Former Governor Brings Policy to Life in the Classroom
by Erin Dietrich

After serving three successful terms as Colorado’s Governor, Richard Lamm could have pursued a variety of professional paths. His decision to join the faculty at the University of Denver and to serve as co-director of the Institute for Public Policy Studies (IPPS) was from the heart.

Other than spending time with his grandchildren, the thing that Lamm enjoys the most is teaching. “I love teaching students and I love the life of the mind,” he said.

Lamm brings his wealth of experience as a prominent and sometimes controversial political figure and his analytical approach to the classroom. He began teaching at the University of Denver in 1969 and, with the exception of his 12 years as Governor, has been here ever since. His passion for teaching is evident in his classes and the way that he interacts and mentors young students. When asked what his favorite aspect of teaching is, he responded “the bright young minds of our future generation of leaders.”

The policy classes that he teaches fill up quickly. Students can expect a lively discussion of policy issues in his classes where he truly values the insights and perspectives of his students.

During his Hard Choices in Public Policy course, a course that meets the Ways of Knowing Scientific Inquiry common curriculum requirement, the class spends each week researching and debating a different policy issue. The introductory course covers many areas including global warming and the national debt, two topics that he feels are the biggest policy challenges facing the current generation of students.

Lamm’s favorite course to teach is a graduate level health policy class. “So much is going on in the health policy area. In the class we explore policy, ethics, organizational policy and more,” he said.

Students benefit from the variety of guest speakers, local and national experts, which participate in the class discussions. Denver and the state offer an excellent learning environment for students interested in public policy as Denver and Colorado serve as a laboratory of policy issues.

“We are often on the leading edge of policy creation and change. It is not only an exciting place to be, but an exciting time to learn about public policy.” Lamm said.

Aside from teaching, Lamm takes his role as advisor and mentor very seriously. His greatest piece of advice for AHSS students as they prepare for their future careers is to “get a good liberal arts education and don’t specialize too early.”
“Life is long – get a good foundation. My greatest hope is that our students will have a good and productive life,” he said. Lamm credits a liberal arts education with giving students the opportunity to walk in many shoes, get insights into many people and issues and making each of us a fuller human being.