U.Va. engineering students Adam Malcom and Scott Kasen’s design for an innovative self-inflating, life-preserver belt won the U.Va. Entrepreneurship Cup in a competition that included entries from U.Va.’s top-ranked undergraduate and graduate business programs.
U.Va. Engineering doctoral students Adam Malcom and Scott Kasen won the first-ever U.Va. Entrepreneurship Cup with their design for a self-inflating, life-preserving belt. The final competition featured six teams with students from the Curry School of Education, the Darden School of Business, the McIntire School of Commerce and the schools of Law, Medicine and Engineering.

Malcom and Kasen’s winning belt design could help increase life preserver usage rates among recreational boaters. Typical life jackets are uncomfortable, obtrusive and hot, Malcom explains. As a result, only 22 percent of boat occupants choose to wear them. It’s estimated that nine out of 10 people who drown are not wearing a personal flotation device, according to the U.S. Coast Guard, resulting in as many as 400 deaths a year.

To increase usage rates, Malcom and Kasen designed a belt with a number of air bladders that self-inflate and emerge from the belt only when the belt is submerged under several inches of water. When the flotation isn’t needed, it remains a simple, unobtrusive belt.


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