Dean Regina Cusson served as Interim Dean for UConn School of Nursing since fall 2011. Prior to that appointment, she was Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Advanced Practice for the school from 2007-2011, and has been a professor at the school since 1998. She is a certified neonatal nurse practitioner and coordinated the school’s Neonatal Nurse Practitioner Program. Her federally-funded research studies have helped define practice standards in neonatal care. In 2008, the American Academy of Nursing made her a fellow in recognition of her contributions to nursing education and neonatal nursing.

Dean Cusson’s research explores workforce issues for advanced practice neonatal nurse practitioners in the U.S. and Britain. She also coordinated the Faculty Special-Interest Group for the National Association of Neonatal Nurses. Serving as a consultant to neonatal nurse practitioner programs throughout the U.S., Cusson has also served on numerous editorial boards, including the two major neonatal nursing journals: Advances in Neonatal Care and Neonatal Network.

From 1979 to 1998 Cusson was a faculty member at the University of Maryland, where she was director of the Neonatal Nurse Practitioner Program and chairperson for the School of Nursing’s Maternal Child Health Nursing Department.

Cusson earned her bachelor’s degree in nursing from St. Joseph College, Emmitsburg, MD, both her MS and PhD from the University of Maryland, and her post-graduate certification as Neonatal Nurse Practitioner from the University of Pennsylvania.

Conn Provost Mun Y. Choi and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs Sally M. Reis announced on Monday, March 25, that Dr. Regina Cusson has been appointed as the Dean of the School of Nursing, following an extensive national search.

Provost Choi stated, “Dr. Cusson is a dynamic leader who has led the school as interim dean and who will continue to develop and implement a strategic vision for excellence in nursing education and research.”

“UConn is a very good school of nursing, set on a firm foundation of excellent faculty, dedicated staff, solid curriculum, and external validation of student success. We are doing wonderfully creative things, like establishing the Center for Correctional Health and the Center for Advancement in Managing Pain (pages 6-7, 21). These new initiatives will bring greater visibility to our school in the international nursing community, fulfilling an important strategic goal to increase our visibility outside of Connecticut,” stated Dean Cusson.

Shortly after accepting her position, the new dean announced Dr. Paula McCauley as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Dr. Jacqueline McGrath as Associate Dean for Research and Scholarship.
When we selected the theme of “Opening Doors” for this year’s Unison issue, I had no idea that I would be opening my own door to five years of leadership at the UConn School of Nursing. While serving as interim dean for the past year and a half, I have come to enjoy many aspects of this role: getting to know so many students … and participating in and leading so many wonderful nursing traditions … and sharing in the successes of your faculty. After examining my own goals and envisioning what the school could become, I was encouraged to apply for the permanent dean role and delighted I was chosen.

Our first strategic goal is to increase visibility of all the wonderful things we are doing at the UConn School of Nursing. Human resources are most important to reach that goal and I’m pleased to report the school of nursing has been awarded six new faculty positions. We will first conduct a national search to secure a director for our pre-licensure programs to complement newly appointed Dr. Ivy Alexander, who will assume the role of advanced practice program director in August (pg. 23). A coordinator for our new FNP program will also be appointed. The remaining positions will phased in over the next few years.

We’ve opened many new UConn doors this year, most importantly our new Widmer Wing addition (see pg. 8, 18-19). It was thrilling to welcome the incoming freshmen class in the Widmer auditorium on the first day that the building was open. The Wing really has changed the way we educate our students. Surrounded by nursing artifacts from the Josephine Dolan History Collection, students gather in the spacious atrium, while a few steps away lie the most high-tech state of the art labs and classrooms. I’ve even begun holding my monthly student open office hours in the atrium because I know I can always find the students there. This increased interaction with the students, and a suggestion from the senior class president Kyle Angell (pg. 22), led me to form the Dean’s Student Advisory Committee, composed of student leaders from all classes and organizations within the pre-licensure program. We’ve already had our first monthly meeting to provide direct student input into School of Nursing initiatives. I will include graduate students next year, as well as a community advisory group.

You will find many stories throughout this issue about our student activities and the doors we are opening among the profession and with the community. I invite you to learn about our students’ study abroad experiences in their own words (pages 14-15), their participation in the interprofessional Urban Service Track (pgs. 2-13) and the exciting mentor program that has grown to include a student mentor for each incoming freshman (pgs. 16-17). Providing expert consultation to the community is also a strategic goal. Read about our sponsorship of the School Nurse Emergency Medical Services for Children program (pg. 10) and our partnership with the Connecticut Association of School-based Health Centers.

I am currently in the process of appointing a leadership team. I am excited that Dr. Paula McCauley has accepted my offer to continue in the role of associate dean for academic affairs. Dr. Jacqueline McGrath has agreed to become our associate dean for research and scholarship. With these two leaders standing by my side, I feel confident that we are entering a new era for the School of Nursing. This strong team will ensure that the UConn School of Nursing will continue to open new doors to students, to the community, and to our patients, for many years to come.