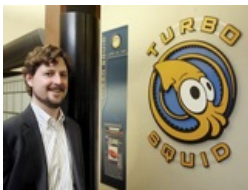


## NEW ORLEANS SHORTAGE OF TECHNICAL WORKERS BLAMED ON LOPSIDED EDUCATION POLICIES



Technology companies in New Orleans are facing a shortage of qualified engineers, leading to an ironic situation, where jobs are available but the right people to fill them are not. TurboSquid, the web-based technology company's founder Matt Wisdom, would like to add to the 31 people he hired last year, but the lack of qualified people prevents him from doing so. "There are so many companies hiring here and there are challenges to find enough staff," said Wisdom. His company TurboSquid sells digital files and images from artists, across the world to other companies. Technology companies' proportion of new jobs in the city is between 5 and 10 percent. But managing to find, even that small percent from local available workforce is getting increasingly difficult. The companies have to depend on out of state qualified workers to fill the vacancies. However, not only do they cost more, getting them to relocate is getting more and more difficult, as the jobs for which they are suitable are easily available in their place of residence. Experts opine that the shortage of workers can only be addressed through a long-term education plan that can prepare the local youth to become proficient in technology fields. The shortage of local workers is because the city does not have quality university programs that can prepare them for the technical work. Schools have to change to more job-oriented courses that teach a trade, instead of concentrating merely on dispensing knowledge. The kids have to be educated with this thought in mind that they are being prepared to address this technical jobs shortage. "Getting the universities in sync to meet the engineering needs will help the whole city," Wisdom said. "Let's make New Orleans an engineering Mecca. If they can get a good education in computer science, we'll train them, we'll give them the experience," Wisdom continued. "There's an enormous amount of opportunities here." Tulane University is addressing this lacuna and is concentrating on developing a computer science program. Hurricane Katrina had left Tulane facing huge losses, owing to which they had to make cuts to educational departments. The Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science was among the first to face the axe. However, it was replaced by the School of Engineering and Science. The dean of the school, Nicholas Altiero, has envisioned a ten-year strategic plan that includes the re-addition of computer science courses. Appointing qualified faculty, proficient in computer education is part of his ten-year agenda. "The University has been very supportive of this initiative to develop a new computer science program at Tulane," Altiero said in an email. "Of course, this takes resources and that has been our biggest challenge." Currently the university does not offer any degree programs for computer science, but the Dean is desirous of offering an undergraduate and graduate degree in the field in the next three to five years. Tulane being a private school does not receive federal financial help and its revenue is dependent on tuition, research funding and gifts. Altiero has said that the university will continue to seek financial support and investments for its computer science program. "In addition to anticipated enrollment and research funding, we are seeking support for the program from corporations and individuals who are committed to building a strong computer science program at Tulane," he said. Altiero is seeking counsel from educational and industry experts and wants to develop a program that serves the purpose of preparing students for technological jobs. "We also envision an industry advisory board to provide continuous input," he said. "Adjunct appointments will also be made as appropriate." Altiero said that owing to the growth of the technology sector, more and more jobs are opening up. The availability of the jobs has opened up opportunities in computer science. "Computing and computation are at the core of virtually all technological advancement and there is a current and growing need for more computer science graduates," Altiero said. "This is one of the motivating factors for our building a strong computer science department as quickly as feasible." TurboSquid is not the only company that is on the lookout for computer science graduates. Federated Sample is another that wants to hire, but is unable to. Its CEO Patrick Comer said, "It's a building block of how systems work," Comer said. "Technology is key, it's a fundamental need. These are things you have to learn to be successful today." Comer said that it was absolutely vital that local universities commenced computer science and computer education classes. Tech companies desperately need students who know how to code, how to make the most of basic technological systems and how to use social media. "We can't support the growth of the industry without the talent," he said. "It's a direct correlation. The more you know about technology, the more opportunities you'll have."

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