

WOMEN WORKING ON MARS: ERISA HINES

My name is Erisa Hines. I am a member of the Curiosity surface operations team. I am currently training to be a rover planner, on the surface.

The rover planners are the part of the team that actually put together the commands that are going up to the spacecraft, for either driving or doing sampling operations – like if we want to drill into a rock or scoop up some soil. So they're the part of the team that actually gets to work with the scientists and to work with other engineers to develop those plans and get them ready to send to Curiosity.

What I enjoy most about working on Curiosity are the other engineers that I get to work with, just because of how creative and technically savvy they are. They're people that know how to do things on the project that I never studied how to do, that I get to learn a little bit by watching them or working with them. There are also opportunities to come up into the Mars Yard here at JPL and see our test rover do things that we want the Curiosity rover to do on Mars.

I enjoy the idea that we get to control something on another planet that is exploring, and that it's going to teach us something about our own world here on Earth, as well as what we might find in the future in space.

Typically engineers are thought of as people who are good at science or in math – those are usually the normal things in school that we talk about: if you are good at science and math then you should consider being an engineer. The other things that you learn when you go to school, is how to problem solve, how to use your creativity to look at a problem and try to understand what the source of the problem is or what you might do to fix it.

So communication, creativity, being able to relate to people and work together in a team – are all things that I practiced in school and was able to hone those abilities and continue doing that now at JPL as we work on Mars.

What I like to let students know is that if they are really enthusiastic about space, it doesn't matter what you want to do in life, whether you want to be an engineer or whether you are really creative and artistic. If you are passionate about space, you can choose to do almost anything that you are good at or that you enjoy doing and make it about space. So if you are an artist you could draw pictures to tell people about space -- to tell people about the science we are finding and make it exciting for them. If you are into rocks and streams, then you can study geology on Mars or on Europa. You can find something in space that is within what you are excited about.

So whether you want to be an engineer or you want to do something that's not engineering, if you like space, go after it: space is a great place to be.