Voinovich School graduate, Jennifer Smolowitz, is a community educator for the Mental Health Association (MHA) in the state of Delaware, where more than 100,000 people are affected by mental illness and a suicide takes place every 3.5 days. Smolowitz, who received a BS in Professional Studies with minors in Sociology and Health from West Chester University in 2010 and a Master of Public Administration from the Voinovich School in 2014, now oversees statewide, peer-led support groups designed for people with depression and/or anxiety. Smolowitz also works with grief groups, which serve those who have lost someone to suicide, an accident or murder.

“I enjoy what I do – no two days are the same and I enjoy the office environment where I work,” Smolowitz said. “My boss is really good about encouraging a good work/life balance, which is especially important seeing as the subject at hand can sometimes be overwhelming.”

Through her position at the MHA, Smolowitz gives mental health presentations to various community organizations and oversees the organization’s partnership with the National Institute of Mental Health. In 2015, she co-chaired a Community Mental Health conference on understanding mental wellness.

Additionally, Smolowitz chairs a subcommittee of the Delaware Suicide Prevention Coalition called GetRightSideUp, which runs a campaign designed to promote youth suicide prevention across the state. Last year, the group sponsored a student competition to produce Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on the topic of suicide prevention. The winning PSA was aired in theaters across Delaware, promoting the message that suicide is preventable and that those with suicidal thoughts can get help.

Smolowitz said her applied learning experience in the Voinovich School gave her the skills needed to do her job well.

During her time at the Voinovich School, Smolowitz worked with associate professor Holly Raffle to implement an online alcohol prevention program at many universities. The program, called AlcoholEdu, is administered to freshman before arriving at college.

As her applied learning experience, Smolowitz also worked with the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Her primary focus in the organization was with the Ohio Youth-Led Prevention Network, where she worked with young people to help organize the second annual “We are the Majority” rally in Columbus, which highlights the majority of teens who choose to live positively by making drug- and alcohol-free choices.
“Working with Dr. Raffle and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services is an opportunity that I'll never forget,” Smolowitz said. “I learned how to work with federal grants, interact with both the public and private sector, help kids reach their goals and so much more.”

Raffle said that working with Smolowitz was memorable for her as well.

“I really enjoyed seeing Jennifer build her public administration toolkit during her time in Athens,” Raffle said. “At heart, Jennifer is passionate about the public and non-profit sectors as well as substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery. While at the Voinovich School, she developed the skills necessary to think critically; innovate; and lead with vision, value and strategy.”

Smolowitz praised the quality of the professors at the Voinovich School, and noted that she was able to form very deep connections with many of the Voinovich School faculty.

“The positive interactions with the faculty are top notch,” Smolowitz said. “Had I not left my comfort zone, moved to Ohio and received the guidance of the faculty and staff along with my classmates at the Voinovich School, I wouldn't be the same person I am today. I'll be forever grateful for those opportunities, and I still stay in touch with some of my professors. It's nice to know that when things go good, or bad, they still reach out to support us in any way that they can.”