

## Laura Goldin Memorial Minute

from Dan Perlman, Environmental Studies

If I could offer just one anecdote about Laura Goldin, it would be this: her syllabi stated, “Open Door Always.” And she *meant* it. And students knew it – and they made tremendous use of her policy.

Laura was just *there* for her students, in all regards: academic, professional, personal. She gave her students all she had to give, often running herself ragged in her later years.

She was also *there* for any environmental cleanup that needed to be done, on campus, in Waltham, or around Boston. She was always seeking opportunities where she and her loyal cadre of students could make a positive environmental impact.

Laura was like a hummingbird – tiny, always in motion, always searching for sustenance – although Laura’s sustenance came from helping others and seeking opportunities for *tikkun olam*.

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She didn’t talk much about her time before she came to Brandeis but she had quite a history. She was in the first class of women at Yale College, then earned her law degree at Cornell... and snuck in a year of law school at Harvard, where she was on the Environmental Law Review.

She held multiple positions over a 20-year legal career. Laura:

Began her legal career at Choate, Hall & Stewart in Boston, specializing in environmental, land use, and health and safety law,

Became Senior Environmental Counsel and Manager of the Environmental Law Group at Digital Equipment Corporation, then the world’s second largest computer company,

Served as General Counsel of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, where she was the Chief Legal Advisor to the Commissioner and a 1000-person agency.

And that’s all before she reached Brandeis in 1996.

When she arrived as a Joshua Guberman Fellow in Legal Studies there was no Environmental Studies program, so Laura, the late biologist Attila Klein, and the just-hired (and recently retired) environmental historian Brian Donahue established one. She eventually became a Professor of the Practice, earning the Louis Dembitz Brandeis Prize for Excellence in Teaching in 2015.

Laura worked nonstop to make environmental issues as real as possible for her students. Not only would they read a gut-wrenching book about cancer-causing pollution like *A Civil Action*, but she would introduce her students to the affected families in Woburn and the lawyer who litigated the case. Many students left her courses as deeply changed people.

But Laura felt constrained by the three hours/week she got to spend with her students in classes. So, she was instrumental in creating the four-course, integrated Environmental Field Semester with Brian and me. Laura then spun off her own four-course integrated program, the Environmental Health and Justice Semester, which took students to Kentucky to learn about the health impacts of living in coal country. The groups performed groundbreaking research in Boston on the indoor air quality of nail salons staffed by Vietnamese immigrants, and hair salons that catered to black women. They published their work in the *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, made presentations at national conferences, and shared their findings with community groups.

In 2007, Laura founded and ran the Housing Advocacy Clinic for WATCH (Waltham Alliance to Create Housing). The Clinic has trained over 400 students, and assisted nearly 2,000 low income and immigrant individuals and families address poor living conditions such as exposure to lead, asbestos, and mold. For her work, she received the Community Hero Award. The Clinic continues today with 3 full-time bilingual case managers, a testament to Laura's passionate commitment to safe and affordable housing for all.

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To give you a real sense of Laura's impact, we will close with words from one of the many students whose lives she changed:

Laura Goldin had a profound impact on the course of my life. "Greening the Ivory Tower" was the first environmental studies class I took at Brandeis... She awakened something in me that semester: Love for the environment, but also justice. Laura embodied both this ferocity of spirit and fight for justice – for the earth and all its creatures, including us humans – but also an unfailing optimism. Laura showed us how we could each make a difference, in small and big ways, even when the odds seemed stacked against us.

May her memory be for a blessing.