

Conversations with Chemists

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

Teri Odom, Ph.D.
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Biography: Teri W. Odom is Charles E. and Emma H. Morrison Professor of Chemistry and Chair of the Chemistry Department at Northwestern University. She received her B.S. in Chemistry from Stanford University and Ph.D. in Chemical Physics from Harvard University. Odom carried out postdoctoral work at Harvard University before starting her career at Northwestern University in 2002. She is an expert in designing structured nanoscale materials that exhibit extraordinary size and shape-dependent optical and physical properties. She is Editor-in-Chief of *Nano Letters*.

Odom's [Personal Story of Discovery](#) video on the transformative nature of her work and her philosophy on elevating everyone around her was featured by ACS Publications. Other interviews have been published in *Bioconjugate Chemistry* on [Women in STEM](#), in *Physics Today* on scientists who carry out [interdisciplinary work](#), in the ACS student member magazine *inChemistry* as an [Eminent Scientist](#), and by OSA on being an [Advocate](#) for young scientists.

Please describe your current job in simple terms.

I am both a Professor of Chemistry and Chair of the Department at Northwestern University. As a professor, I have two primary roles: (1) leading a nanoscience research lab of around 20 graduate students and postdocs; and (2) teaching chemistry courses to college students. As department chair, I am in charge of a large organization of faculty, staff, and students focused on chemistry.

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

I teach and train students to become scientists and responsible public citizens. These people will then make new discoveries that can help the entire world such as treating diseases, creating faster communication, and fighting climate change. In our nanoscience research, we explore new ways to make materials with amazing properties that could lead to the next technological revolution.

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

I didn't – the career chose me. I was exposed to science at school but didn't compete in science fairs or play (much) with chemistry sets. It wasn't until college and after I "saw" pictures of atoms that I became interested in research.

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

What has been very exciting recently is the range of folks interested in STEM – which means that there are now people with very different backgrounds and opinions trying to solve the same problems. One timely example of this worldwide is the successful design of vaccines against the COVID-19 disease.