
Midland College Student Success

April 26, 2017

Teaching is passion for MC Alumna

“I didn’t think I wanted to go to college,” said Rachel Harris. “Now I’ll be starting a doctoral program at Texas Tech in the fall!”

Harris credits her mother for the encouragement she received to attend Midland College (MC) and now work toward a doctoral degree in Math. Harris is one of four siblings who have attended or are currently attending MC. She said that the three younger ones will probably begin their college careers at MC, also.

The daughter of army parents, Rachel was born in Fitchburg, MA and then moved to Germany at a young age. In 2005, she eventually ended up in the Permian Basin with her mother and siblings so that the family could be near her great grandmother, Chris Hamlin. In the fall of 2010, Rachel Harris was just 16 years old when she began taking Midland College courses as part of the college’s early enrollment program. Harris’ education began as a homeschool student being taught by her mother.

“We would sit at the kitchen table, and my mother made sure we completed all of our assignments,” said Rachel. “At the time, I didn’t think much about the curriculum we were using, but I have come to realize that it was very thorough. It helped prepare me for college; in fact, when I first enrolled at MC, I placed immediately into Calculus I.”

Upon completing her studies at MC, Rachel Harris enrolled at the University of Texas of the Permian Basin (UTPB) and received baccalaureate degrees in Math and Mechanical Engineering.

“I like engineering,” exclaimed Harris. “However, I LOVE math! My doctorate will be in pure mathematics.”

Harris fondly recalls her math and science professors at Midland College and said that it was at MC where she decided she also had an affinity for teaching. As an MC student, Harris was employed as a tutor in the college’s Math Lab and has worked for the MC Math/Science Division ever since.



In addition to her employment at Midland College, Harris also created a new equation for fluid motion in a gas turbine under the mentorship of Dr. Essam Ibrahim at UTPB and took most higher-level math courses in self-study under Dr. Xinyun Zhu, also at UTPB.

After graduating from UTPB in May 2016, Harris became an adjunct math Instructor at Midland College. During the Spring 2017 semester, she continued to teach math courses and also taught a physical science lab—a course that relied upon her mechanical engineering skills. The next phase of Rachel Harris' life includes the Texas Tech comprehensive master's/doctoral program. Harris explained that she will complete her master's degree in 2 ½ to 3 years and then finish her doctorate degree in an additional 2 to 3 years. She estimates that the total amount of time to complete the program will be 5 to 6 years.

Harris said that her mother and stepfather have encouraged her to continue with advanced degrees, even though it means she will have to move to Lubbock for a few years.

"Family is very important to me," explained Harris. "When I applied for a doctoral program, it was Texas Tech or nothing because I wanted to go someplace that wasn't too far from my family."

Now, at the age of 23, Harris' dream is to eventually come back to Midland College as a full-fledged professor with her doctorate. She has accepted a teaching assistant position at Texas Tech and will continue to pursue her passion of teaching while she is in Lubbock working on her advanced degrees and performing research in computational fluid dynamics.

"I'm not sure where I want to pull in my mechanical engineering background," noted Harris. "Even though I'm a licensed Engineer in Training, I'm not really interested in engineering as a career. I love teaching!"

Always relying on her love of family, math and reasoning, in her spare time, Rachel Harris enjoys playing Legos with her younger siblings—Tony (age 20), Ezra (age 16), Michelle (age 14) and Emily (age 6). In addition, she studies Hebrew with her stepfather, reads math books and works math problems—for fun!

"It's hard to believe that just seven years ago, I didn't think I wanted to pursue higher education," said Harris with a laugh. "Now I find that I want it to be my career. I hope that everyone can find their passion and have the encouragement that I've had from my family and Midland College colleagues to pursue it."

###