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Capstone Project Addresses Dangers of Hygiene Products

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Toxic shock syndrome, harmful chemicals and environmental waste are major risks of women's hygiene products. Senior Industrial and Innovative Design (IID) major Rebekah Jerschina from Cloverdale, Oregon, is researching the global wellness market to help solve these problems. The IID major is held in Powell, Ohio.

After taking an emergency medical technician (EMT) course at Cedarville in 2017, Jerschina discovered an interest in the medical field. This new passion, combined with her IID studies, sparked the idea for a capstone project on women's health and, specifically, hygiene products.

"There are all of these major problems that women are embarrassed to talk about, so they don't get solved," said Jerschina.

Jerschina began her research by talking with industry professionals and performing consumer research. She found that many current hygiene products are hazardous to women's health. They could lead to toxic shock syndrome, a potentially life-threatening bacterial infection, or other health complications from hazardous chemicals in the products. Additionally, current hygiene products impact the environment with large amounts of waste.

Before exploring new product designs, Jerschina researched women's experiences and opinions. She created a social media campaign for women to voice their frustrations with current products, including pads, tampons and menstrual cups. After reviewing responses from 300 women of all ages and geographic backgrounds, Jerschina discovered that women's top priority was a product that "doesn't inhibit them from leading active lives."

Jerschina started designing a prototype for a new product by focusing on a simple design that would prevent leakage and eliminate environmental waste. She built her prototype using a flexible silicone material that seals liquid-tight and adjusts in size.

"I got the idea from a heart stent or a Chinese finger trap," Jerschina said. "You could squish it up so small that it would fit inside of an applicator; you would then insert it and it would expand inside the body. I wanted to create something that is as easy to apply as a tampon but has the reusability and length of use as a menstrual cup."

The design is in the preliminary stages, but Jerschina has already received an award from the Columbus chapter of the Industrial Designers Society of America for her industrial design work. She hopes to finalize her prototype and begin testing it soon. "I think there is something here," she said. "It's a small thing that can make a really big impact on women's daily lives."

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,193 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and leading student satisfaction ratings. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.