Meet
Rachel Curtis
Master’s program, Biology

Rachel Curtis is a traveler. Born in Illinois, she has lived in St. Louis and Bellevue, Wash. Now, as a student at Jackson State University, she calls Mississippi home.

The biology major originally thought she wanted to be a pharmacist, but decided against it. Her adviser, Dr. Carolyn Howard, suggested she pursue a master’s in biology.

Curtis, who will receive her master’s degree in May, threw herself into lab work during her first year of graduate school and never looked back. She now wants to pursue a Ph.D. in environmental science at JSU and eventually work in a corporate position as a research biologist.

She says that the words of Dr. Greg Begonia, former chairman of the Department of Biology, have always stayed with her. “He was always looking out for me in college and told me to not let anything stop me.”

Curtis is passionate about research and spends most of her waking hours in the lab. She has been working with the Nigerian Basil plant, ocimum gratissimum, and testing its ability to kill lung cancer cells. The results have been positive, and she is working with her mentor, Dr. Stephen Ekunwe, on a journal publication. Curtis says the wealth of knowledge that she has gained during graduate school has proven invaluable. Her biggest challenge, she says, has been time management. But that’s understandable when raising three children, a daughter, 12, and two sons, 5 and 6.

Curtis says going to school and raising a family is made easier by the support of her family, particularly her mother, whom she calls her biggest fan.