

Memorial Moment for Peter Conrad
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Peter Franklin Conrad, Harry Coplan Professor of Social Sciences, and Emeritus Professor of Sociology, died in his home in Lincoln, Massachusetts on March 3rd. He was 78 years old.

Peter was born April 14, 1945, in New York City, the son of Jewish emigres from Germany and Austria. He grew up in New Rochelle, a reference that could send him humming *Bye Bye Miss American Pie* after his classmate, Don McLean.

He received his BA from SUNY Buffalo, and then a Master's degree from Northeastern University. As a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War, he was assigned to do alternative service as an occupational therapy assistant at Boston State Hospital. Observing the interactions between patients, clinicians and the hospital inspired Peter's sociological interest in the medical system. He received his PhD in Sociology from Boston University in 1976. Although Peter seemed to be interested in everything, his academic pursuits were channeled into the subfield of medical sociology.

Peter's research focused on the experience of illness, and the relation between medicine and deviance. His work elaborating the concept of the medicalization of social problems was transformative for medical sociology. This concept describes the process of defining a problem in medical terms, usually as an illness or disorder, or using a medical intervention to treat the problem. In his first book, he used the case of hyperkinesis (what is now called ADHD) to show how something once understood as deviant or a moral failing was turned into a medical diagnosis. Peter's work also examined the experience of epilepsy, worksite wellness programs, the social construction of genetics, and many other topics. He was the author of 16 books or monographs and approximately 120 articles and chapters. I doubt there is anyone in the field of medical sociology unfamiliar with his work. He won awards from the American Sociological Association for distinguished contributions to medical sociology, and the Society for the Study of Social Problems for significant achievements over a distinguished career. Even after his retirement and faced with various health issues, Peter never stopped being a sociologist. Collaborating with a former graduate student, he did research on the use of movement therapies to ameliorate Parkinson's symptoms. Peter himself practiced Parkinson's boxing until just days before his death.

After a few years teaching at Drake University, Peter joined Brandeis in 1979, and stayed until his retirement in 2017. He demonstrated a deep commitment to this university. He was known as an enthusiastic classroom teacher, and a caring advisor. Numerous students in crisis because of premed plans gone awry, emerged from consultations with Peter with smiles and new ideas about health-related careers. Graduate students loved working with him, as he was always brimming with ideas, exhibited endless patience, and drew them into collaborative work. After he died, one of his former grad students wrote: "Peter's complete and total confidence and trust in me from day one was an incredible gift that not all graduate students are so lucky to receive. None of his students had to worry whether we were good enough in his eyes because he never made any of us feel that we ever wouldn't be."

Peter worked so hard and accomplished so much, but he approached all his efforts with great equanimity and an abiding sense of humor. He was one of the few people I have known who actually enjoyed the role of department chair; he chaired the Sociology Department from 1993 to 2002. He attributed his capacity to stay focused and unruffled throughout long days to the brief interludes when he'd slip into his office and meditate.

Peter was an institution builder. While he was on numerous committees, one of his proudest achievements was to co-found HSSP, the Health: Science, Society, and Policy program, which he chaired from 2003 to 2013. The development of the program, so unusual for its structure that brings together the Sciences, Social Sciences, and Heller, showcased Peter's ability to build bridges and remain undaunted by organizational obstacles. Peter was also one of the central people in forming the joint Sociology-Heller PhD program, another example of his ability to link together seemingly different intellectual paths.

Creating connections between people was one of the things he most liked to do. He was always introducing colleagues to one another, or his students to scholars with similar interests. Some of the best Sociology parties were ones Peter and Libby hosted at their home. These were among the many ways Peter created good will. He was enormously generous with his time, with his support, and with his genuine enthusiasm for the lives of other people.

That generosity extended to me too. Peter was the first person I met when I interviewed at Brandeis, and after I was hired, he was always available as a friend and advisor. Our offices were next door to one another, and he took to calling me his neighbor. That was an apt description as one of us would regularly stop by to say hello. We'd talk about department business, a book we'd read, a movie usually Peter had seen, our classes, politics, a quirky email message we'd received, our research, our families. These were the kinds of sustaining conversations that make one feel truly human.

Peter had so many interests outside of academia as well. He loved traveling, seeing movies, and growing vegetables in his garden. He participated in local community associations. And he took great joy in his family. Peter is survived by his wife Libby, his daughter Rya, his son Jared, son-in-law Drew, daughter-in-law, Rita, and three grandchildren.

Peter's family is organizing a Celebration of Life to take place on June 23rd in Lincoln. His many friends, colleagues, and students are welcome to attend and to contribute to a memory book. Up to the last, Peter is bringing people together, this time to look back on a very full and good life.