Our choices in life are often influenced by a particular person or a memorable experience. For Amber Black, one of those was the "gold penny" experiment in high school. In a science project, she dropped a penny in boiling sodium hydroxide and zinc, then heated it over a Bunsen burner until it turned into "gold." Amber was amazed and hooked.

At the University of Connecticut, she found her place—in engineering. There Amber got involved with ASM, serving on the Hartford chapter’s executive committee and as vice-president and president in the Material Advantage student chapter. "It wasn’t a real active chapter, so I helped revamp it. Now they continue to win awards."

At an MS&T conference, Amber met her current advisor at Penn State, Dr. Judith A. Todd, FASM, who encourages her to stay involved with ASM. Amber is currently a graduate student in engineering science and mechanics researching laser sustained plasma for the development of hard surface coatings.

In academic and career decisions, ASM has been a determining force. "I wouldn’t be at Penn State if not for ASM connections. People have helped me figure out what I wanted to do, every step of the way. I’m an NSF Graduate Fellow, and all my reference letters were from ASM members."

Amber enjoys mentoring undergrad students and will no doubt encourage their involvement in ASM. Her own dream is to work in a national laboratory doing analytical work.

Currently, she serves ASM at the national level, on the Emerging Technologies Awareness Committee and as incoming vice-chair of the Volunteerism Committee.

“I love meeting people at conferences and on committees,” says Amber. “They have really interesting stories and are passionate about their work.”

In Amber’s family, volunteerism is a strong value. Her mother mentors others in her civic involvements and encourages Amber to do the same.