

Robin Leidner, Sociology

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Robin Leidner

Robin Lisa Leidner, a former associate professor of sociology in the School of Arts and Sciences, died on September 23, 2022 of complications from breast cancer. She was 65.

Born and raised in Long Island, Dr. Leidner earned a BA in sociology from Harvard University in 1980, then acted in a feminist theater group in Providence, Rhode Island before entering graduate school. In 1983, she earned an MA, and five years later a PhD, also in sociology, from Northwestern University. In 1988, she joined Penn's faculty as an assistant professor of sociology. She immediately became an engaged member of Penn's feminist community, leading a seminar on *Women, Work, and the Family: Controversy and Change* for Penn's 250th anniversary conference in 1990. During the 1990s and 2000s, she served on the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, as well as several Penn-wide task forces and committees (like

the Committee on Manufacturer Responsibility). In 1997, she engaged in a spirited debate among the faculty on whether faculty should be required to submit their course reading lists to the Penn Bookstore or allowed to submit them to independent bookstores near campus (*Almanac* November 18, 1997 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v44/n13/bookstorediscussion.html>)). Dr. Leidner taught sociology of gender courses in the gender, sexuality, and women's studies program in SAS in addition to her teaching in the department of sociology, where she also served as undergraduate chair.

Dr. Leidner was a leading feminist scholar and a specialist on the sociology of work. Her book, *Fast Food, Fast Talk: Service Work and the Routinization of Everyday Life*, based on her doctoral research at Northwestern and at "Hamburger University" (a McDonald's training program), showed how employers sought to alter the emotions of workers and clients. Exposing the scripts fast-food workers are compelled to follow while dealing with customers, she showed how workers were constrained by, and resisted, these efforts. The book has been cited over 2,500 times. Her research covered other topics as well. In 1992, Dr. Leidner received a University Research Foundation (URF) award for her project *Parents' Responses to Professional, Informal, and Institutionalized Advice on Childrearing*. She published over 20 peer-reviewed journal articles about women's workplace experience and fast food labor, and was awarded by the American Sociological Association, the Society for the Study of Social Problems, and the U.S. Department of Education.

"Students often commented on her warm and supportive manner, praising the ways in which she would ask questions, probe their thinking, and suggest readings in ways which guided them to new intellectual paths," wrote the sociology department in a tribute to Dr. Leidner. Former student Elizabeth Vaquera wrote, "Robin taught me so much about navigating academia with kindness and integrity." Colleagues also noted her supportive demeanor. Daniel Aldana Cohen, a research affiliate at the Population Studies Center, wrote, "Robin was one of my kindest and most supportive colleagues while I was at Penn, and was admired by students and faculty alike." Dr. Leidner appeared on *Jeopardy* for two nights in 1995, and sent quirky Groundhog Day cards to friends and family every year.

Dr. Leidner is survived by her mother, Marilyn Leidner; brother, Michael Leidner; sister-in-law, Beth Leidner; nephew, Destin Leidner; and her partner of 35 years, Sam Kaplan.