Professor Emeritus Stuart W. Stein of the Department of City and Regional Planning died June 24, 2014, age 84. In his 31 years as a faculty member (ending in 1993) and more than 50 years as an Ithaca resident, he had a remarkable impact on Cornell, our local community, and his many students. His death brought forth an outpouring of appreciation from the University and the broader community that surrounds it.

Stu enjoyed 59 wonderful years of marriage with Sandy, his best friend. He leaves her along with their four children and spouses/partners: Tom (Hale Aylanc), Peter (Jill), Catherine/Katie (Frithjof Hungnes), and Jenny (James LaVeck). He also leaves seven grandchildren, Avi, Rachel, Tova, Chloe and little Stuart Stein, and Maya and Matthias Stein Hungnes, in addition to many nieces and nephews, cousins.

Stu was born in Brooklyn, New York, to Tillie and Herman Stein, with older siblings Anita and Danny, all now deceased. The family
resided in Queens, where Herman, a Polish immigrant, owned a lumberyard. Enduring several lengthy hospitalizations in his youth, Stu developed an abiding compassion for those facing uphill struggles. Upon graduating from Brooklyn Tech High School, he entered the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), becoming the first in his family to attend college. There he completed his undergraduate degree in Architecture in 1952 and his Master of City Planning degree in 1954.

Stu quickly gained respect and reputation as an urban planner. Employed by the Rhode Island Development Commission for three years, in 1957 he joined with Lachlan Blair to create Blair & Stein Associates in Providence, RI (which eventually added offices in several other cities, including Washington, DC). Their work attracted national attention with the publication of College Hill: A Demonstration Study of Historic Area Renewal (1959), a plan for an historic area adjoining Brown University in Providence.

At a time when historic buildings were typically razed and replaced with new ones, the College Hill plan called for their retention and rehabilitation, with sensitive in-filling where new buildings were needed. It became a model for preservation efforts in many places. This effort reflected what became a recurring theme in Stu’s work, a willingness to innovate in ways that excited and united communities, rather than fomenting conflict and fear of change.

Blair & Stein worked for towns and cities in Rhode Island and further afield: e.g., preparing downtown plans for Binghamton, NY and Fort Wayne, IN. They also worked in places of great natural beauty, such as the Cape Cod National Seashore. As the firm grew, Stu developed a knack for empowering others to be their best. Increasingly, he saw his calling as teaching and cultivating young professionals interested in serving the common good.

In the early 1960’s Burnham Kelly, Stu’s former MIT professor and then Dean of Cornell’s College of Architecture (now the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning), was attempting to balance design theory in the Department of Architecture with social science-based planning in City and Regional Planning. Dean Kelly realized Stu’s
dual background in architecture and planning, along with his practice-oriented design capabilities, made him an ideal candidate for a new faculty position, and Stu accepted a joint appointment in the two departments.

By 1969, Stu’s appointment was wholly in City and Regional Planning. Focusing largely on physical planning, his courses dealt with a wide array of subjects, including urban design, plan-making, site planning, survey methods, historic preservation, issues regarding urban renewal, housing, urban transportation, the needs of minority groups, and urban planning in developing countries.

Of particular significance, his community workshop courses, offered over many years, formed the core of Stu’s accomplishments as an educator. Under his guidance, planning students applied themselves in helping to solve community and neighborhood issues in the Ithaca area and more broadly throughout the Finger Lakes Region. Students benefitted from Stu’s unique combination of creativity and ethical idealism while learning to master the best professional practices in the planning arena. He became a master of connecting students with local groups and communities which needed assistance, and connecting those planning efforts to emerging initiatives at state and federal levels.

Stu’s effectiveness led to several leadership positions at the University. For a number of years in the 1970’s there were two planning departments in Sibley Hall, and Stu chaired the Department of Urban Planning and Development. After the departments recombined, he became the first Director of City and Regional Planning’s new Urban and Regional Studies undergraduate major; and during two different periods he was Associate Dean in the College.

From his first years at Cornell, Stu involved himself in local public affairs. In 1963 the City asked for his help with re-invigorating Ithaca’s decaying downtown. In collaboration with three other faculty members, he helped develop a plan to convert a section of State Street from an automobile thoroughfare to an expansive and
welcoming pedestrian mall, leading eventually to creation of one of Ithaca’s defining features, the Ithaca Commons.

After serving on Ithaca’s Board of Zoning Appeals, in 1971 he was elected to its Common Council for one year. With these efforts he began a series of expanding official public roles that for roughly two decades paralleled his academic duties. Over time he chaired the City’s Planning Board and held seats on its Urban Renewal Agency, Board of Public Works, and Downtown Mall Steering Committee.

Eventually Stu undertook far wider public responsibilities at the county level. He completed five four-year terms as an elected member of the Tompkins County Board of Representatives (1982-2002). Serving as the Board’s Chairman from 1993 to 1996, Stu was recognized for his unique ability to bring together often contentious Democratic and Republican contingents. He fostered bipartisanship by understanding seemingly incompatible positions and forging from them a creative synthesis differing parties could accept. Highlights of his years on the Board included a broad initiative to invigorate the arts and tourism, creation of the first economic development strategy for the county, and consolidation and expansion of the county’s public transit system.

Stemming from his role as a county legislator, Stu also gave years of service to the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council, the Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency, the Board of Directors of the Finger Lakes Association, the Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board (which he helped found and for which he served as chair), and the Tompkins-Tioga Electric and Gas Alliance. On his retirement from the county legislature, he became a co-founder of the Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance Inc. (MEGA), a non-profit, community-based energy cost savings program that is benefitting more than 100 communities and more than 30 counties state-wide.

Stu’s public service extended far beyond Tompkins County. He was appointed a member of the New York State Board for Historic Preservation in 1977 and served as the Board’s Chairman from 1979–1995. Other significant positions included the NYS
Committee on Registers (dealing with the National Register of Historic Places, 1977-95); the Commission for the Restoration of the New York State Capitol (1980-92, and 1995-2001); the NYS Parks Council (1979-95); the NYS Urban Cultural Parks Advisory Board (1986-95), and, at the federal level, lengthy service on the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Commission.

Stu earned numerous honors, including:

--- his election as a Fellow of the American Institute of Certified Planners in 2000;

--- the Finger Lakes Association’s George F. Train Memorial Tourism Award in 2001 and the Tompkins County’s Tourism Partner Award in 2013;

--- the Certificate of Merit from the Commissioner of the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in 1995;

--- the Tompkins County Community Action Award in 2001 recognizing his years of effort in fighting poverty in Tompkins County; and

--- the Community Arts Partnership’s “Friend of the Arts” award recognizing his significant contributions to the growth of arts and culture in Tompkins County, an award received just five days before his death.

One of Stu’s proudest moments as a legislator flowed from his efforts in helping amend Tompkins County's Fair Practices Act to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. At the time, this was very controversial, and Stu’s impassioned statement of support helped the measure pass by just one vote. The local LGBT community honored him for his moral courage and influential role in achieving this important legal and cultural milestone.

Stuart Stein was a professor in the very best sense of the word – teaching, yes, but far more importantly imparting to decades of students an understanding of how to make good things happen in a
difficult, messy world. He combined his role as a teacher with major contributions as a public servant, making his community and many other communities better places to live and work. Cornell is proud of his many accomplishments and contributions, and his abiding humanity.

Richard S. Booth; Pierre Clavel; John W. Reps