In the spring semester of the 2009-10 academic year I embarked on an experiment with thirteen dedicated Brandeis undergraduate students; an exceptional teaching assistant, Cynthia A. Tschampl, Ph.D. candidate in Health Policy at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management; and the logistical, financial, and intellectual support of both the International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life and the Legal Studies Program at Brandeis University.

“Advocacy for Policy Change” (LGLS 161b) combines an investigation of the ethical dilemmas that arise in the process of lawmaking with hands-on advocacy work with entities seeking to reform laws or to propose new ones. Students choose existing laws they feel could be credibly challenged on ethical or moral grounds, or proposed laws being promoted to redress perceived wrongs.

Working in teams, the students in this pilot version of the course researched their chosen issues and designed and implemented advocacy projects to address particular laws and line items. Each team was mentored by a state legislator and/or a member of an advocacy organization, who helped them understand the lawmaking process, connect with colleagues, and set realistic goals.

There are a few people I must thank individually. This course would not exist without the ongoing support of Professor Richard Gaskins, my mentor and the Director of the Legal Studies Program. Together, he and Dan Terris, Director of the International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life, took the kernel of a unique idea and made it a reality. Massachusetts State Representative and Brandeis alum, Jay Kaufman ’68, MA ’73, and Judy Meredith, longtime advocate and Director of the Public Policy Institute, helped me to create a course worthy of Brandeis University.

Each student completed a series of assignments related to their project, in formats relevant to advocacy work, such as an “elevator speech” and a short video. (The full list of assignments is on page 5.) What follows in this book are excerpts from these assignments from each project, updates on the bills and line items the teams focused on, and links to more information on the relevant issues or organizations.

This course is part of the Advocacy for Policy Change initiative, designed to encourage citizens to bring moral and ethical insights to the process of making and revising laws. This initiative is supported by generous multi-year commitments from International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life Advisory Board member Norbert Weissberg and his wife, former Board member Judith Schneider, to whom I and the students of this course are grateful. For more about this initiative, see brandeis.edu/ethics/atbrandeis/advocacy.

“Advocacy for Policy Change” is a natural fit for Brandeis University, where students understand the importance of combining academic pursuits with hands-on work. I am looking forward to the continued development of this course.

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