

# Love of chemistry leads woman to active life at Roberts Wesleyan

## Amy Kovach takes on many administrative functions at college

By NICOLE SHELDON

**W**hen it came time to look at colleges, Amy Kovach never pictured herself attending Roberts Wesleyan College. Her brother, Scott, went there and she was tired of being known as “Scott’s sister.” But, she applied anyway and received an offer that she could not refuse.

Kovach, 36, graduated from Roberts Wesleyan with a bachelor’s degree in chemistry in 2004. Academically, she found herself interested in many different subjects, but it was her high school chemistry teacher who pushed her to pursue chemistry.

“Then when I came to college I had the most amazing chemistry professor here at Roberts that spoke into my life in more ways than I can even express, and he was the one who told me that I was capable of pretty much anything, and he encouraged me to go to graduate school,” says Kovach. “I would say he was the No. 1 reason I went to grad school.”

Kovach graduated with a master’s degree in chemistry in 2006 and a Ph.D. in chemistry in 2009 from the University of Rochester. She got a taste of teaching as an undergrad when she worked as a teaching assistant, which affirmed her interest in becoming a college professor.

Today Kovach is an associate professor of chemistry at Roberts Wesleyan College.

“As I was looking for jobs, there was an opening here at Roberts so I applied,” says Kovach. “I wouldn’t necessarily say I envisioned myself coming back to Roberts, but as I was applying to jobs and deciding between several job offers I felt like this was the place that God had led me back to. I’m now in my 10th year here.”

Kovach’s time is split between teaching and administrative work. She wears many hats at Roberts, serving as honors program director and director of academic summer in addition to her teaching role.

“Five years ago I was asked to redesign our honors programs,” explains Kovach. “In the redesign process the task force that I chair ... came up with two separate programs: one for freshmen and sophomores, which is the global honors program, and one for juniors and seniors, which focuses on academic research and leadership.”

The academic research and leadership honors program is open to any Roberts Wesleyan student who meets the GPA requirement, even if they transferred from another campus. Kovach notes that many students struggle in high school, but they come to college and figure it out and become excellent academics.



Photo by Kate Melton

Amy Kovach

The honors program shows students that even if they were not labeled as honors students in high school, they still have a chance to turn it around and graduate with an honors diploma in college.

Kovach also founded Roberts’ Adopt-a-School program, a national program in conjunction with the American Chemical Society. The program involves students volunteering at an inner city school once a month to teach third- and fourth-graders hands-on science lessons. Due to her many other time-consuming roles, Kovach had to make the difficult decision to step away from that particular program this year to better balance her time.

As director of academic summer, Kovach oversees all of the traditional undergraduate summer classes at Roberts, as well as the high school summer camps that Roberts’ hosts.

“I recognized that students on our campus weren’t taking advantage of summer classes, and our campus wasn’t as active over the summer as it could be,” she says. “I proposed that we change our summer class pricing, and we did that. We now offer all of our summer courses at community college pricing. That was a big risk because it was a drastic decrease, but this coming summer is our third summer implementing this.”

Kovach also suggested that the campus be used during the summer to expose high school students to a college campus. High school students are invited to spend one or two weeks on campus at Roberts with the chance to ex-

plore an academic area of their choice.

“We offer the camps basically at-cost, so we don’t use them as a tuition revenue stream,” says Kovach. “We’re basically doing it as a service to the community. We want high school students to have the opportunity to see what it’s like to be a college student and to experience a subject area.”

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“Even though we offer the camps at cost, we recognize that that cost still might be prohibitive for students, so we offer scholarships for every camp. So I’m also the steward of the scholarships.”

Growing up, Kovach moved around a lot. Her father is a pastor, so her family was frequently uprooted because of his job. Born in Wisconsin, Kovach and

her family moved to Texas and Michigan before settling in rural Pennsylvania. As an adult, Kovach now appreciates her peripatetic childhood because it gave her opportunities to meet many new people and the boldness to speak in challenging situations and become a strong academic professional.

While Kovach still enjoys teaching chemistry, she has found a passion for administration and hopes to pursue it further. She says she is grateful to have two extraordinary mentors at Roberts that she can turn to, chief academic officer David Basinger and President Deana Porterfield.

“Professionally, having a mentor is absolutely essential,” asserts Kovach. “Even more than that, finding a sponsor, meaning someone who’s willing to advocate for you and put your name forward is really important.”

Outside of the walls of Roberts, Kovach loves to spend time outdoors hiking and going on bike rides. But her favorite hobby is baking.

“I bake a lot for my students,” which explains the “Best Baker” paper plate award on her desk. “I love making pretty birthday cakes for people—I’ve even taken cake decorating classes. But my favorite thing to bake is my grandmother’s chocolate éclair recipe because it brings back so many happy memories.”

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