There is no room for “senioritis” in the School of Nursing’s recent revisions to the ways that the senior fall semester Nursing Leadership in the 21st Century course is taught. Last year, students formed teams to begin work on identifying a clinical need for which they brainstormed and developed technology innovations, judged competitively late in the spring semester by a “Shark Tank” panel of healthcare innovators.

According to course instructor Associate Professor Art Engler, PhD, RNC, APRN, “The course has taken on a new edge of excitement and interest with the addition of the innovation project. Students are engaged with the idea early on and work on it throughout the semester.”

This year students have begun working on new innovation projects, but their learning in the course has also been enriched by guest visits from nurse leaders.

Dean Regina Cusson sought nurse leaders to speak in the senior leadership course, asking them to discuss:

- What does leadership mean to you?
- How did you become a nurse leader?
- What traits do you look for in new grads?
- How can current students become leaders?

The panel included regional nurse leaders Cheryl Hoey, Cheryl Ficara, Margaret Flinter, Kathleen Hirsch, and Mary Bylone. Panelists shared personal stories about situations that made them think of themselves as leaders.

The goal of the panel was to initiate a dialogue rather than a series of separate questions and answers. Hoey is vice president of clinical services and chief nursing officer at Connecticut Children’s Medical Center. Ficara is vice president of patient care services for Hartford HealthCare’s Hartford region. Flinter is the senior vice president and clinical director of the Community Health Center and founder of its Weitzman Institute. Hirsch is interim chief nursing officer for UConn Health, responsible for the operations of all patient care, access, nursing, and clinic services for the 235 bed, acute care teaching facility. Bylone is vice president for patient care services and chief nursing officer at William W. Backus Hospital.

“I have discussed with seniors that this is a difficult job market,” Cusson observed, “so they are aware that they might not get their dream job right out of college, but I am hoping leadership speakers will provide helpful advice on making graduates successful in their job search.”

According to Engler, “The nursing panel offered students a perspective of leadership ‘from the trenches,’ that is, from those actually in institutional leadership roles. Students were also able to ask questions about RN positions, interviewing tactics, and other related topics.”

...continued
Nursing Leadership Course - A Gathering of Leaders  

In addition, Ellen Crowe, Regional Director Clinical Excellence & Innovation Hartford Healthcare East Region, and Christine Meehan, a UConn nursing alumna, innovator and angel investor now living in Florida, were each guest speakers during the semester.

Another change in the course this year is that it now fulfills undergraduate students’ requirement for an in-the-discipline writing-intensive course in UConn’s general education program.

Students identified a professional problem, debate or controversy, searched the literature, and wrote a policy paper with recommendations and a related op-ed essay on the same topic. In the apt phrase of Bernice Buresh and Suzanne Gordon’s book on “what nurses know and must communicate to the public,” our seniors are ready to move “From Silence to Voice.”