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By [Christy Levy](#)

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Woman of the Year: Cynthia Jameson

Forging a path in science

Cynthia Jameson: doing research “is like solving puzzles.”

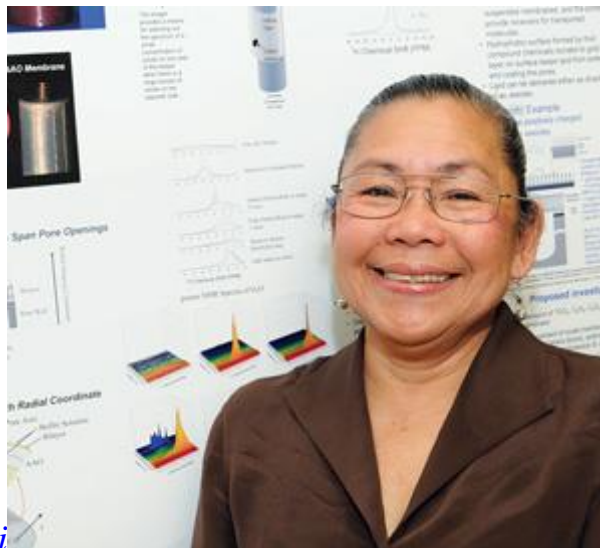


Photo: [Kathryn Marchetti](#)

[Cynthia Jameson](#)'s work schedule seems to contradict her retired employment status.

She's in her office in the Chemical Engineering Building by 9 a.m. each day, working until at least 6 p.m.

She spends her time investigating new research projects, mentoring students and preparing a training session for professors in the Philippines.

“I only retired from the teaching part,” said Jameson, professor emerita of chemistry and chemical engineering, who officially retired in 2006 after 38 years at UIC. “And I don’t work on the weekends anymore.”

Jameson keeps coming back each day for the thrill of conducting research.

“The thing about a research career in science is that it’s the kind of thing that you would do whether you get paid or not,” she said. “The doing of science is sufficiently interesting and exciting, and you go from one day to the next with a lot of expectations.”

For her accomplishments, Jameson was named 2008 UIC Woman of the Year by the [Chancellor’s Committee on the Status of Women](#). She will be honored at a reception Nov. 14 from noon to 1:30 p.m. in 302 Student Center East.

Those who nominated her said Jameson serves as a role model for women interested in careers in science.

Originally from the Philippines, Jameson came to the U.S. to pursue graduate work. She received her Ph.D. from UIUC in 1963.

When she joined the UIC chemistry department in 1968, she was a rarity.

“In those days, there were hardly any female faculty members in chemistry,” she said. “Women were not naturally thought of as being professors. It was very different times.”

Though it was unusual for women to pursue careers in the STEM fields — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — decades ago, Jameson didn’t think about trying something else. But she didn’t have many peers.

“My entire career, there was always not more than one other woman on the faculty, and sometimes I was the only one,” she said. “Things changed very, very slowly.”

Now, Jameson said, there are many more women pursuing science in college, but not all are moving into academia.

“Many women are choosing not to go that route because they can see how difficult it is,” Jameson said.

“Female graduate students watch their professors, who are typically male, and they see how much of their intensity is devoted to research and they tell themselves, ‘I don’t want that. I want a more balanced life,’” she said.

And that’s a tough balance to find, she said. When Jameson joined the faculty, she had two daughters, both younger than 3. She found a daycare center near her husband’s office at Loyola University, then a trusted caregiver to watch them after school.

“Trying to get tenure and raise a family was not easy,” she said. “You have so many other demands on your time — keeping house, cooking and cleaning. People ask me ‘how did you do it?’ and I tell them, ‘I hardly slept at all.’”

More women might pursue professorships if family-friendly policies existed, such as access to newborn and toddler child care on campus, she said.

In her work with UIC’s [Women in Science and Engineering System Transformation](#) program, Jameson mentors post-doctoral female students and helped develop a faculty search toolkit.

“The toolkit is a set of tips for search committees on how to go about doing it in such a way that’s fair — and you still get the best faculty in the end,” she said.

The toolkit provides a template for faculty searches to compare all candidates in the applicant pool, as well as tips for recruiting female faculty members.

“We still want to hire the best, but what we want to do is put women in the applicant pool so that when we look at them, there are enough of them to consider,” Jameson said.

The toolkit’s recruitment tips were used during several recent faculty searches in chemical engineering and chemistry, Jameson said. As a result, by 2009 three women will be on the chemistry faculty and two in chemical engineering, she added.

“That’s a huge difference from having hardly any female faculty,” Jameson said. “We feel very good about that.”

In her own work, Jameson is leading two major projects: a study of how ions transport through nanochannels, funded by the National Science Foundation, and an observation of the transport of molecules across a model membrane, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy.

She's putting together lesson plans for a workshop on quantum mechanics and spectroscopy that she'll teach to chemistry professors in the Philippines this spring.

When she's not working, Jameson likes to spend time with her husband, Keith, a retired chemistry professor, as well as her two daughters and five grandchildren.

She also enjoys reading, solving crossword puzzles and tending to her garden at her home in Evanston.

"I've somehow managed to grow quite a large collection of perennials," she said. "That's my therapy."

But she's sure she'll never give up her lab for her garden.

"I don't know if I can," she said. "I just enjoy research so much. Doing research is like solving puzzles all of the time."

"I will probably be around for a while."

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