



Professor. Molecular Biologist. Researcher.

Women's Month Profile: 15 minutes with...

Valerie Mizrahi

My name is Valerie Mizrahi, Director of the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine, a position I've held since 2011.

Can you describe yourself in three words?

Energetic. Optimistic. Focused.

How do you think your colleagues would describe you in three words?

Busy. Distracted. Impatient.

Describe your work in two sentences or less

My main job is as director of a very large postgraduate research institute. It's a great job because the institute comprises so many outstanding research groups, whose work is inspiring. My other job is to run a research group together with my colleague, Digby Warner, which allows to spend at least some of my time thinking about science and helping to steer the work of a phenomenal group of young scientists.

What do you find most fulfilling about your work?

Watching talented young people grow and develop. I am also passionate about the research that I do – working in the field of Tuberculosis research has special meaning and significance as a scientist based in South Africa.

What have been some of the highlights of your time at UCT?

Growing the IDM; receiving an A1 rating from the NRF while serving as IDM director; winning the Harry Oppenheimer fellowship; learning that my colleague (and former PhD student), Digby Warner, had been promoted to Full Professor; hooding both my daughters at their



graduations at UCT; reading the examiners' reports of the students I've co-supervised.

What are the main challenges of your work?

Striking a balance between service to the institute, Faculty and University versus thinking about science and doing my own research.

What do you love or hate about UCT or FHS specifically?

I love the view from my office! I hate the fact that getting things done can be slow and difficult (I'm betraying my impatience here!).

What's the biggest risk you've ever taken?

Moving to UCT to take up a senior position with great responsibility after 22 happy and fulfilling years running my own research group at the Wits/NHLS School of Pathology.

How do you conquer your fears?

By taking a deep breath, following my gut instinct and drawing on my natural optimism and resilience.

What's your version of self-care?

Taking a walk on the promenade in Sea Point on a Sunday morning (although my mom, daughters and sister tell me that I don't understand the meaning of self-care and that I should take much better care of myself).

If you could change something overnight at UCT, what would it be?

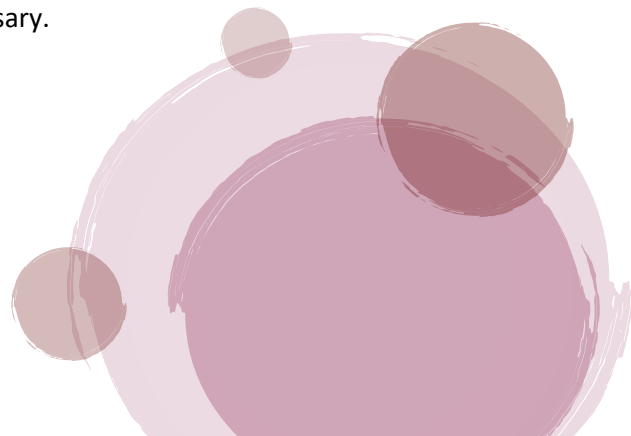
I'd like UCT to become a place that truly celebrates diversity and is welcoming to all.

If you had a choice between two superpowers; being invisible or flying, which would you choose?

Flying (silly question!)

What was the last gift you gave someone?

My sister and I gave our wonderful parents a beautiful coffee table for their 65th wedding anniversary.





What is your advice to young people building a future in academia?

Don't be afraid to ask for advice, be prepared to fail, keep on trying, stay positive, and never forget how fortunate you are to be in the position of building a career in academia.

If you could have dinner with any woman (or anyone), who would it be and why?

Thuli Madonsela – her wisdom, strength, compassion and integrity are the personal attributes that I value most deeply, and she embodies them all.

What are your future plans at UCT? What would you like to achieve?

I will be retiring in 4 years' time, so my focus over the next few years will be on ensuring the sustainability of the IDM and on developing a succession plan that will enable this amazing institute that I'm so privileged to lead to rise to the next level.

