



Patricia O'Hara

Amanda and Lisa Cross Professor of Chemistry

As a scientist, teacher, mentor, and person, you don't just teach about bonds that bind, essential elements, and catalysts for change, you embody these properties. While the close to six thousand students whom you have taught over more than four decades at the college span the disciplines, their admiration for you knows no boundaries. "Pat possesses the extraordinary ability to recognize the potential in her students, meeting them where they are and helping them grow through both intellectual rigor and personal compassion," one student wrote. "Under her guidance, I learned to think critically and creatively, to approach scientific problems at a deeper and more thoughtful level, and perhaps most importantly, to believe in my own capabilities." Another described you as "an exceptional professor, making a notoriously difficult subject understandable, while fostering an inclusive and equitable classroom environment." You maintain connections with your students years after they graduate, and many cite you as their inspiration for pursuing careers in the sciences.

The first woman to receive tenure in the physical sciences at Amherst, you have supported faculty members, as well as students—co-teaching with early-career professors and generously sharing your wisdom. One colleague wrote about your impact on women scientists, in particular: "Today, over half of the faculty in the Department of Chemistry and in the Biochemistry and Biophysics Program are women. This is in no small part due to Pat's recruitment and mentoring, including organizing for decades a women in sciences gathering every semester, bringing us together in community to celebrate our accomplishments and share strategies for navigating Amherst, academia, and work-life balance...Truly a liberal arts renaissance woman who has broken barriers and continued to lift up others coming behind her, it is not an exaggeration to say that through her myriad teaching, mentoring, curricular and community initiatives, Pat has had a profound positive impact on the entire science ecosystem at Amherst."

A master cook and baker, you have brought to Amherst's table new ingredients for student learning, designing intensive courses that make the standard chemistry curriculum accessible to students with a wide range of preparation; serving as a driving force behind the creation of Amherst's Biochemistry and Biophysics Program; and telling the chemical story of olive oil in your popular first-year seminar—to name just a few of your contributions to the curriculum.

In recognition of your extraordinary teaching and mentorship, the enduring impact that you have had on Amherst students and colleagues, and your transformative contributions to the curriculum and our community, **Amherst College is honored to award you the 2025 Jeffrey B. Ferguson Memorial Teaching Prize.**

Michael A. Elliott
President
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