

Social work students see advocacy in action

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What started off as a trip to learn about public protest and how to advocate through discussions with elected officials turned into witnessing the beginning of an ongoing national movement as seven social work students traveled to Washington, D.C.



Social work students, from left, Jessica Liddell, Meggie Breaux and Sara Maurer are interviewed during their experience observing the Occupy Wall Street organizational structure in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Kristen Callais)

Led by social work assistant dean Julianna Padgett and adjunct faculty member Nancy Thacker, seven students participated in the ["Stop the Machine"](#) protests from Oct. 6 to 9. Those protests quickly became closely aligned with the worldwide Occupy Wall Street movement.

"We wanted students to begin to see not only the issues, but the effort of organizing, so we coached them to explore the structure of the event, as well as understanding nonviolent approaches," Padgett says about the group's

preparations.

While in D.C., the students spent most of their time at Freedom Plaza, the site of the peaceful protests, where they engaged with people from across the country and participated in committee meetings about health care and criminal justice. They also visited the offices of Sen. Mary Landrieu and Rep. Jeff Landry. The combined experience energized their own efforts to help raise awareness and enact change for marginalized populations, Padgett says.

Student Adam Dietz says the trip was important for his development as a social worker and an agent of social change.

“I can't express enough how important I think it is that I participated in this action,” Dietz says. “If nothing else, I think it's important to be there as observers, as supporters, as compassionate listeners, and as future change makers. I went to observe a budding movement and to represent the marginalized populations I work with and plan on working with in the future. I think it is a movement that could bring about positive change.”

Joseph Halm is marketing/communications coordinator for the Tulane School of Social Work.