For Preeya Saikia, who works at The White House, Office of Management and Budget, as a Confidential Assistant, a strong value system is a key component to her success in public service.

“The recent passing of Harper Lee took me back to the first time I read *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the age of 11,” she says. “I still read it. In fact, I read it every year since I first met Atticus Finch. I learn new things about Atticus every year, but something that always moves me, is his courage of convictions. This is the attitude I bring to public service and eventually hope to bring to a career in law.”

Preeya says the MPA put to the test one conviction best explained by former boxer Jack Dempsey: “A champion is someone who gets up when he can’t.” As a student, Preeya struggled to remain resilient through a variety of health issues. “There were times when I wanted to give up.” By finding the courage to “get up” when she couldn’t, she managed to finish the program at the top of her class.

Preeya also stresses the importance of believing in yourself, something she often struggled with. Preeya recounts meeting MPA Director Mark Musell at the end of a practice interview, “He turned to me and said, ‘I don’t know who you are, but I’d hire you on the spot.’” Mark’s comment then, and his continued encouragement, advice, and occasional tough love helped Preeya see the potential she hadn’t always seen in herself. “It has made a great deal of difference in my career,” she says.

Preeya also learned from the MPA program’s tight-knit cohort system the importance of collaboration, something she applies to her interactions with colleagues at The White House. As Confidential Assistant, Preeya’s job is to lead collaborative projects, maintain relationships with federal and non-federal agencies, and include “important thought leaders on policy that affects the social safety net and American education and labor issues.” “I could not do a good job without the relations I’ve built at work.” She says, “People may have the skillset to make them successful, but we rarely work alone.”

Preeya encourages others to understand their value system and credits the MPA program with helping her clarify her own. Values help us set meaningful goals and motivate ourselves to reach them, even when we feel like we can’t.