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## **Ohio Student Has Career Liftoff with NASA Scholarship**

**CEDARVILLE, OHIO** -- When people hear the word "NASA," they probably think of space and rockets. But for Tara Keller, a molecular biology major at Cedarville University, her interest in biology and health care landed her a research opportunity with the well-renowned organization.

NASA is partnering with the Ohio Aerospace Institute to sponsor college students conducting research that would be applicable to NASA's field of study. Keller was chosen as one of the recipients.

All scholarship recipients, with the guidance of a faculty mentor, are required to propose and initiate a research project for the academic year. From Cedarville University, Dr. Heather Kuruvilla, senior professor of biology, has assisted Keller in the group research project, and Dr. Robert Chasnov, senior professor of engineering, has overseen the communication between the university and the Ohio Aerospace Institute.

Through the help of these professors, Keller received the NASA Ohio Space Grant Consortium financial scholarship.

"When my professor (Kuruvilla) realized that my group's research proposal was applicable, not only did that get me a scholarship but it got our research out to more people that care about it. It's more meaningful to know that real people actually care about this research," said Keller, a junior from Frankenmuth, Michigan.

In past years, the Ohio Aerospace Institute would sponsor any type of research, but starting this year, it only sponsors research that benefits NASA'S programs.

"It seemed like it shouldn't apply to me. I'm a molecular biology major and interested in medicine," shared Keller. "Typically, biology is too broad for space science, but one of NASA's focus areas is climate control. Our research is looking at the effects of temperature on microorganisms."

Keller's research group includes four other students, all molecular biology majors -- junior Haleigh Eckert from Mason, Ohio; junior Isaac Seabra from Columbus, Ohio; senior Taylor Strickland from Chillicothe, Ohio, and sophomore Katrina Mills from Garfield, Arkansas. The team meets once a week for about two hours, facilitated by Kuruvilla. In their lab, they experiment on microorganisms (tetrahymena) by heating test groups to different temperatures as well as keeping a control group.

Cedarville has provided the resources for Keller and the group's research. "We look at Tetrahymena thermophila under a fluorescent microscope and see how many cells there are. We also look at what's going on with the DNA inside the nucleus," said Keller. "We have different fluorescent antibodies that we're able to look at under the microscope and to see whether the change in temperature is creating more proteins or less."

The group's project will help them to predict how a global change in temperature would affect a microenvironment based upon what the microorganisms indicate.

Keller will present the research at the Annual Student Research Symposium at the Ohio Aerospace Institute in Cleveland, Ohio, in April.

"This scholarship and experience has been such a testament to God's provision," shared Keller. "The Lord brings things into my path whether that's a scholarship, a job or meeting somebody at just the right time. I'm grateful to be recognized for the things we get to learn here and get to share that with other people."

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 5,082 undergraduate, graduate, and dual enrolled high school students in more than 175 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, high graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and the #4 national ranking by the Wall Street Journal for student engagement. For more information about the University, visit [www.cedarville.edu](http://www.cedarville.edu).

Written by Abby Totten

Photo Caption: Tara Keller using a fluorescent microscope during her lab