

Ashlee Wilkins

AY 2016-17 All-S.T.A.R. Fellow

College of Computer, Mathematics, and Natural Sciences

Department of Astronomy

6th Year, PhD Candidate, RA and TA



My graduate assistantships have afforded me opportunities to serve my department, university, and discipline while developing myself professionally. I was a teaching assistant (TA) for three semesters, and have been a research assistant (RA) for nine. As a TA, beginning in introductory astronomy for nonscientists (Astronomy 101), I learned the bedrock of my discipline as my students did and developed communication skills, confidence, and poise as I stood at the front of the classroom for the first time. Later, I taught in an interdisciplinary course applying modern pedagogical strategies; this provided a new lens with which to view education. As an RA, I study the atmospheres of exoplanets. I've worked with scientists at UMD and NASA/Goddard. I've traveled around the country and abroad

for conferences and focused summer schools to hone my research skills. I've published one first-author refereed paper and a first-author conference proceeding; I will finish two more first-author papers before defending. Simultaneously, I helped start, and now lead, a nationally recognized diversity initiative that I think is a crucial component to the solution to broadening participation challenges in STEM. Graduate school is difficult; not just because becoming an expert is hard as it should be but also because of the uncertainty, the inevitable missteps along the way, and the challenge of defining ourselves as scientists. My assistantships and the accompanying resources have helped me tremendously in facing those challenges, and I hope that they have helped me support others heading on the same challenging path