



the Collage

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Kutztown University

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Dr. Darren Achey | Biochemistry Faculty Highlight

Dr. Darren Achey, professor of Biochemistry at Kutztown University, became interested in chemistry early on, but it wasn't until he earned his PhD that he discovered he wanted to teach. He enjoys sharing his love of chemistry with his students and wants to see them connect with it like he did. He values the ability to keep learning new things all the time, and his position as a professor allows him to do just that.

His high school teacher helped him get engaged and interested in chemistry and the connection he felt with the subject encouraged him to pursue it in college. At first, he planned to go into a pharmaceutical job and began his PhD program to advance in the industry. However, he became a teaching assistant, realized he had a passion for teaching, and changed his path. He decided to become a professor.

Teaching gave Dr. Achey a new perspective on chemistry. When he's teaching, he gets to see the class from the student's point of view. "When you learn it, you're just worried about learning information for tests and getting good grades," Dr. Achey says. "But when you teach it, you get to see what is hard for people to learn."

There are students from a variety of science majors in his General Chemistry classes and he makes an effort to help each student connect with chemistry. "I want to let them know why it's important to take the course and I want to make connections in the class to individual majors," Dr. Achey explains. He feels too many people have negative past experiences with chemistry and he wants to change that. He wants everyone to have the kind of connection he had with chemistry in school.

"Whether it's research [or] tutoring, get connected to a subject and the people around you."

As part of his mentoring at the university, Dr. Achey has a research group which he encourages anyone interested in chemistry to join, regardless of their skill level. Even freshmen can have a part in the project, and they can gain experience and knowledge from Achey and older students in the group. After the school year is done, Achey and his research group attend the Middle Atlantic

Regional Meeting (MARM) conference where they display their research. Dr. Achey believes it's a great way to get students excited about their work. Even if a project is not finished, having your name associated with the research shows your dedication and hard work.

This research group is part of Achey's philosophy for students to get involved in school activities. It helps you build connections and experience which are vital to getting a position in a future career. He would like every student to do something on campus and commit to it. Even if only for a year, he wants students to have something to show their work and abilities outside of classes. Limiting yourself is not a good first step in pursuing a career. Achey states, "You can gain a lot by taking something from every class and every opportunity you are given."

Award Winning Faculty and Staff



Dr. Chris Saidi
2024 Chambliss Faculty
Research Award



Dr. Lisa Frye
2024 CLAS Dean's
Outstanding Faculty Award



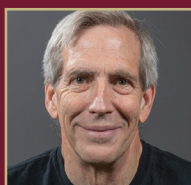
Julie Smith
2024 KU Employee
of the Year



Dr. Dylan Schwesinger
UGRC Faculty
Mentorship Award



Dr. Darren Achey
UGRC Faculty
Mentorship Award



Dr. William Donner
Freyberger Professor





Sierra Smart | Geology Student Highlight

Sophomore Sierra Smart didn't wait long before getting involved at Kutztown University. She has been a part of a field work project, and an internship, and she has started her own club based on taking trips to places with interesting rocks and observing them—all during her freshman year at KU.

“Rocks tell a story... I’m a fan of that.”

She found her passion in analyzing and working with rocks “pretty soon to the start of [her] education.” She believes KU’s program offers many different routes and provides a good basis for her interest, though she doesn’t have any specific career goal in mind.

Right away she started taking initiative in her major by starting her own club based on rockhounding. Rockhounding

is a geology term for the activity of searching for and collecting rocks, fossils, or minerals. During her first semester at KU, she took a trip to an anthracite mine with her class, and they spent the day looking at rocks such as pyrite and quartz. This trip inspired Sierra to start a rockhounding club for her and her classmates to go out, find, and observe certain types of rocks. Last year they went on six trips in total. The trips ranged from as close as Weis markets, all the way to Herkimer, New York. On average, about 5 people attend each trip, and Sierra hopes to keep this group going and growing in the coming years.

Sierra’s main field work project, entitled “Three Thrones Geophysical Investigation,” gave Sierra her first experience surveying and working on a site. Sierra joined Dr. Sherrod and a few others in surveying a residential site in Phoenixville, PA. They were hoping to find artifacts left behind from when George Washington possibly occupied the area in 1798. Sierra learned a lot about using field equipment and surveying methods from the experience. Sierra believes the more work experience she has, the better. “Every site that I go out to is going to be a little different... it’s like a whole set of different variables and circumstances for each site,” she says.

Sierra also got an internship this past summer in Middletown organizing and cataloging rocks. Sierra and the other people working on the project relabeled and organized boxes of rocks since the old boxes and bags had begun to deteriorate. They separated rocks into bags and then organized them into boxes to create a system of cataloging the rocks. The team she worked with had a goal of filling 1,014 boxes which they hit, plus a



Sierra Smart during her internship looking at outcrops next to a highway.

few. The team also took a Dead Sea scroll, a long strip of paper mapping stratigraphic sections, and put the information into Excel for easier use in the future. Sierra says this work helped her learn another skill in the field: data preservation.

In March 2024, Sierra attended the annual meeting of Pennsylvania Professional Geologists. Despite feeling young at the conference, her reason for going was to get her name out there early. She says that attending the conference may have helped her in obtaining her internship that summer, so she feels it was the right decision. Sierra says, “There were definitely comments about how ‘oh wow she’s pretty young for that’ but it was good getting to go meet people.”

She hopes to keep taking advantage of these opportunities from her professors and growing her knowledge base with each one. The Geophysics Society of KU will have more projects lined up soon which Sierra plans to take full advantage of.

Reflecting on the busy first year she’s had already, she encourages those who are hesitant to take part in these types of projects to just start doing it. “Even if you don’t think the odds are in your favor, or if you think you’re too young, just go for it anyways.” After all, Sierra got her experience because “I just kept saying yes, I just kept doing projects and then here we are.”

New Tenure-Track Faculty



Dr. Donato Fhunsu
English



Dr. Thiep Pham
Computer Science and
Information Technology

