



(Photo credit: NASA)

Woman on the moon

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Who will be the first woman on the moon? Maybe **Jessica Watkins**, BS '10. In December 2020, Watkins was chosen to

be a part of NASA's Artemis team that will participate in missions on and around the moon. According to the **press release** from NASA, the Artemis program will “land the first woman and next man on the moon in 2024 and establish a sustainable human lunar presence by the end of the decade.”

After graduating from the **2020 NASA Astronaut Class**, Watkins also has a chance to be one of the first humans to step foot on the Red Planet. NASA aims to send humans on a round-trip mission to Mars in the future and Watkins could be on those missions. “It would be pretty cool to be able to ground truth some of the research that I’ve done,” she said. “I say, ‘Sign me up,’ as long as there’s a ride back.”

While at Stanford, Watkins explored the feasibility of simulating Martian soil to test the viability of growing plants on Mars. After earning a PhD from UCLA, Watkins accepted a postdoc at CalTech, where she helped to plan the daily activities of the NASA Martian rover Curiosity and studied the geologic history of the Red Planet's Gale Crater.

How did Stanford help to push Watkins toward a career as an astronaut? While flipping through a Stanford catalog, she came across a course called *What Makes A Habitable Planet?*, taught by NASA Ames planetary scientist Jack Lissauer. Choosing planetary geology “was a way for me to study space and keep my eyes on the stars while staying within the framework that would make me eligible to be an astronaut,” Watkins said. Human spaceflight “pushes the limits of our technological, scientific, psychological, and physical capabilities. Because of that, it is something that brings people together in a way that not a lot of other things do. It’s something that is bigger than some of the divisions that we create amongst ourselves.”

