

Bio - Amy Cheng Vollmer
Isaac H. Clothier, Jr. Professor *Emerita* of Biology, Swarthmore College

Dr. Amy Cheng Vollmer is a first-generation Chinese-American who grew up in the Kansas City, Missouri. Her close-knit family includes a son, a daughter, three sisters, and many nieces and nephews. Vollmer completed her B.A. in biochemistry from Rice University and her Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. After her post-doctoral fellowship in immunology and cancer biology at Stanford Medical School, she spent four years as a faculty member in the Biology Department at Mills College. From 1989 to 2022, she was a faculty member at Swarthmore College, where she served as chair of Biology for 5 years. At Swarthmore, she taught courses in microbiology, astrobiology, biotechnology and metabolism as well as special courses in bioethics, virology, and immunology. In her research on bacterial stress response and on the gut microbiome in small animals, she mentored ~90 undergraduate students, many of whom have presented their work at national meetings. She published numerous papers, book chapters and reviews - in areas of teaching as well as research.



Vollmer served the inaugural editor-in-chief (1999-2003) for what would become the [Journal of Microbiology and Biology Education](#). Among her honors: the Carski Distinguished Undergraduate Teaching Award from the American Academy of Microbiology; Distinguished Lecturer of the American Society for Microbiology; President of the Waksman Foundation for Microbiology*; Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar; a Fellow of the American Academy of Microbiology. In 2025, she was elected as a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Among her other interests: promoting adult science literacy (offering adult learning courses about bacteria, viruses, vaccines, immunology, the gut microbiome, the gut-brain axis, the relationship between science and technology), and promoting networking and mentoring for students and faculty in the sciences. Throughout her career, she has advocated for increasing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and Medicine). She was a tireless advocate for DEI, especially as a member of the first Board of Directors for the ASM. She was heavily involved in establishing and then leading the Swarthmore Summer Scholars Program during the its first 7 years, helping to raise a \$5M endowment to secure the Program's future funding.

Presently, she serves on the Board of [Experimental Science Now](#), a charity that supports the work of [Stan-X](#), a community of educators and a curriculum that provides authentic research experience to high school students.

*The Waksman Foundation for Microbiology was closed by the family in 2017, but its legacy lives on in [the National Academy of Sciences Waksman Award](#) (one of the highest honor for a microbiologist), the [ASM's Waksman Distinguished Lecturer](#), the [MBL's Eveleigh Lecturer](#), two scholars each year in [Swarthmore College's Summer Scholars Program](#)