Rising into the top 5 of graduate nursing programs in New England and top 7% nationally according to U.S. News & World Report, UConn’s School of Nursing has distinguished itself as a world-class leader in nursing education. Out of over 500 accredited nursing schools, in 2015 the School of Nursing was ranked number 43 (up 36 spots from its number 79 ranking in 2011) in “America’s Best Graduate Schools.”

What has led to the program’s rapid growth?

“It’s easy – topnotch faculty dedicated to education, research, and service,” current doctoral student Lisa Sundean explains. “As talented scholars, researchers, and mentors, they lead the way.”

Sundean also attributes the School of Nursing’s success to its commitment to innovation, focus on interprofessional collaboration with the science, engineering and business schools, and its distinction as its own STEM field. With a combination of faculty, staff, students and alumni committed to education, outreach, and building the science and knowledge base of nursing to inform and transform healthcare, the School of Nursing has what Sundean calls “a winning combination.”

Prior to her enrollment in the UConn’s School of Nursing Ph.D. program, Sundean worked as a nurse in a neonatal intensive care unit and served on the board of directors of a local children’s hospital. As the only nurse on the board, she quickly realized that her nursing expertise was vital to understand board-level issues about hospital and patient care. With renewed purpose, Sundean became committed to advocating for nurses on healthcare boards, motivating her to return to graduate school to earn master’s degrees in nursing and health administration, which now brings her to UConn’s School of Nursing.

Reflecting on her experiences so far with the doctoral program, Sundean has found the School of Nursing’s faculty to be generously supportive by making themselves available for students and offering invaluable opportunities for professional development. With just over a year with the program, Sundean has attended the AACN Student Policy Summit at Washington, DC, with Dean Regina Cusson and has co-written a book review of Philosophies and Practices of Emancipatory Nursing: Social Justice as Praxis under the direction of Dr. Carol Polifroni. She was also invited to serve on the national Nurses on Boards Coalition with the facilitation of her mentor and advisor, Dr. Jacqueline McGrath, directly engaging her work as statewide director for the Connecticut Nursing Collaborative-Action Coalition. As a Jonas Nurse Leaders Scholar Sundean works to improve healthcare by

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advocating a strong, diverse, and well-educated nursing workforce involved in critical decision-making about health, healthcare and reform, and social justice.

“The upper level decisions really must be made by a diverse group of people who are vested, qualified, and intimately connected with the outcomes of board decisions,” Sundean says. “Nurses are uniquely qualified for boardroom decision-making in healthcare.” She hopes to see a time when nurses in the boardroom become the benchmarked norm and not the exception.

To students who consider joining the School of Nursing doctoral programs, Sundean says, “Just do it! You will meet so many inspiring people and at some point, you will realize that you inspire others. That is a crystal moment. It’s not the goal, but it happens, and, when it does, you realize you have an obligation to yourself, other nurses, and to the people you call your patients to do your very best. Surround yourself with supporters and like-minded people, and just do it!”

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