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ADVOCATE: A Legislative Advocacy Model for Counseling Students

Jacquelyn E. Schuster, Lauren Rocha, Angie Sevillano, Felicia Green-Johnson, Jennifer Gerlach

In the classroom, master's students learn that advocacy is a central component of the counseling profession and counselor identity, whereas doctoral students train to be advocacy leaders. While counselor educators often infuse advocacy into the classroom through assignments and use current advocacy models present in the literature, we found a need for a practical model specifically for legislative advocacy to implement with counseling graduate students outside of the classroom. The authors pulled from their collective experience of meeting with state legislators at the state Capitol to create the ADVOCATE Model, a practical, step-by-step guide to legislative advocacy. The authors share the details of their model and discuss implications and recommendations for counselor educators and students.

Keywords: advocacy, counselors-in-training, legislative advocacy, counselor education

Advocacy is a central concept in the counseling profession woven into the course curriculum through assignments and the study of counselor identity (Edwards et al., 2017; Gonzalez et al., 2018). Various advocacy models provide a theoretical framework for advocating. However, the profession is missing a practical model that teaches students how to develop advocacy skills outside of the classroom, particularly with legislators. We propose a practical model of legislative advocacy called ADVOCATE, formed from our collective experiences of advocating with state legislators through a partnership with our state counseling organization and university Chi Sigma Iota (CSI) chapter. As a result of the visit to the Capitol, we provide a brief review of advocacy literature followed by an overview of the ADVOCATE Model. The ADVOCATE Model stresses the importance of connections with professional organizations, counseling student involvement, mentorship from counselor educators, and preparation for a successful advocating experience. By implementing the ADVOCATE Model, counseling programs will have an outline for navigating legislative advocacy events. Lastly, we discuss the practical implications of this model for counseling students and counselor educators.

Teaching Advocacy to Students

Advocacy skills are challenging to instill within counseling students. This difficulty stems from a lack of advocacy opportunities and vague guides of when and how counselors advocate. Thus, students have expressed a lack of readiness and overall poor understanding of advocacy (Edwards et al., 2017). Gonzalez et al. (2018) attempted to increase student preparedness perception by implementing a social justice advocacy course. The course faculty instructed students to identify sociological issues and barriers when working at their clinical sites. Although researchers found that students felt confident with their advocacy skills after completing the course, the logistics of adding a master's level course to counseling programs are unrealistic. Instead, Gonzalez et al. (2018) suggested an advocacy project would be logistically appropriate. Though infusion into class assignments is a creative way to teach advocacy skills, the feasibility of actually implementing such advocacy projects is cause for concern. Some advocacy projects need more than a 15-week semester to develop and implement. Once a course ends, there can be little incentive for students to follow-through with their projects. Further, it is

possible to lose the spirit of advocacy in the constraints of meeting assignment expectations. Thus, there is a likelihood that these projects result in more hypothetical or theoretical ideas and are less action-based.

Current literature provides limited instructions for teaching advocacy to counseling students in vivo. As such, we turned a local CSI chapter project into an extracurricular department advocacy project for all students, both master's and doctoral, in our program. Our experience meeting with legislators combined with extant advocacy models informed our ADVOCATE Model.

Professional Advocacy Models for Counselors

Advocacy models have become a cornerstone to guide counseling professionals. Although different, each model emphasizes the need for counselors first to acquire a level of knowledge, which then motivates actions toward advocacy. This similarity of knowledge first and then action became a foundation in the current advocacy model we present. We briefly discuss four advocacy models next and then share how various components complement our ADVOCATE Model.

Trusty and Brown (2005) Model

Trusty and Brown (2005) separated advocacy disposition, knowledge, and skills into competencies to create structure. The core of the model suggested that counselors should know the advocacy logistics within a political network because they then feel less intimidated to approach political officials (Lawson et al., 2017). Furthermore, Trusty and Brown (2005) highlighted the benefits of clear, organized plans that included outlets for adversity and connections to resources. The organization prepares for smooth implementation and collaboration of the counselors' advocacy efforts. Through the guidance of the Trusty and Brown (2005) Model, we became familiar with the process of state legislative advocacy and built upon the model by developing a detailed stepwise plan for addressing state representatives and advocating for legislative change. One drawback to their model is that the authors do not offer suggestions for building advocacy knowledge in political networks.

Systems Model

The Systems Model by Cigrand et al. (2015) outlined the language in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1994) by evaluating advocacy in each system. Since the Systems Model applied to state legislation, we considered the approach for the exosystem. In the exosystem, representatives of the professional counseling organization establish relationships with state legislators. According to the Systems Model, counselors then build constituency groups with education, governmental task forces, and legislators to lobby for bills that would benefit the profession, clients, and students. Following the Systems Model, the leaders of the ADVOCATE Model established rapport with professional counseling organizations and state representatives. The connection with professional associations allowed us to understand the process of legislation, the timing for advocacy, and a picture of walking through the state Capitol with a plan of action. The Systems Model provides specific leadership targets for building the political network that is only generally mentioned in the Trusty and Brown (2005) Model. However, the Systems Model did not discuss incorporating counseling students in building a political network. We then searched for models that guide the incorporation of counseling students.

Counselor-Advocate-Scholar Model

Ratts and Greenleaf (2018) created a model that interlocks the counselor, advocate, and scholar roles of counseling professionals. Each role addresses counselors as mental health professionals, promoters of their clients, and professionals who use methods supported by evidence-based research, respectively. The model asserts that social justice education starts in counseling programs because they unite the three elements of the Counselor-Advocate-Scholar Model. The Counselor-Advocate-Scholar Model matched our context since we were a group with master's students, doctoral students, and counselor educators. Everybody fit the role of being a counselor, advocate, or scholar. In counseling programs, practicum and internship students serve as primary sources for anecdotes of underserved client populations. Counselor educators are mentors who guide students through determining sociologically-based issues and provide evidence-based support as

supplemental information to anecdotes. The Counselor-Advocate-Scholar Model labeled the role of students in the legislative advocacy process. Since we are working with students, training seemed pertinent to the preparation process, which was not addressed in the Counselor-Advocate-Scholar Model.

Three-Tiered Legislative Professional Advocacy Model

Farrell and Barrio Minton (2019) discussed the most recent model, which was guided by a constructivist grounded theory framework. The model involves three tiers: Advocacy Catalyst, Advocacy Action, and Advocacy Training. The tiers are part of a process illustrating how counselor leaders begin Legislative Professional Advocacy. The Advocacy Catalyst and Advocacy Action employed similar advocacy contributors as other models, such as professional organization connection, community involvement, knowledge in content, and training in understanding the legislative process. Previous models have provided general phases and tiers for general advocacy and legislative advocacy. The Three-Tiered Legislative Professional Advocacy provides details for acquiring knowledge in advocacy and clients, advocacy training, and establishing professional and political relationships. Whereas other models discuss advocacy in the profession, the Three-Tiered Legislative Professional Model provides insight for teaching advocacy within a counseling program. The mentorship of counselor educators and encouragement of student autonomy fosters the next generation of counselors and counselor educators who contribute to the fifth force of counseling, social justice. Therefore, the Advocacy Training tier served as the emphasis for us to involve counseling students in the advocacy process. Yet, the Three-Tiered Legislative Professional Model did not provide specific training steps. The ADVOCATE Model will provide specific strategies for training students in the legislative advocacy process.

The ADVOCATE Model

Advocacy is one component of the counseling field where there is ample room for growth. Specifically, legislative advocacy is time-consuming and labor-intensive, which is further complicated by ambiguity within the actual process. It makes sense

that students who are naturally preoccupied with coursework are less likely to initiate contact with legislators to discuss current issues facing our profession and clients. As such, it is essential for counselor educators to be intentional with advocacy instruction, create opportunities for students to interact with legislators, and partner with professional organizations to share in these responsibilities. The connection of all individuals is a characteristic of the Counselor-Advocate-Scholar Model (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Students serve as the counselors, the faculty serve as the scholars, and the leaders in the professional organizations serve as the advocates.

It is significant to note that before we started training students, the counselor educators already established relationships with leaders from the American Counseling Association (ACA) state division. The connection with such professional organizations is the foundation in previously mentioned advocacy models (Cigrand et al., 2015; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017; Trusty & Brown, 2005). Moreover, the connection with the professional organization allowed the counseling department and students to take advantage of Advocacy Day and to meet with our state lawmakers. Along with the state division, we connected with the university CSI chapter. The bridge between the university and state divisions created a connection for counseling master's and doctoral students to professional organizations and advocacy action. The CSI chapter raised funds and arranged transportation to the state Capitol for 35 master's and doctoral students, who then connected with members of the state division at the Capitol. By including students, we utilized the training tier from Farrell and Barrio Minton (2019) throughout the model to prepare students.

Based on this opportunity created by our state counseling organization and facilitated by our CSI chapter, we integrated our own experiences with advocacy literature to develop the ADVOCATE Model. ADVOCATE stands for Arrange an Agenda, Divide into Groups, Value Time, Organize Thoughts, Carry Out Discussions, Add Anecdotes, Tie Everything Together, and Educate Others. The ADVOCATE Model provides detailed steps from the preparation of advocacy initiatives through the

interaction with lawmakers. See Table 1 for a summary of the ADVOCATE Model.

Arrange An Agenda

In order to foster a productive Advocacy Day, it is advantageous to set a clear agenda. Trusty and Brown (2005) built a model apropos to organization and guided instruction. We incorporated Trusty and Brown's (2005) suggestion of organization to enhance the success and student experience of advocacy. In comparison, the current model focuses on organizing the detailed instructions of the Capitol

walkthrough rather than the overall process. Nevertheless, it emphasizes the salience of uniform assembly and preparation groundwork.

The faculty members became familiar with the legislative process to pass a bill and taught it to students. Knowing the logistics of passing a bill helped students understand the impact of advocating in-person rather than sending letters or using phone calls. Students became aware of the groundwork set by the initial emails and phone calls when bills were in committee and the final persuasion of in-person interactions. After we confirmed we were able to move forward with transporting students to the state

Capitol, doctoral students collaborated with the faculty supervisor to create an agenda. The inclusion of doctoral students fostered the development of future counselor educators and leaders. Including doctoral students in the planning process contributed to the advocacy training as described in the Three-Tiered Legislative Professional Advocacy Model (Farrell & Barrio Minton, 2019). When doctoral students finalized the agenda, they reviewed the schedule with master's students and instructed them on the legislative process.

The agenda includes information that dictates the arrival time, activities or meetings throughout the day, and time of departure (see Table 2). The information consists of the time of meetings with representatives, an overview of the bills to discuss with the representative, any foreseen breaks, allotted lunchtime, and anticipated travel time. The meeting times should be set before attending Advocacy Day and can be done by

Table 1

ADVOCATE Model Summary

Arrange an Agenda	• Allocate meeting times • Account for "lost time" • Include breaks and lunch • Include the map and routes
Divide Into Groups	• Create themed groups by counseling specialty • Assign a leader
Value Time	• Be intentional • Assign a member to monitor time
Organize Thoughts	• Consider: What are the main points I want to address? • Identify the issue • Review supported research and statistics • List implications • Make recommendations/show support for or against a bill • Ideally, practice with a group member or professor before the advocacy event (e.g., role-play)
Carry Out the Discussion	• Show your passion • Be confident and concise
Add Anecdotes	• Reflect on internship experiences as well as personal experiences • Consider: What areas of need do my experiences highlight?
Tie Everything Together	• Summarize with one final line or impact statement • In one minute, state: What do I want to share, and how will it impact others?
Educate Others	• Share about process • Demystify legislative advocacy • Emphasize the importance • Encourage participation • Conduct workshops • Present outcomes

Table 2

Arrange an Agenda Summary

TIME	EVENT
7:45 AM	Arrive at Capitol
8:00 AM–8:45 AM	Breakfast: Brief Advocacy Training by Texas Counseling Association
9:00 AM–9:45 AM	Group A: Appointment with Representative X, Location X Group B: Appointment with Representative Y, Location Y Group C: Appointment with Representative Z, Location Z Group D: Appointment with Education Policy Analyst E, Location E
10:00 AM–10:45 AM	Group A: Appointment with Representative Z, Location Z Group B: Appointment with Representative X, Location X Group C: Appointment with Education Policy Analyst E, Location Group D: Appointment with Representative Y, Location Y
11:00 AM–11:30 AM	All Groups: Recognized by Senator S in the Senate chamber
11:45 AM–12:30 PM	Group A: Appointment with Education Policy Analyst E, Location E Group B: Appointment with Education Policy Analyst F, Location F Group C: Appointment with Representative X, Location X Group D: Appointment with Representative Z, Location Z
12:45 PM–1:30 PM	Lunch
1:45 PM	Departure

Note. See the Capitol map for the location of the offices. List the office numbers on the agenda.

emailing the representatives and senators of interest. Although we added a few stops on our advocacy journey, such as visiting the House and the Senate, having a clear agenda helped keep us on schedule. Navigating unfamiliar territory such as the Capitol building can take much longer than anticipated; therefore, it is helpful to add transition time between events to account for getting lost. Furthermore, it can be challenging getting around the Capitol, so including a map of the Capitol with defined routes, office locations, and meeting places can be helpful.

The overall goal of the agenda is to minimize the chaos of navigating through the crowds, learning floor plans, and herding students through the halls.

It provides an overarching structure and can help alleviate stress amongst the group that may already feel anxious over speaking with the representatives. Although crowd and building size are uncontrollable, effective time management can lead to surplus time for bill reviews and words of encouragement from leaders to ease public speaking anxiety.

Divide Into Groups

Since professional organization leaders are the advocates of the Counselor-Advocate-Scholar Model (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018) and are familiar with the legislative process, they gather professionals

from the area to unite in advocacy and serve as advisors for groups trying to advocate. The professional organization leaders advised us to break into small groups. When traveling with a large group, breaking into smaller groups of five to six individuals allows more students to speak with representatives. Designating a group leader will allow one person to focus on navigating the Capitol and the discussions with state representatives. The representatives still acknowledge the number of people making an effort to advocate, but smaller groups ensure each individual can share his or her thoughts and anecdotes. Furthermore, when each student has the opportunity to interact with representatives, they are building relationships with the exosystem structure (Cigrand et al., 2015). The conversations with

representatives give counselors and students an in-vivo experience of external forces impacting clients, building multicultural knowledge.

In addition, smaller groups can plan amongst each other the issues they discuss and can further organize an order for each person to speak. For example, small groups can highlight anecdotal themes regarding the contextual influence of the bill. Students serve as the counselors bringing the issues to life for the representatives (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Groups may vary, but it can be valuable to separate groups depending on specialties (e.g., clinical mental health, school counseling, addictions, etc.). Designating a group leader and the group divisions promote the flow of discussion and provide the opportunity for students to build on similar issues. Therefore, the representatives can construe concise, pertinent main ideas of the various bills' impacts across different counseling fields.

Value Time

Trusty and Brown (2005) suggested building political networks, and Cigrand et al. (2015) stated the impacted system when counselors form relationships with lawmakers. However, neither provided examples for discussion or shared potential barriers when building relationships with lawmakers. Next in the ADVOCATE model is to value time, which emphasizes the importance of building relationships with lawmakers in a limited amount of time. Meeting times allow for a tentative 30-minute slot; however, representatives' unpredictable schedules compress the allotted time. Additionally, navigation confusion can hinder the punctuality of the group. Consequently, there is a narrow timeframe to voice their concerns. Because of the limited time, students should think critically about the most salient issues to share before meeting with the representative. The group leaders should monitor the time and moderate the transition of the discussion points. Overall, students in the group must be intentional with their time management.

In our experience, we spoke with the assistants before the representatives. Meeting the assistants took place when the representative was unavailable at the start of the designated meeting time. In the process, the assistants wrote notes regarding our

concerns to share with the representatives. Although we missed time with the representative, the group was intentional to carry our message through the system. For this reason, the group must intentionally and strategically manage every minute in the office, starting with knowledge of the Capitol physical structure and schedule of the meetings. Thinking deliberately about discussion topics and organizing them should occur before the meeting. Leaders should assign the groups before the Advocacy Day and hold discussion training sessions with students. The training would simulate time constraints in discussions so students can practice stating the main ideas and anecdotes. Counselor educators and group leaders can work with students on developing a 2-minute elevator speech (Rieger et al., 2017) where they identify the problem and potential solutions in a clear, concise manner without the use of counseling jargon. Additionally, the training teaches students to be succinct and persuasive, developing their autonomy in advocacy skills (Farrell & Barrio Minton, 2019).

Organize Thoughts

To capitalize on valuing time, it is important to have organized thoughts of discussion for representatives. The outlined ideas and timed practice make the interaction less intimidating for students (Farrell & Barrio Minton, 2019; Lawson et al., 2017). First, students should identify the issues or bills to be discussed with the state representatives. Current bills are found by either contacting the state counseling association to gather information or going to the state legislature's website for more detailed information on relevant bills. The bills guide the discussion and direct types of persuasive anecdotes. Next, students should include the statistics that support the argument for or against the issue. Counselor educators can assist students with identifying research and statistics because they serve as the scholar of the group (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Students can outline the main ideas, start assigning the research, compile anecdotes, and assign each person to individually timed talking points. Similar to the Three-Tiered Legislative Professional Advocacy Model (Farrell & Barrio Minton, 2019), students are given

the responsibility of determining the bills and discussion points, which enables them to increase their advocacy skills and autonomy.

Carry Out Discussion

As mentioned earlier, students should practice carrying out the conversations before meeting with the representatives. The early practice would highlight the flow and identify additional ideas for discussion. The conversation should follow a flow of identifying the bill that representatives should or should not endorse and providing the reasoning for the decision, including statistics and anecdotes. The statistics and stories should represent the targeted population the bill would affect and highlight the passion for the issue and the profession.

Role-plays and elevator speeches are strategies advocates can use before the meeting with representatives. The techniques will assist students with becoming confident and concise in carrying out the discussion. Along with the role-play, each group should designate a leader who initiates the conversations. It is common to become shy or nervous when meeting with lawmakers, and it is the responsibility of the group leader to engage the representative and fill extended lulls. Faculty members can assist with role-plays by acting as the representative and evaluating the sequence of anecdotes and research. The mentorship of the faculty member can improve discourse between students and lawmakers (Farrell & Barrio Minton, 2019). The faculty member can also provide feedback on where to elaborate, what research to provide for support, and how to improve communication skills. Additionally, the faculty member can be part of the discourse with the representative.

Add Anecdotes

Students can reflect on their internship and personal experiences to provide anecdotes. Sharing student stories is an influential component of advocating that allows the representatives to appreciate firsthand experiences and gain a better understanding of professional issues. Narratives establish insight into the intimate ecosystem of one's community that is striving for its ability to flourish, self-protect, and maintain (Cigrand et al., 2015). Again, anecdotes draw out the passion in the counseling field when counselors are making an effort outside

of the clinical or school setting. Students in practicum and internships share stories to provide meaning and context to help inform our lawmakers about some of the issues in the counseling field. The experiences with a disenfranchised demographic are the context for the Advocacy Catalyst (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018) that mobilize counselors across the state to meet at the Capitol.

To highlight some current issues, school counseling students in our groups shared personal stories of working in schools that had (a) a large number of students in their caseload, (b) the expectation of administrative noncounseling duties, (c) the lack of time allotted for direct student services, (d) the insufficient training in comprehensive school programs, and (e) the restrictive 2-year teaching requirement for certified school counselors. Moreover, students continued to explain the school policies for counselors that conflicted with the recommendations of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2012), highlighting the divergence between their education and real-world experiences. Another group of students shared experiences working in the clinical setting. The students mentioned (a) the importance of accepting diverse clients, (b) educating others on the importance of mental health, (c) reimbursing for counseling treatments, (d) changing the provisional license term from *intern* to *associate*, and (e) the need for a review board knowledgeable in counseling. Providing these firsthand accounts gives meaning and context to professional issues and client concerns. By personalizing these realities, students equip representatives with information that assist them in making better-informed decisions for their constituents.

Tie Everything Together

After discussing ideas, data, thoughts, and anecdotes with the representatives, it is beneficial to tie everything together. When the end of the meeting approaches, the discussion should be forming conclusive overtones. Students should summarize the conversation with one final line or impact statement that demonstrates the effect legislation has on external forces on counselors (Cigrand et al., 2015). For example, school counseling students can briefly share the impact of smaller caseloads and more direct counseling services on students. These implica-

tions include improved academic achievement, increased knowledge of coping skills for life stressors, decreased discipline issues, increased attendance, and increased student satisfaction (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). When clinical mental health counselors advocate for the issues mentioned in the Add Anecdotes section, they promote access to mental health care as well as unity and respect for a counseling profession. The promotion, in turn, will assist counselors in providing services to marginalized clients and destigmatize the counseling profession, both of which improve the mental health needs of the community. The group of advocates reaffirms their appreciation for the representative's time and consideration while simultaneously summarizing the reviewed bills.

Educate Others

Lastly, once students have gained the experience and practiced advocacy skills, it is pertinent they understand advocacy does not end after meeting the lawmakers. Faculty members should encourage students to train other students and professionals, which develops autonomy for leading the next advocacy event (Farrell & Barrio Minton, 2019). For example, students who participate in Advocacy Day can visit counseling classes to discuss their experiences and suggestions for increased student involvement. Hearing firsthand from students can motivate other students to take small steps in participating in legislative advocacy. Sharing these experiences helps concretize and demystify the legislative advocacy process for students who may be unclear or timid about involvement. Other ways to share the process and present outcomes include workshops, conference presentations, or manuscript submissions. Attending Advocacy Day also offers faculty the opportunity to "practice what you preach" by modeling advocacy involvement for students. Lastly, educating others about this process creates a positive ripple effect and makes legislative advocacy less ambiguous. The more counselors understand how to approach legislative advocacy, the more willing they are to follow through with advocating for their clients, professional identity, and the counseling profession.

Discussion and Implications

The ADVOCATE Model offers a detailed plan for fostering professional legislative advocacy with counseling students. This plan illustrates how the model can be implemented by counselor educators to help cultivate advocacy efforts among counseling students. This section discusses the model in relation to current literature, implications for counseling students and counselor educators, limitations, and future direction.

The ACA endorses specific advocacy competencies and references advocacy in the ethical code (ACA, 2014; Toporek & Daniels, 2018). The ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics* expects counselors to advocate at individual, group, institutional, and societal levels to "improve the quality of life for individuals and groups and remove potential barriers to the provision or access of appropriate services being offered" (p. 8). The *ACA Advocacy Competencies* (Toporek & Daniels, 2018) provide guidance on skills, knowledge, and behaviors related to both clients and the counseling profession. The competencies cover a spectrum of microlevel to macrolevel involvement. Specifically, these competencies include a domain on social/political advocacy and provide broad strategies and recommendations. Though encouraged to advocate, there is little clarity on how to engage with lawmakers, which is critical as public policy often influences clients' ability to access services.

While the advocacy competencies provide some strategies, there is still a need for a more specific action plan to garner student involvement with legislators. The ultimate goal of the ADVOCATE Model is to instill advocacy principles early in students' education and connect theory to practice so that they can improve client welfare and further the counseling profession. Moreover, this model can be used at any time to participate in legislative advocacy. Although relationships with professional organizations are essential, students and counselor educators need not wait for professional organizations to create advocacy opportunities to engage with lawmakers.

Implications for Counseling Students

This model was initially developed by doctoral students to concretize their experience and to promote student involvement in legislative advocacy.

However, there are additional implications for students to consider outside of the specific steps of the model. Before scheduling meetings with legislators and gathering facts to share, students are encouraged to begin a thoughtful examination of current policies and laws to identify potential gaps or inequities in them. To enhance preparation, students should examine their power and privilege statuses and consider the perspectives of those who do not hold those same positions. The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) (Ratts et al., 2016) provide a framework for helping students begin the exploration of privileged and marginalized statuses starting with themselves, then their client's worldview, next within the counseling relationship, and finally with counseling and advocacy interventions. Whereas students may focus primarily on self-awareness and client worldview, the ADVOCATE Model can serve as a supplement or a next step to the counseling and advocacy interventions of the MSJCC as it provides a roadmap for how and where to start with legislative advocacy. Systemic change can be an overwhelming and arduous undertaking. However, this model helps make legislative advocacy less nebulous and more achievable, particularly for students who may not know where to start.

Implications for Counselor Educators

Counselor educators often teach students how to advocate at the individual and group levels, usually through classroom experiences (Edwards et al., 2017; Gonzalez et al., 2018) or through individual interactions with students (Chan et al., 2019). They may use course assignments, modeling their own advocacy experiences, and field-based experiences to teach students about advocacy (Bemak & Chung, 2011; Edwards et al., 2017; Havlik et al., 2019). Though there has been a surge in attention toward social justice and advocacy (Smith et al., 2008), there is still ambiguity about advocating at the legislative level. As social justice is the fifth wave of counseling (Lee, 2012; Ratts, 2009), the importance of advocacy at the systems level is critical.

Therefore, the ADVOCATE Model aims to assist counselor educators and students by providing a specific action plan when speaking with those who create our laws. At a basic level, counselor educa-

tors can refer their students to this model as an organizational guide to preparing for and engaging with legislators. Students may not be aware of the detailed process with which proposed bills become law or the length of time it takes for systemic change. By visiting these institutions and speaking with lawmakers, students can see firsthand the efforts it takes to educate those outside our profession.

However, one of the most integral roles counselor educators play in using this model happens before meeting with lawmakers by teaching students to examine current policies, laws, and power structures critically. Policies and rules are often created by those in power, which can sometimes be remiss in including the needs of marginalized populations. For example, with renewed energy on racial injustice in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, the United States is at a national reckoning with systemic racism, and many existing laws and policies are under scrutiny. As such, counselor educators are encouraged to assist students in critically examining various system structures that are inherently biased and perpetuate disenfranchisement of those not in power. However, it is more than just developing awareness or recognition of unjust practices — action and redress then become necessary. After identifying gaps in policy issues or inequitable laws, the ADVOCATE Model supports the next step, or the “now what?” in advocacy.

A critical examination of these systems and the status quo is not an easy undertaking, yet it is necessary to ensure equity for clients. Further, it can undoubtedly make students, who may be prone to avoid confrontation or direct challenging of those in power, uncomfortable. Therefore, counselor educators should offer support for students as they may wrestle with these feelings. Moreover, students may feel conflicted with advocating for change when it does not align with their belief system. Counselor educators can work with students on reconciling this dissonance by bracketing their values to support client welfare, as required by our professional ethics (ACA, 2014). Appropriate self-disclosure by counselor educators in their advocacy awareness and action journeys may help assuage some of this discomfort.

Limitations and Future Direction

This model is not without limitations. First, it is not an evidence-based model. Instead, it is a theoretical and practical model that draws upon our experiences as we are learning to navigate legislative advocacy and develop an advocacy identity. Secondly, we created this model out of the support provided by the Texas Counseling Association during its Advocacy Day initiative. Though we sought to make this model accessible for those who may not have organizational support, there may be some challenges or gaps we did not consider.

In addition to limitations, there is a need to investigate legislative advocacy further. Specifically, student advocacy development research is needed. Perhaps researchers could develop studies to see if this model helps facilitate legislative advocacy efficacy in counseling students. Moreover, student interviews may help explore student experiences and perceptions of learning about and implementing the ADVOCATE Model.

Conclusion

The authors used their experiences as first-time advocates meeting with state legislators to create a practical model that instructs students on how to advocate with local, state, and national lawmakers. The ADVOCATE Model offers a step-by-step guide for those looking to make an impact at the federal or state legislative level. It can also be useful for counseling graduate students looking to become involved in legislative action on their own or with counselor educators looking to develop their students to become more engaged with legislative advocacy.

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