In 1989, The Miller Center for Retailing Education and Research developed a seminar course to give the students of the University of Florida an opportunity to learn about retailing through presentations from visiting retail executives. Each week, the Center invited a different presenter from the industry to discuss a different issue or career in retailing. For years, this retail management seminar existed as a course that only attracted students needing to fulfill a credit obligation to the college.

Then in 1999, Sears, Roebuck and Company established a generous fund to endow the seminar course. It was renamed the Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Management Seminar and it has grown to educate over 400 students a year who are considering a career in the retail industry. The course became part of a certificate program developed in the late 1990's to help guide students into retailing (honorably named the Walgreens Retailing Certificate in early 2004). This bold expansion has made the course into a "must see" for students. The excitement has also instigated interest from retailers who must now join a waiting list to present. They are not the only ones who wait. Students have to postpone registration into the course as it fills each semester. Business advisors "push" students into the class above the seating capacity! It seems like everyone wants a piece of the retail seminar action. So, what happened?

"Retailers woke up to the limited opportunity of getting in front of this receptive audience and are now fighting for the class time," says Cecilia Schulz, who develops the course each semester, "...and students realize it is the perfect forum to hear ideas and issues of 'what's hot' in the retailing community from an executive who lives it." Additionally, students at the University of Florida have come to understand retailing as a viable career option. They see it with a future and not a dead-end job. They see career and personal development, advancement, travel, lucrative pay and security. They finally see a work-life balance. Retailers are attracting top-notch students and the Sears Retail Management Seminar is a crucial way to access these students.

The class is not an infomercial. Companies are discouraged from talking specifically about their companies. This is not what students want as they can research this information on their own via the Internet and company websites. Instead, speakers are expected to candidly discuss retailing issues and be able to respond to students' questions. It's fast-paced, it's informative,
it instigates thoughtful discussion and it's alive!

Typically, the semester of speakers and issues are developed by need. For example, students graduate and usually take positions in management, buying and planning. Since this may be a student’s first exposure to retailing, there is always a speaker to cover these careers and the challenges brought by the responsibilities of these positions. After learning the company culture and developing within their job, graduates advance within their specialty or learn new jobs within the company. This inspires speakers to cover human resources, real estate and product development. Beyond these, the course is designed to inspire thought with the most current issues. For example, when Ford and BridgestoneFirestone were in a crisis, the current President of the Retail Division of BridgestoneFirestone came to speak to students about taking special care of employees throughout turbulent times and providing support through a foundation of leadership. During the upheaval of corporate America, the CEO of Office Depot and the Regional Vice President of Walgreens spoke to students about the importance of ethics in their businesses. Students have also seen the dotcom industry fluctuate, so there have been speakers to talk about its use of e-tailing, its synergy with other retail channels and its future. Retailers know to change with the demographics to continue to be successful, so the Sears Seminar has addressed changing demographics and what it means for the sales force as well as for sales. Philanthropy is a valuable element for students of the Y generation as they are programmed to expect a broadened scope of social responsibilities from employers. They are more likely to engage in community service than previous generations. Knowing this, companies have been invited into the class to share their community involvement initiatives including JCPenney’s commitment to their After School Program and The Home Depot’s involvement in Habitat for Humanity.

In recent semesters, the Sears Retail Management Seminar course has attracted many upper level executives including many CEOs and vice presidents. We have been honored to have speakers like Bruce Nelson, CEO of Office Depot; Maxine Clark, Chief Executive Bear for Build-A-Bear Workshops; Conrad Symanski, President of Bealls; Bruce Peterson, Senior Vice President, General Merchandise Manager of Wal-Mart; Amy Kule, Vice President of Marketing for Annual Events for Macy’s; Rick Hans, Director of Investment Relations and Assistant Treasurer for Walgreens; Tina Settecase, Vice President and General Merchandise Manager for Sears, Roebuck and Company; and Diane Mahood, Executive Vice President of Marketing for RLG/Macy’s. We’ve even had successful store managers talk to students about developing a fun and supportive work environment and utilized the popular FISH! video to demonstrate.

This spring, the Seminar has attracted Bill Moran, President and CEO of Save-A-Lot who discussed his edited assortment format which has led to Save-A-Lot’s success and to being a major player in the grocery industry. Mike Tovian, Vice President of Store Operations of Walgreens spoke about how Walgreens has changed assortments and services to better serve the changing customer. To talk about how retailers give back to the community, Ed Solzczak, the Vice President of Afterschool Fund Committee of JCPenney discussed how this program works to develop a solution to the 15 million children who are home alone when the school day ends. Students have learned what advantages private labeling has over national brands and how to source it from Wilson Zhu, Vice President of Private Label and Global Sourcing for Office Depot. Diane Weibler, Regional
Manager for Southern Florida for Helzberg Diamonds talked about the diamond industry and selling an experience.

Students look upon the class as an opportunity to step inside the retail industry and test the career potential. Because they are dedicated retailers, speakers are able to illustrate that retailing is challenging, intellectually stimulating, rewarding and fun unlike the part-time jobs the students held in high school. Since students can take this course as early as their first year at the university, they have the time to understand retailing, apply the new knowledge to their other courses and consider retailing for internships and training positions upon graduation. The excitement and variety of the Sears Retail Management Seminar makes this course a “must see” for University of Florida students of all ages and a “must do” for retailers recruiting talented people.

Two participants in the course, Kelli Koegel and Ray Snell, share the experience in different ways. Kelli experienced a successful summer internship in 2003 with Burdines as part of the management team in a store. She took the seminar class to better understand the industry and to add to her current knowledge in preparation for her career. Ray took the class because he thought it would be interesting and expand his knowledge of business practices. Initially he was planning a career in law enforcement, but after participating in this course, he is actively pursuing a career in retail management and is currently deciding between three offers! Students are the real spirit behind what the class can do. Students enthusiastically participate and question speakers about their positions and their work within the corporations. As the course grows in popularity and the students become involved, the Sears Retail Management Seminar course can only increase the excitement for retailing here at the University of Florida. 

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For Information on these and Other Speakers Log on to www.cba.ufl.edu/crer for more details.
GATOR IN RETAILING

As Executive Vice President of Marketing and Sales for CHANEL Beauté and Fragrance, Jean is responsible for the domestic marketing of all colour, treatment, and fragrance brands. She oversees the direction of long-range planning, new product development, marketing, promotions, public relations, creative strategy, sales and corporate advertising. After graduating with honors from the University of Florida, Jean began her career in sales promotion at Charles of the Ritz, where she remained for four years before joining Bristol-Myers in new product marketing. Jean then joined Estee Lauder as Director of Fragrance Marketing. In April 1978, she came to CHANEL as Director of Beauté Marketing, and was responsible for launching CHANEL cosmetics in the U.S. market. In 1983 she was named Senior Vice President, Marketing, Fragrance and Beauté. In 1986 she assumed responsibility for Corporate Advertising and in June 1990 she added the sales function to her title. Most recently, Jean became Executive Vice President, Marketing and Sales. She is a member of the Operating Committee as well as the International Strategic Advertising Committee and the Global Coordinating Committee. Jean reports to the President and Chief Operating Officer of CHANEL, Inc.

When asked why she pursued a career in retailing she replied that the appeal was the fast, new and exciting activities that occurred daily. She describes retailing as “…most opposite to boring and it continues to keep my interest!” She looks at luxury retailing as fun and creative. She enjoys staying on top of her business by keeping her hand on the consumers pulse and continually researching her market to see what is the biggest, best and hottest for the upcoming seasons. When asked how she would advise students, Jean suggested that students should pursue as much selling experience as they can if they were considering a marketing position in retail. “The idea,” she said, “is to get in touch with the customer and understand her needs and desires. Sales may not necessarily be what you want, but you have to deal with people to learn the business.” She also thought understanding finance was an excellent foundation and having this knowledge is helpful in any business. She advises students to become better writers and to become comfortable in making oral presentations.

In addition to being a working mother, Jean is past President and Chairman of Cosmetic Executive Women, a non-profit professional organization with 1700 members. She is a member of Advertising Women of New York (AWN), The Fashion Group, The Fragrance Foundation Board of Directors and The New York committee for United Cerebral Palsy. Jean also lends her time to FIT as an Advisory Board Member for the Graduate Program.

As active as Jean is in the luxury retailing and the community, she says she is able to keep a healthy balance by managing time well. She limits evening meetings so she can share dinner with her family and attend major family events.

Jean Hoehn Zimmerman, Executive Vice President of Marketing and Sales for Chanel Beauté and Fragrance.