Barbara Lau
Director, Pauli Murray Project, Duke University Human Rights Center

Barbara Lau is the co-recipient of the 2011 Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award from Duke University. This award seeks to perpetuate the excellence of character and humanitarian service of Algernon Sydney Sullivan by recognizing and honoring such qualities in others. A recipient of this award is known to his/her colleagues and peers as someone who exemplifies the qualities of generosity, service, integrity, and deep spirituality, as well as “nobility of character,” which the Sullivan Foundation defines as “when one goes outside the narrow circle of self-interest and begins to spend oneself for the interests of humankind.”

In her professional work as a folklorist, oral historian, teacher, curator, radio producer, and consultant, Barbara has worked to address injustices. In her decade of work with Duke’s Center for Documentary Studies, Barbara worked with a wide swath of people in Durham. She builds bridges, encourages people to feel proud of their communities, and inspires new ideas.

In empowering Durham citizens from across the city to recover their history and tell their own stories, Barbara is working on the cutting edge of human rights, increasingly concerned with how the violent past can be understood, taught and used to foster social justice. This is challenging work and demands both initiative, patience and a willingness to work across diverse communities and interests. Barbara has consistently reached out to the Duke community -- including faculty and students -- and to the Durham community, where her efforts can be seen in the bright murals throughout town as well as the upcoming Pauli Murray Historical marker and efforts to preserve Murray's childhood home.

She is a tireless worker, giving hours beyond what is required. In her work with the Pauli Murray Project, she seems willing to show up nearly anywhere, any time to share information and listen to people. A person of great integrity, she works to create groups that reflect the wide variety of people in Durham. The steering committee she built for the Pauli Murray Project includes voices from many walks of life and parts of town. Just bringing this group together was a service to the community. She is generous, kind. When asked for help or assistance with projects that overlap her areas of work, she has been enthusiastic in her response and participation. She is of good character, saying what she can do, doing what she says she will, and frequently showing up to ask the hard questions. She stewards the human and financial resources of the Pauli Murray Project so that volunteers and funders feel their time, money, and intentions are honored and respected. Barbara is motivated by a deep trust in something much larger than herself. She is interested in and respectful of the religious and spiritual practices of those around her and participates in various spiritual traditions when invited.
Like Mr. Sullivan, who “reached out both hands in constant helpfulness to others,” Barbara sees her mission in life as the building of community and the quest for social justice.