



**Dr. Mary Liz Jameson, professor of biological sciences at Wichita State University, shows off the dung beetles housed in the Jameson Lab at Hubbard Hall to one of her students. Jameson was recently elected to the prestigious 2024 AAAS Fellows for her work in entomology.**

## **Wichita State biology professor elected as prestigious AAAS Fellow**

**By Caelin Bragg**

When the email notification popped up, Dr. Mary Liz Jameson, professor of biological sciences, thought there must have been a mistake. It must have been for someone else at the university or perhaps another Mary Liz at a different university.

Once the shock wore away, Jameson realized it was true: She had been elected to the prestigious American Association for the Advancement of Sciences AAAS Fellows, class of 2024, for her integrated work on entomology.

AAAS Fellows are elected for their accomplishments across multiple disciplines and fields in areas such as research and teaching. Among all the universities represented in the 2024 class, Wichita State University, an R2 institution, is surrounded by a sea of R1 institutions, as classified by the Carnegie classification.

"Typically, it's only people in R1 institutions who get this award," Jameson said. "We're not an R1 institution — we're an R2 institution — so people like at Harvard, University of Florida, Chicago, Rutgers and places like that get this award, not somebody from an R2 institution."

Jameson is in good company at Wichita State, joining Dr. Coleen Pugh, dean of the Graduate School, who was elected in 2010; and Dr. Susan Sterrett, Curtis D. Gridley Distinguished Professorship in History and Philosophy, who was elected in 2016, as the only WSU faculty who have ever been elected to the AAAS Fellows.

While some may try to claim the spotlight for themselves, Jameson, Pugh and Sterrett see a bigger picture developing.

"The three of us who are AAAS Fellows are women, and at least within my discipline, that's a very leaky pipeline," Jameson said. "There's a lot of women who go to meetings who are young professionals but don't often stay in the field. That leaky pipeline is something that I think is important, and I'd like to help do my best within my discipline and open up doors for people."

The trio of AAAS Fellows from Wichita State represent the student-centered and innovation-driven values of the university.

"What a spectacular honor for Dr. Jameson and WSU," said Dr. Monica Lounsbery, senior executive vice president and provost. "Recognition as an AAAS Fellow is a testament to the quality and impact of her work and it is a reflection of the extraordinary faculty we have at Wichita State. She joins a distinguished line of scholars at our university who have earned this national honor, reinforcing our strong foundation in research. Dr. Jameson's work exemplifies the innovation and academic excellence that define Wichita State."

### **Jameson sees collaboration where others see mentorship**

In a secluded corner of the fifth floor of Hubbard Hall, an area that may just look like another office or classroom, houses the Jameson Lab, home to a variety of insects and arachnids. Among them are the ones she is most excited to show people: her family of dung beetles.

This is the energy and excitement she brings to her students.

When Jameson first arrived at Wichita State, she came here primarily as an evolutionary biologist, but meeting the needs of her students, she branched out. From cyber infrastructure and bioinformatics to studying invasive species in Hawaii, she not only meets students where they are, but also where they want to go. Most recently, her focus has been on studying insect communities.

While Jameson was told she was elected to the 2024 AAAS Fellows for her integrated work on entomology, to her, the most important thing was the collaboration she fosters with her students.

"I think they nurture me too," she said. "It's totally a two-way street. I try not to meld them in my image, because my image is old-timey. Instead, I want to hear their ideas, I want to hear their views, I want to hear what's important to them."

This collaborative approach with her students not only gives Jameson fresh perspectives she couldn't find on her own, it allows her students to flourish and explore the topics that excite them.

To her students, Jameson is not just another professor they see once or twice a week, she opens doors for them that they wouldn't be able to open on their own.

"She introduced herself on the first day like 'I'm a field entomologist. I work with dung beetles,' and I was like 'oh my god, I want to be a field entomologist; that's been my dream forever,'" said senior Vee Disbro. "So I talked to her and asked if she was looking for an assistant or anything, and later that semester I was helping one of her graduate students with dung beetle research out in the field and actually doing the work I had been wanting to do for years."

Vee was also part of a team that presented at the joint Central State Entomological Society and Kansas Academy of Science annual meetings at Friends University with Syd Downey, junior; Melissa Hernández, senior; and Leónidas Reyes, senior; where they won first place for their poster presentation, an opportunity afforded to them with the help of Jameson.

All of them agreed that Jameson was instrumental in helping them during their studies, whether that was guiding them to the resources they needed on campus, giving them opportunities to explore and learn what they wanted to or by helping them find the courses they needed each semester.

### **Dr. Susan Sterrett finds success through interdisciplinary viewpoint**

Sterrett's title, Curtis D. Gridley Distinguished Professorship in History and Philosophy, doesn't fully capture the breadth of her educational background.

Looking at her credentials – a bachelor's degree in engineering, master's degrees in both math and philosophy and a Ph.D. in philosophy – some may wonder how those subjects tie together, but it's that interdisciplinary work that eventually led Sterrett to be elected to the 2016 AAAS Fellows.

Her notice letter said it was "for distinguished contributions to the philosophy of science, particularly the study of models and analogical reasoning in engineering, physics, geophysics, and biology and the philosophic basis of the study of natural and artificial intelligence." This interdisciplinary nature is something she hopes to see more of from higher education.



**President Rick Muma**

While her election to the AAAS Fellows is a celebration of her work, Dr. Sterrett sees that her work isn't just her own, but is also everyone's whose shoulders led to the insights she finds.

"In my case, it's a joint effort in a different way because I work along in writing papers and philosophy," Sterrett said. "But it's papers I've read by other people who gave me insight, and I wouldn't have been able to do this work without them."

Another reason for her election to the AAAS Fellows was for her work on the philosophy of artificial intelligence. One of her most cited papers about philosophy of AI was about an ambiguity relating to the Turing Test, which arose from grading student papers in which students were trying to deal with the ambiguity during a class assignment.

"First, I started thinking that I'll have to find out what the right answer is and then mark their papers," Sterrett said. "Then I realized that they're not wrong."

This is why she sees the importance of working with students as going hand in hand with doing research. While she continues to teach them, she wants to hear the insights they offer.

"They live in a different time period," Sterrett said. "They're a different generation, so to see how they see things can give you a whole new way of appreciating some concepts in philosophy."

### **Dr. Coleen Pugh found chemistry through an unlikely road**

"I will never take chemistry in college."

That's what Pugh, dean of the graduate school and professor of chemistry, said when she was looking at attending college.

So what was the plan if not chemistry from the beginning? Fashion. But at the University of California, Davis, as part of her textile science degree, was chemistry.

"I liked it so much better than in high school," Pugh said. "I kept taking more chemistry classes until I first switched from textiles and clothing to textile science, and then I added chemistry as a double major."

For textile science and chemistry, the connection was polymers, which eventually became the focus of Pugh's research that led to her election to the 2010 AAAS Fellows while she was working as a professor of polymer science at the University of Akron.



**Coleen Pugh**

The reason for her election was her advancement in the field of chemistry, both through her scientific work – through the development of liquid crystalline polymers – and her community work – for serving as an associate editor for the American Chemical Society Journal, *Macromolecules*, and for establishing a Research Experience for Undergraduates site for polymer science and engineering through the NSF at her institution.

Following her time at the University of Akron and looking at what to do next, Pugh saw in Wichita State an institution that truly valued the students it served and one that had a forward-thinking vision.

“I like the aspects of positive risk-taking,” she said. “The opportunity to try new things and understand that they won’t all be successful. I felt like this was a place where I could make a difference.”