



IN MEMORIAM

Michael Jura
Professor of Physics and Astronomy
UC Los Angeles
1947-2016

Professor of astronomy Michael Jura, who played a major role in advancing scholarship in his field and in shaping UCLA's Division of Astronomy and Astrophysics over the course of four decades, died on January 30th following a lengthy illness.

Professor Jura brought a unique, theory-oriented viewpoint to the analysis of astrophysical data. His research spanned a broad range of topics including intensity fluctuations in pulsars, excitation of molecular hydrogen, star formation and dust in galaxies, the chemical composition of interstellar gas, mass loss from red giant stars, and diffuse interstellar bands. He was especially interested in planetary systems outside the Earth's solar system — their comets, asteroids and planets — and in determining if there is life outside our solar system.

Among his many contributions to UCLA astronomy and astrophysics, Professor Jura was instrumental in developing the infrared focus of the division when he chaired the department of astronomy in the late 1980s.

His recent research, on the "pollution" of white dwarf atmospheres, opened a whole new area of research and has allowed the characterization of the chemical composition of small bodies, such as asteroids, in extrasolar planetary systems. His creative approach has provided direct information on extrasolar planetary systems that is very difficult to measure otherwise. By measuring the abundances of elements common to the terrestrial planets, he has been able to infer levels of tectonic activity in these systems, a remarkable feat.

Professor Jura earned his bachelor's degree in physics from UC Berkeley in 1967 and his Ph.D. in astronomy from Harvard University in 1971, and went on to become a postdoctoral scholar at Princeton University. He joined UCLA's faculty in 1974 as an assistant professor, was promoted in 1977 to associate professor and to full professor in 1981. He continued teaching through the fall quarter of 2015.

Committed to finding ways to reduce our society's consumption of non-renewable energy, Professor Jura taught courses at UCLA on energy and the environment and strove to move the campus toward increased use of renewable energy. He drove an electric car, and he and his wife installed solar panels on the roof of their home in West Los Angeles.

Jura is survived by his wife, Martha; their son, Michael, and Michael's wife, Ying; and two grandchildren, Sean and Stella.