Advocacy has been recognized as an important skill in psychology and psychologists are increasingly becoming involved in advocacy and public policy. However, many feel unprepared for this work. A 2009 study revealed 62% of psychology faculty and students reported advocacy training was not offered in their graduate programs (Lating, Barnett, & Horowitz, 2009).

For the last two years, a Public Policy and Advocacy course was offered to students across GSPP programs. The course provided students with an overview of legislative client-based, media, social justice, and health care advocacy. Guest speakers for the course included legislators, candidates, and individuals from non-profit, advocacy, or social justice organizations around the Denver metro area (including AdvocacyDenver, ACLU Colorado, Mental Health Colorado, the Colorado Innocence Center, the Rocky Mountain Victim Law Center, and the Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council) discussing ways in which psychology can have a bigger role in social change. The capstone project for the course involves students providing mock testimony on a current bill and using psychological research to communicate their empirically-informed opinion on an important mental health or social issue.

GSPP students who were enrolled in the course immediately took charge. Students signed up to volunteer for the ACLU. Students registered for Mental Health Colorado’s Brain Wave—a statewide network of volunteers and advocates. MAFP student Olivia Pait serves as a policy intern for Mental Health Colorado; developing research fact sheets, testifying on bills concerning substance use treatment and suicide prevention, and making recommendations on how the sequential intercept model could operate more effectively. PsyD student Michael Fiorini is a member of DU’s Mental Health Taskforce and running for President of the Graduate Student Government. On March 20, myself, MAFP student Cory Marchi, and MAFP alum Moses Gur testified before the Colorado House Committee on Public Health Care and Human Services on HB 18-1245 (Prohibit Conversion Therapy Mental Health Provider). GSPP is (again) leading the way developing curriculum that meets the needs of both our students and the public!