

Conversations with Chemists

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1:00 - 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time

Greglynn Gibbs
Research Support Technician & Chemistry Labs Manager
Penn State Berks



Biography: Greglynn Gibbs is a Research Support Technician, Manager of the Chemistry Labs and Student Chapter Advisor at Penn State Berks. Greglynn successfully hosted and facilitated online and outdoor (socially distanced) outreach events celebrating National Chemistry Week including Undergraduate Resume Workshops, and community-wide Halloween Chemistry and Online Slime workshops through partnerships with the Penn State Alumni Association, Spring Township Parks and Recreation, and the Reading Science Center. In addition to her service as Membership Chair of the Lehigh Valley Section, she serves as an ACS Career Consultant, member of the Reading Science Center Programming Committee, the ACS Committee on Community Activities.

Please describe your current job in simple terms.

I manage the instructional (teaching) and research labs for the Chemistry Department at Penn State Berks. I make sure all of the classroom lab reagents and supplies are prepared and set-up. I also repair scientific equipment, order supplies, serve as the safety officer, negotiate contracts, and do the accounting among other things.

What is the impact of your job/why does your work make a difference in the world?

The impact of my job is that it creates a better learning environment for students, and a better teaching and research environment for my colleagues. Does my job make a difference in the world? Not directly, definitely not immediately. But the rewards of providing a positive educational environment, assisting with research, or mentoring a student aren't always seen right away nor do they result in an immediate reward.

Why did you choose a career in STEM? Was there something specific that inspired you (especially if this occurred during childhood)?

I always loved science. I always loved mixing chemicals or using household cleaners on things to see what would happen. I know...but I grew up in a different age and time. But it seemed like I was always testing something in my house on bugs, rocks, or something I couldn't get super shiny just to see if it would keep the bugs away, dissolve the rocks, or get rid of the tarnish or rust. I also used to watch my grandfather garden and repair things, so I would also test what he would use in the garden on my own plants and substitute parts in broken electronics to see if I could take them apart and get him to work like he did. In middle school, I knew my dad did work that my dad couldn't tell me about, but it wasn't until high school that I realized that my dad was a nuclear scientist that I couldn't tell anyone about. That was difficult. But I guess my grandfather and father were my greatest influences technically and scientifically. My mother also instilled in me a love of writing well which I use every day. I think of her every time I write a protocol, re-write a manual, or write for publication. She is the reason I love technical writing and can sit all day in front of a computer typing and editing – the only other time I am in my element other than when I am in the lab.

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What excites you most about the future of STEM/why should someone pursue a career in STEM?

What excites me most about science and STEM is that there will always be a question or a problem that only science can answer. There will also always be more than one way to observe or investigate a phenomenon. And there will always be more than one approach or answer to the same problem. While some people see science as the cause of many of the problems in the world, it is also the cause of all of the advancements that have us as a society, and globally, where we are today. There have been so many advancements that have saved mankind, even if from ourselves, but we can always depend on science and the scientific method to help us find a way through.