanding environment with high expectations, but it was an outstanding program.”

“We joke that we graduated from the St. Rita Academy for Wayward Girls,” Schraffenberger said.

Even as medical records administration evolved and some alumni brought their skills to adjacent fields, there was a sense among the Class of 1974 that UIC had been the launching pad for their success. That gratitude helped drive their decision to create the endowed scholarship, and they hope other graduates will join them.



Members of the class of 1974 in June 2012. Top (left to right): Cheryl Kula Rymark, Delight Kawakami Tanakatsubo, Elizabeth Zielke Allan, Carol Petrie Liberty and Lou Ann Schraffenberger. Middle center (left to right): Denise Rohrer Hartigan and Susan Evans. Bottom (left to right): Karen Reiter Patena, Jane Clayton Malone, Judith Lampinen Miller and Margaret Flettter Skurka. Photo: Judith Lampinen Miller



Members of the class of 1974 in July 2023. Top (left to right) Susan Evans, Jane Clayton Malone, Elizabeth Zielke Allan and Delight Kawakami Tanakatsubo. Bottom (left to right) Stephanie Johnson Donnell, Lou Ann Schraffenberger and Karen Reiter Patena. Photo: Judith Lampinen Miller

“Where would you be without this program? That’s what you should ask yourself,” said Evans.

Allan, her classmate, concurred. “When I look back, the most amazing thing is the careers we all had.”

Thinking about the future

Health information sciences looks different now, but UIC programs — which include bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees, a minor and certificate programs — remain among the best. The online BS in HIM degree program was ranked third in the country for 2024 by U.S. News & World Report, the 12th consecutive year the program has been highly ranked.

When Allan decided to support the endowed scholarship, she wasn’t only honoring the past; she was also thinking about the future.

“When we started, everything was paper,” Allan said. “A lot has changed and will keep changing. But you still need the basics. You need to know how to collect information, how to keep it private, how to provide it to

the people who need it — when they need it, how they need it.”

Schraffenberger views the scholarship as a rallying cry across generations.

“Your older peers think enough of you that we want to recognize your talents and hard work,” she said. “We want you to do well. We want you to be fulfilled in this profession that we love.”

Anyone can contribute to the fund, and as an endowed scholarship, the principal is invested, meaning the fund will last in perpetuity.

“This isn’t something where you give one year and then it’s gone,” Allan said. “Our support for students will go on forever.”

Gifts of any size make a difference, and there are many ways to contribute. Some donors made pledge payments over several years. Others are considering the tax savings of donating the required minimum distribution from retirement plans and IRAs.

“If we pool our resources, I really think we could achieve it,” Schraffenberger said. “We hope you’ll join us.”

A Scholarship Can Change a Life

Ata Atta, the first recipient of the HIM Class of 1974 Endowed Scholarship, works full-time as a respiratory therapist at University of Chicago Medicine while attending UIC.

When he learned he had won the scholarship, the first he’s ever received, “all my anxiety and stress went down a bit,” Atta said. “I felt confident and motivated to study hard.”

As Atta looks ahead to graduation and a new career, he wants potential donors to know their generosity can change a student’s life.

“Any kind of help can make a student’s semester or year better,” he said. “You can really make someone happy.”



To make a gift, visit give.uic.edu and search for "HIM 1974" or contact Kristen Kepnick at kkepnick@uic.edu or 312-996-8219.