

By Amy Mast



Jason Kitchen, a member of the lab's nuclear magnetic resonance probe-building team, husband, father, and Florida State University undergraduate, proves that the road to research can wind a little along the way.

Jason Kitchen assembles a probe. Latex gloves keep the delicate parts clean.

The Magnet Lab employs people with many types of degrees. Physics, engineering, math and chemistry degrees, sure. But anthropology?

Mag Lab employee and FSU engineering major Jason Kitchen's path to a career in science has been an unusual one. Kitchen graduated from FSU in 1997 with a degree in anthropology and headed out west to New Mexico, where his natural aptitude in other areas led him to a job as a database manager for a defense contractor.

Growing up, Kitchen liked both anthropology and engineering, but he chose the former for his first degree.

"By the time I got done with the degree, I didn't think I wanted to go on to graduate school and do (anthropology) as a career," said Kitchen. "I missed working with my hands, and I always liked science a lot."

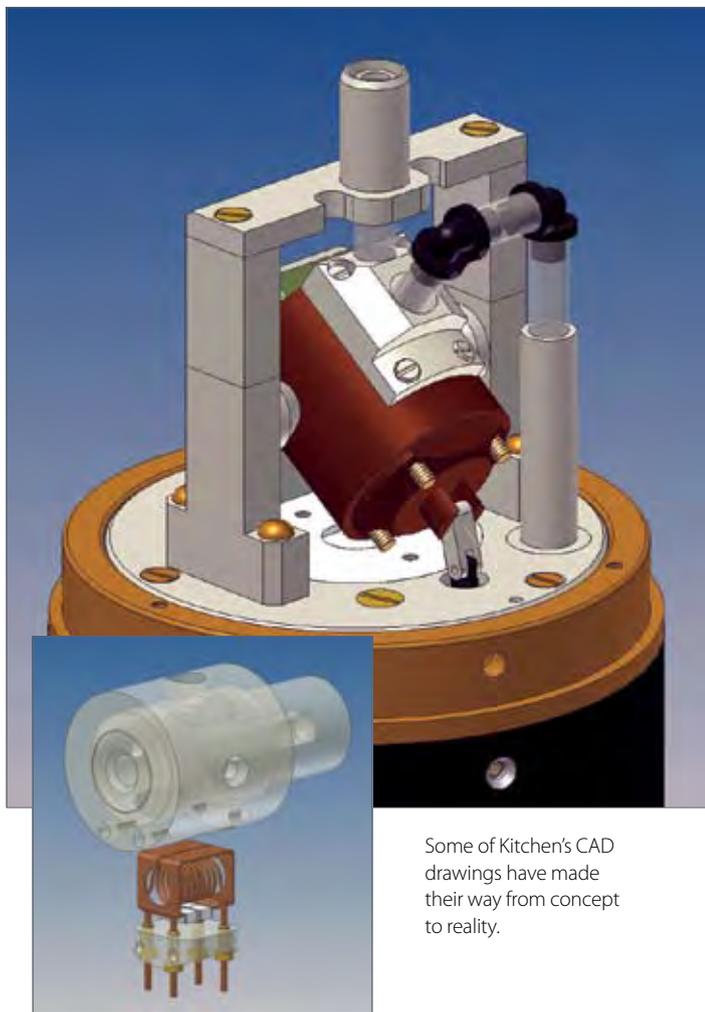
Other people at the defense company noticed Kitchen's scientific bent, and he was soon splitting his time between the database work and the more exciting field experiments engineers were conducting. "Seeing the mechanical engineers do the computer-aided design (CAD) work tied in with how much I like to draw and I like 3D visualization," Kitchen said.

On a visit to see his brother in Tallahassee, Kitchen met his now-wife. As their long-distance relationship grew, he made the decision in 2004 to move back to Florida and get married. With the move, he took the chance to go to college all over again – this time with the goal of an engineering degree squarely in place.

His new degree underway, he applied for a part-time position in the Mag Lab's Geochemistry department. Sure, it was a job pushing papers, but it represented one step closer to the

type of work he wanted to be around. He began to do some bookkeeping work here and there for other departments until he found himself in a conversation with Associate in Engineering Peter Gor'kov, part of an innovative lab team researching, designing and building magnet probes for nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) experiments.

"I told Peter that I was a mechanical engineering student. He kind of raised his eyebrows and said, 'What are you doing in administrative position?' So the next time we met, I showed him some of my CAD drawings. He showed them to the machinist, Richard Desilets," said Kitchen.



Some of Kitchen's CAD drawings have made their way from concept to reality.

Desilets was impressed, and Kitchen embarked on a new adventure. While he continues to do some administrative work for the group, he also produces CAD drawings and helps to assemble probes. During the day, Kitchen simply walks from his job at the lab to his engineering classes across the street and back again.

"Jason was a real find," says Associate Scholar/Scientist William Brey. "I admire the way he manages his life so that he can excel in his classes, be an engaged father, and still arrive every day and focus on his work at the Mag Lab."

Working on probes is detail-oriented, complex, and time consuming, says Kitchen, and having a mentor like Gor'kov has taught him some important lessons.

"In addition to being a scientist, Peter's got a strong aesthetic sense," said Kitchen. "I think he feels things will work better if they are also beautiful – if they look just right. I appreciate the time he takes to do things right; instead of spending all our time troubleshooting what's wrong with a probe you can give that time to serving a user need."

Once his degree is complete, Kitchen's goal is continue working in the same field, citing the combination of discipline and inventiveness as the reason that this work, for him, is finally the right fit.