

# From corporate to biology research: ASU Online graduate pursues scientific discovery

By Gabriela Harrod, ASU News  
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**Editor's note:** This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2026 graduates](#).

Christina Jackson is graduating from Arizona State University with a Master of Science in biology from the School of Life Sciences in The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences through ASU Online. Originally from Little Rock, Arkansas, Jackson balanced graduate coursework and research alongside a demanding full-time corporate career while rediscovering her passion for scientific research and discovery.

One of the most defining experiences of Jackson's time at ASU came during a Biology Education Research course with Associate Professor [Katelyn Cooper](#). At the time, Jackson was working a salaried corporate position that required extensive travel, but the course provided a rare opportunity to participate in collaborative research as an online student and potentially contribute to a publication. The experience reignited an interest in research that had been missing during her decade-long career in corporate engineering.

Having attended STEM-focused charter and boarding schools growing up, Jackson had long valued science-driven environments and found herself drawn once again to the curiosity and purpose that research offered. Participating in the Cooper Lab also marked her first experience working within a fully functioning research lab and team setting. She found the collaborative environment especially meaningful, describing the group as deeply dedicated, thoughtful and ethical in both their work and the way they supported one another. The experience ultimately reshaped how she views future research opportunities and the kinds of academic environments she hopes to pursue in PhD programs.

Another standout accomplishment came during the Discovering Biodiversity course, where Jackson conducted research on the desert shrub genus *Glossopetalon*. Recognizing that relatively

little research existed on the plant, she expanded the project beyond the course requirements and developed an experimental design she believed had publication potential. After preliminary testing showed promising results, she committed fully to the project and transformed an early draft into a manuscript through extensive coding and analysis. The work continues as the manuscript moves toward submission, giving Jackson the opportunity to contribute original research as a graduate student.

In addition to her biology research, Jackson explored creative intersections between science and art during her time at ASU, including writing a song as part of a project for her Environmental Ethics course. Following graduation, she plans to continue pursuing research opportunities while also serving as co-owner of a wholesale coffee roasting and quality systems consulting company.

*Note: Answers have been edited for length and clarity.*

**Question: What was your “aha” moment, when you realized you wanted to study biology?**

**Answer:** I had always loved nature, gardening and plants growing up, but the moment it clicked for me was during a landscape restoration project at the University of Central Arkansas in 2014. A professor started explaining plant physiology and clonal growth while we worked, and I was completely hooked.

**Q: Why did you choose ASU?**

**A:** I found ASU through the Starbucks College Achievement Program, which allowed me to study without student loan debt. ASU also does an incredible job creating meaningful opportunities for online students to engage in research and academic communities.

**Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?**

**A:** [Maya Shamsid-Deen](#)'s mentorship came during a really difficult period after my corporate role was unexpectedly eliminated this spring. Her encouragement helped me rebuild confidence, pursue research more seriously and step into spaces I might have otherwise avoided.

**Q: What's something you learned at ASU that changed your perspective?**

**A:** A study abroad trip to New Zealand during my undergraduate years completely changed how I viewed environmental stewardship and human impact. It challenged many of my assumptions and pushed me toward a more compassionate and thoughtful worldview.

**Q: What's the best advice you'd give to current students?**

**A:** Trust in your capacity to learn and expose yourself to new experiences. Don't let the depth of what you don't know intimidate you. Stay curious, humble and tenacious.

**Q: What was your favorite study spot?**

**A:** My home office became my favorite study space. I renovated it with cedar trim and LED lighting to display the guitars I inherited after my dad passed away. It's where I've spent countless late nights studying and writing music.

**Q: If someone gave you \$40 million to solve one problem on our planet, what would you tackle?**

**A:** I'd focus on helping rural communities transition septic and propane systems into biogas-based systems that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect groundwater and create more sustainable energy solutions. Even small pilot programs could create momentum for meaningful long-term change.

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

**Text image(s)**



Christina Jackson, courtesy photo