

# Alumni Spotlight: Bridging the Gap from Campus to Career with John Harkins (SSE '21)

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The transition from student to professional is a journey of growth, but for Tulane University engineering alumnus John Harkins, it has also been a full-circle

experience. Returning to the uptown campus as a recruiter for Intralox, Harkins found himself on the other side of the table at the School of Science and Engineering (SSE) career fair.

Walking back into the career fair environment felt "surreal" for Harkins, who vividly recalled his own nerves as a student. "I tried to put myself in their shoes and just break the ice," he noted, emphasizing that his goal was to provide the same guidance and empathy he once sought.

Harkins, who earned his degree in Engineering Physics with a mechanical certificate, first discovered Intralox through a classroom presentation. After securing an internship that remained intact throughout the pandemic, he transitioned into a full-time role at the company, which specializes in industrial automation and conveyor belt production.

Now scouting for the next generation of talent, Harkins looks for specific traits that define Tulane engineers or the "Tulane Spark". Beyond technical proficiency in computer-aided design (CAD), he prioritizes candidates with strong project experience and teamwork skills. He specifically highlighted the value of Tulane's maker space culture. "Anyone that lives and breathes that place and is there all the time, they are the right kind of folks that we are talking to," Harkins said. He explained that students who engage in these spaces often possess a natural "spark" for designing, tinkering, and problem-solving.

Reflecting on his education, Harkins pointed to the sophomore and senior design projects as critical preparation for the workforce. These experiences force students to navigate team conflicts, build trust, and develop areas of expertise. "I remember talking about [the sophomore design project] more than anything else during my internship interview panel," he recalled, noting that managers frequently ask how candidates resolve conflicts and work within a team.

For students feeling intimidated by the recruiting process, Harkins offers simple but effective advice to be authentic and do your research. He encourages students to ask recruiters about their own professional journeys, as building a rapport can lower the perceived barriers to entry. "It lowers the walls," Harkins said of the alumni presence at these events. "It's very easy to be yourself, so don't try being anyone else. People are there to talk to you. You're there to learn."