

U o f T E n g i n e e r i n g N e w s

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Engineering News



James
Xu,
at
left,
and
Kevin
Han
(both
Year
1
EngSci)
have
been
named
2016
recipients
of
the
Schulich
Leader
Scholarships.
(Courtesy:
DUA)

Established in 2012 by businessman Seymour Schulich, the [Schulich Leader Scholarships](#) were created to foster the next generation of global pioneers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Two of the four Schulich Leader Scholarships awarded at U of T each year are earmarked for engineering students, and this year U of T Engineering welcomes **Kevin Han** and **James Xu** (both Year 1 EngSci) as the 2016 recipients. As they launch their undergraduate careers, these emerging leaders share their first impressions of U of T, making friends and taking things apart.

What attracted you to U of T?

James: I chose the University of Toronto because of its international reputation, the variety of specialties and the quality of professors. I was also interested in the Engineering Science program, which allows students to experience a number of fields before choosing what they want to specialize in.

Tell us a bit about your volunteer work.

Kevin: I started volunteering in grade 10 with Chill Zone, which worked with underprivileged elementary children who needed help in school, or a place to go and do something fun — arts and crafts, games and sports. When I started Grade 10 I was at a new high school, and I felt really lucky to be in a community that was new, because it gave me so many opportunities to create traditions and lead the way. I saw [The Inside Ride](#), which raises money for a pediatric cancer foundation, online and presented it to our student council. Students, teachers or community groups would form teams of six and come up with crazy costumes around a theme, and then they'd ride a stationary bike in turns to raise money. We'd have prizes for celebrating spirit or longest distance. Our first year, we had no expectations, so we set our goal at \$3,000 and then raised \$10,000. It built from there and we eventually raised \$50,000 over three annual events.



Kevin Han (right) teaches in the Chill Zone (Courtesy: Kevin Han)



James Xu, at centre, trains using a Sit Ski for his volunteer role as a ski instructor for people with disabilities. (Courtesy: James Xu)

James: I came to Canada from China in the eighth grade. It was hard to catch up, particularly while learning English. When my family moved to Aurora before high school, I started to teach skiing to people with disabilities as a way to meet people in a new community. I wanted to do something to get beyond the language barrier and I wanted to help people. My students have really inspired me to pursue my goals. I helped them and they helped me to try harder and I started to do really well in school. My current student has weak leg muscles and non-verbal autism. She can communicate through yes or no questions — it's very important to communicate clearly in skiing. You have to know where you're going, the turns have to be perfectly synchronized. I used to be very shy, but learning to communicate with different people has helped me get better at breaking the ice.

Why have you decided to pursue a degree in engineering?

James: Both of my parents are electrical engineers. Since I was little they have been sharing their knowledge with me. They always encouraged me to question things and work. In elementary school I had a toy where you'd press a button and it would make a sound. I remember once it stopped working and I took it apart — I think it was just a loose connection, and when I touched it the connection came back. And ever since then I've been interested in building things. I bought a screwdriver set and started to break everything I had. My parents encouraged me to understand the workings of very simple things.

When we moved to Aurora I had a garage to myself and power tools to try to build things. I made a boomerang, which took a lot of experimentation. I also made an electric skateboard — it took me three years. I made it with parts from remote control cars, boats, you name it. These projects confirmed my interest in engineering where I can invent, design and create.

Kevin: I've always had a strong interest in STEM-related subjects. I found new STEM discoveries or inventions in the news fascinating and I wanted to replicate those success stories in my own way. After my undergrad, I want to continue pursuing higher education with either a master's or an MBA program to complement my career as an aspiring innovator. In terms of my engineering major, I am currently open-minded with a wide range of interest in

biomedical, computer, robotics, and aerospace engineering. One thing is for sure: in whatever I do in the future, I will always seek to find new solutions to issues in the world.

How are you enjoying U of T so far?

Kevin: The upper years talk about the bond between engineering students, and it already feels true. It's very easy to make friends. It's also been very interesting to come to U of T and the Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering from a high school that was so new, because U of T has so much tradition. You walk onto campus and see an iconic building like University College, and then you turn around and see the CN Tower — it's such a different community and I'm looking forward to being a part of.

[Learn more about the Schulich Leadership Scholarships](#)

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