

Sanitary Items at Columbia
History and Proposal
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Background

Over the last couple years years, members of Columbia College Student Council (CCSC), Engineering Student Council (ESC), and General Student Student Council (GSSC) have sought to provide free feminine sanitary items to all students in bathrooms on Columbia's campus. In Spring 2016, members of these undergraduate councils approached VP of Campus Services Scott Wright about a pilot program to provide tampons and pads for students at Columbia Health Services. During this time, 137 students went to Health Services in John Jay Hall and picked up 200 pads, 325 tampons, and 310 super tampons. Between September 16 and October 28 of 2016, 320 tampons and 196 pads were picked up from Columbia Health Services.

It is not just Columbia who has taken steps to provide free tampons and pads to their students. Brown University's student government began¹ a similar pilot program, staffed by members of their student government and fully funded from their budget, and it has now been assumed by the President of the University. Additionally, New York University² and New York City public schools³ have implemented programs to provide tampons and pads for their students.

In the fall semester of 2016, members of CCSC drafted a more comprehensive pilot program to provide tampons and pads for students in one to two bathrooms in Butler, East Campus, Northwest Corner, Mudd, Hamilton, Carman, McBain, Lewisohn, and Fairholm. Campus services agreed to fund the installation of the stations in which councils put the tampons and pads. To address the cost and labor to re-stock the stations with tampons and pads as needed, CCSC members requested money and volunteers from within GSSC, ESC, and CCSC. Over the course of Spring 2017, students from the three schools re-stocked stations and collected data which ultimately revealed the need to expand access to free feminine sanitary items across campus. 17 bathrooms – including women's, men's and gender neutral locations – were stocked one a week by student volunteers. The weekly allotment of 17 tampons and 9 pads was depleted in full in many bathrooms – especially highly trafficked women's restrooms such as those in Butler, Hamilton, and Mudd – nearly week to week. After discussion with Campus Services and Health, one primary point of pushback from the pilot questioned the exact quantity of the need, as this crucial data point would influence the entire budget. In other words, though 17 and 9

¹ Mettler, Katie. "Free Tampons for All at Brown University This School Year — Even in the Men's Room." The Washington Post, September 9, 2016.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/09/09/free-tampons-for-all-at-brown-university-this-school-year-even-in-the-mens-room/>.

² Brooks, Stephanie. "NYU Cramps the Cost of Menstrual Hygiene Products." Washington Square News, February 10, 2017. <https://www.nyunews.com/2017/02/10/nyu-cramps-the-cost-of-menstrual-hygiene-products/>.

³ Mettler, Katie. "'They're as Necessary as Toilet Paper': New York City Council Approves Free Tampon Program." The Washington Post, June 23, 2016.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/06/23/menstrual-equity-ny-city-council-approves-giving-away-tampons-to-women-in-schools-prisons-and-homeless-shelters/>.

tampons and pads were used to depletion on a given week, just how many *would* Columbia need to provide on a given day?

Over the course of one week of Fall 2017, ESC stocked six of the spring's chosen bathrooms twice a day, to help understand a better sense of daily need in order to address this concern and estimate an upper bound of usage. By stocking 16 pads and 16 tampons every 12 hours in some of the most traversed bathrooms on campus, council members collected data that spoke to a clear need of these items. A few locations were even hitting 16-16 usage numbers by the end of some 12-hour shifts.

In our conversations throughout 2017, we requested that health services take over financial and logistical support for the program, by purchasing and stocking tampons and pads in bathrooms – and that the bins in which these supplies are held are permanently attached to the wall in order to avoid further theft of these amenities. We were not granted such requests on the basis of budget constraints, but we believe this is a University issue that must provide such resources to all members of the Columbia community, and thus we propose this project to be inherited by the Senate.

History of the Program

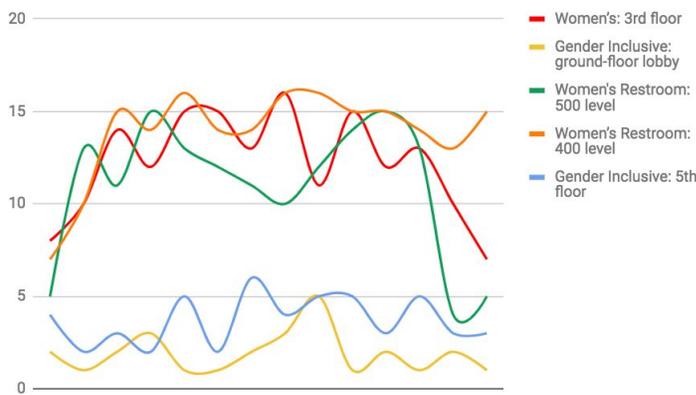
At the beginning of the spring semester, members of CCSC met with Dita Sali, Facilities Manager, to walk through each bathroom listed in the program. CCSC, in collaboration with Facilities, identified every location where boxes should be placed in bathrooms. After the boxes were installed, volunteers from CCSC, ESC, and GSSC began the pilot program to stock tampons and pads. Volunteers would pick up stock every Sunday, and stock bathrooms every Monday of the semester (with the exception of March 13 because of Spring Recess). During the first two weeks of the program, usage data was collected three times a week. During the next four weeks, data was collected twice a week. In the last six weeks, data was collected once a week, on stocking days. The spring program stocked up to 9 pads and 12 tampons once a week.

As a whole, the program ran smoothly. The volunteers went through an orientation at the beginning of the semester, and, therefore, volunteering was standardized. Additionally, every time stock was transported from the council storage closet to a bathroom, it was done so inside a plastic bag, so to ensure the stock was clean. Over the course of the program, there were a few challenges. Most saliently, boxes were removed from four bathrooms over the course of the program (Northwest Corner, Mudd, and Hamilton Men's Rooms, and Butler Second Floor Women's Room), and there are occasional gaps in the data because volunteers were not able to collect data on certain days. The councils also received feedback that, because stocking only happened once a week, there were often not enough tampons and pads for students to use. As a whole, the councils believe that the program ran as well as possible for a pilot program, and produced a large amount of data to build on in future years.

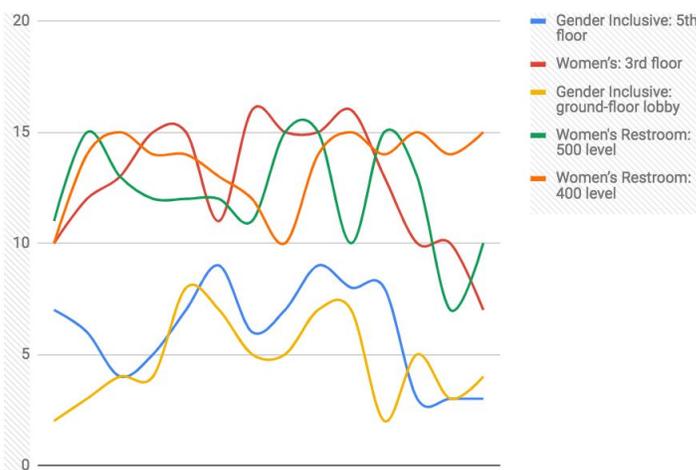
Last fall, ESC sought to shed more light on the actual amount being used per day in a select six bathrooms. These bathrooms were stocked twice a day, a Sunday through a Saturday, always refilled to 16 pads and 16 tampons. There were times in Hamilton and Mudd that all 16 pads and/or tamps ran out during one half-day increment. Otherwise, the data helps supplement the finding of the “upper bound” of pads and tampons needed in randomly-selected bathrooms per day. The one men’s room included (Mudd) in this sample size had its box removed mid-week, and so there is no data for a few days – we thus ruled the data for the purpose of the pilot inconclusive. The findings there are potentially inconclusive. That being said, women’s restrooms of academic buildings of high traffic (Mudd, Northwest Corner, Hamilton), saw significant usage, even on weekend dates.

Summary of the Data, Fall 2017 – Budget Going Forward

Tampons Usage, Bi-Daily Fall 2018



Pads Usage, Bi-Daily Fall 2018



The budget is derived from these bi-daily numbers. Its breakdown goes as follows:

- The average of the bi-daily usage in the three women's restrooms of the Fall 2018 pilot are used to project the upper bound of usage in other women's restroom from the Fall 2017 pilot, as well as gender-neutral locations frequented by many schools
- The average of the bi-daily usage in the two gender neutral restrooms of the Fall 2018 pilot are used to project the upper bound of usage in other gender neutral restrooms and the men's restrooms from the Fall 2017 pilot
- Thus, this budget covers items for the following bathrooms, as laid out and stocked in Spring 2017

Below: Bi-Daily Data, Fall 2018

TAMPONS

	S1	S2	M1	M2	T1	T2	W1	W2	T1	T2	F1	F2	S1	S2	SUM
Gender Inclusive: 5th floor	4	2	3	2	5	2	6	4	5	5	3	5	3	3	52
Women's: 3rd floor	8	10	14	12	15	15	13	16	11	15	12	13	10	7	171
Gender Inclusive: ground-floor lobby	2	1	2	3	1	1	2	3	5	1	2	1	2	1	27
Women's Restroom: 500 level	5	13	11	15	13	12	11	10	12	14	15	13	4	5	153
Women's Restroom: 400 level	7	10	15	14	16	14	14	16	16	15	15	14	13	15	194
Men's: 400 level (data inconclusive, box removed mid-week)	1	2	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

PADS

	S1	S2	M1	M2	T1	T2	W1	W2	T1	T2	F1	F2	S1	S2	SUM
Gender Inclusive: 5th floor	7	6	4	5	7	9	6	7	9	8	8	3	3	3	85
Women's: 3rd floor	10	12	13	15	15	11	16	15	15	16	13	10	10	7	178
Gender Inclusive: ground-floor lobby	2	3	4	4	8	7	5	5	7	7	2	5	3	4	66
Women's Restroom: 500 level	11	15	13	12	12	12	11	15	15	10	15	13	7	10	171
Women's Restroom: 400 level	10	14	15	14	14	13	12	10	14	15	14	15	14	15	189

Men's: 400 level (data inconclusive, box removed mid-week)																
	1	2	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Using the prices for the product used in the Spring of 2017 – i.e. the most cost effective cardboard tampons and pads we could afford, the price per item is \$0.13 for each tampons and \$0.14 for each pad.

I. *The projected weekly usage of a women's and highly frequented gender neutral bathroom is:*

- 173 tampons
- 180 pads

The projected weekly usage of a men's or gender neutral bathrooms is:

- 40 tampons
- 76 pads

II. *Thus, the weekly budget for a women's and highly frequented gender neutral bathroom would be*

- \$22.49 for tampons
- \$25.20 for pads
- **TOTAL: \$47.69**

Thus, the weekly budget for a men's or gender neutral bathroom would be

- \$5.20 for tampons
- \$10.64 for pads
- **TOTAL: \$15.84**

III. *Thus, the two-semester (30 weeks) budget for a women's and highly frequented gender neutral bathroom would be*

- **TOTAL: \$1,430.70**

Thus, the two-semester (30 weeks) budget for a men's or gender neutral bathroom would be

- **TOTAL: \$475.2**

Bathrooms as part of the Spring 2017 pilot that we would like to see included in the first wave of this project

- Lerner Hall Women's Restroom: 5th floor, just outside of the Black Box Theater
- Lerner Hall Gender Inclusive Restroom: 5th floor, just outside of the Black Box Theater
- Butler Library Women's Restroom: 2nd floor, East Side
- Butler Library Gender Inclusive Restroom: 800 floor stacks
- East Campus Gender Inclusive Restroom: 2nd floor, outside of the lounge, furthest
- East Campus Gender Inclusive Restroom: 2nd floor, outside of the lounge, closest

- Northwest Corner Women's Restroom: 500 level
- Northwest Corner Men's Restroom: 500 level (data inconclusive)
- Mudd Women's Restroom: 400 level, just outside of Blue Java cafe
- Mudd Men's Restroom: 400 level, just outside of Blue Java cafe
- Hamilton Hall Women's Restroom: 3rd floor, west side
- Hamilton Hall Men's Restroom: 3rd floor, east side
- Carman Hall Gender Inclusive Restroom: ground floor, lobby
- McBain Hall Gender Inclusive Restroom: ground floor, lobby, just past the guard desk
- Lewisohn Women's Restroom: 300 level
- Lewisohn Men's Restroom: 200 level (data inconclusive)
- Fairholm Gender Inclusive Restroom: basement, hall lounge (data inconclusive)

7 bathrooms at \$1,430.70 a school year

- **\$10,014.90 a school year**

10 bathrooms at \$475.2

- **\$4,752.00 a school year**

TOTAL SCHOOL YEAR BUDGET REQUESTED FOR INDICATED BATHROOMS:

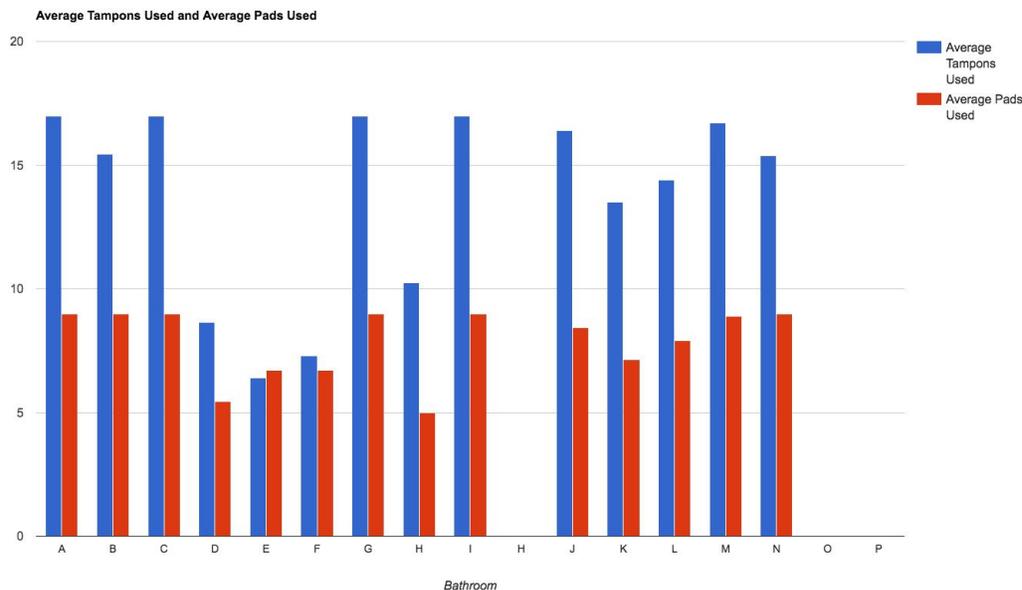
\$14,766.90

For further analysis and explanation of the Spring 2017 pilot stocking these 17 locations, please keep reading.

Summary of the Data, Spring 2017 (As Presented to Campus Services/Facilities + Health)

A summary of the data is as follows. More detailed information on the program can be found in the appendix.

Graph of the Average Tampons and Pads Used in Each Bathroom, Spring 2017



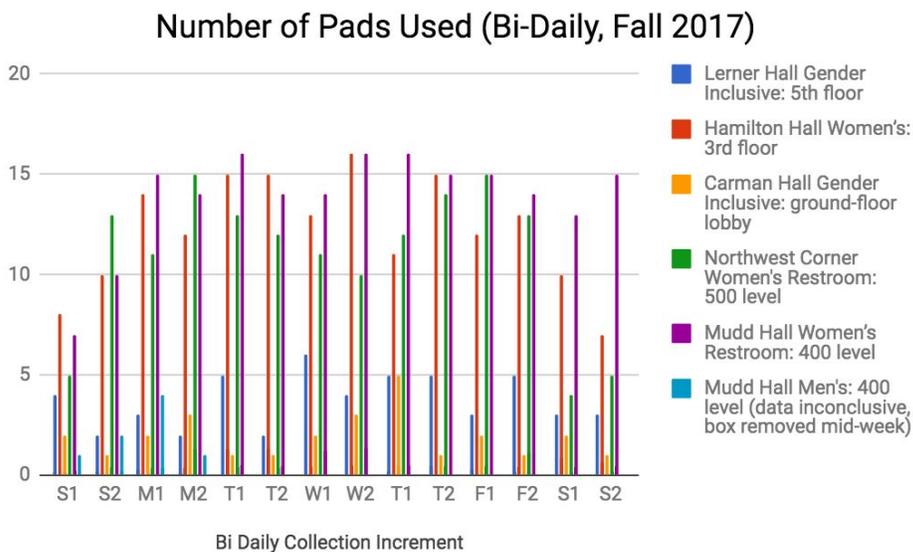
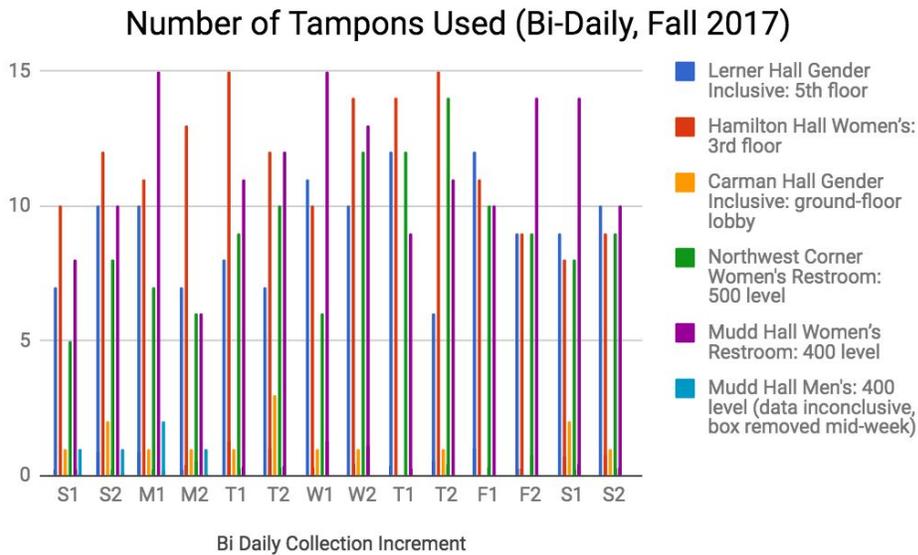
Bathroom Index

- A. Lerner Hall Women's Restroom: 5th floor, just outside of the Black Box Theater
- B. Lerner Hall Gender Inclusive Restroom: 5th floor, just outside of the Black Box Theater
- C. Butler Library Women's Restroom: 2nd floor, East Side
- D. Butler Library Gender Inclusive Restroom: 800 floor stacks
- E. East Campus Gender Inclusive Restroom: 2nd floor, outside of the lounge, furthest
- F. East Campus Gender Inclusive Restroom: 2nd floor, outside of the lounge, closest
- G. Northwest Corner Women's Restroom: 500 level
- H. Northwest Corner Men's Restroom: 500 level (data inconclusive)
- I. Mudd Women's Restroom: 400 level, just outside of Blue Java cafe
- J. Mudd Men's Restroom: 400 level, just outside of Blue Java cafe
- K. Hamilton Hall Women's Restroom: 3rd floor, west side
- L. Hamilton Hall Men's Restroom: 3rd floor, east side
- M. Carman Hall Gender Inclusive Restroom: ground floor, lobby
- N. McBain Hall Gender Inclusive Restroom: ground floor, lobby, just past the guard desk
- O. Lewisohn Women's Restroom: 300 level

P. Lewisohn Men’s Restroom: 200 level (data inconclusive)

Q. Fairholm Gender Inclusive Restroom: basement, hall lounge (data inconclusive)

Graph of the Number of Tampons and Pads Used in Select Bathrooms over One Week, Fall 2017



“W1,” for example, denotes how many of the respective graph’s product of the first/morning Wednesday stocking of 16p/16t were used by the next data collection. “W2” denotes how any of the second/night Wednesday stock of 16p/16t were used by the next collection, etc.

The above graph offers a new, supplemental sample of data, which was a bi-daily stocking/collection that ESC conducted for one week this October.

Testimonials from Volunteers and Students

Over the course of the program, twenty student volunteers put in time every week to stock bathrooms. The following are accounts from two student volunteers about their experience with the program.

Zoha Qamar, SEAS'19

Bathrooms stocked across campus included those in buildings both residential and non-residential. One of the initial pitches offered during CCSC's presentation of the program to Engineering Student Council advocated for the provision of supplies in dormitories, to ameliorate the financial burden that feminine sanitary items carry. This pilot program did not test the nature of this particular proposal, largely because none of the bathrooms stocked included regularly utilized ones of actual residence floors or suites, meaning the pads and tampons were not provided on a scale or at a convenience for such regular, ubiquitous use. This, naturally, was due to the sample size and budget the pilot program could feasibly manage. While the financial strain of feminine sanitary products remains heavy, this program's showcase of which locations' supplies depleted most quickly reveals another dimension of University-wide and University-provided sanitary product need.

Bathrooms A, B, C, G, I, J, M, and N (Graph: Average Tampons Used and Pads Used) illustrate a semesterly average of near depletion of all the supplies stocked each Monday. A couple instances include one pad or tampon left, but these locations, regardless, demonstrate a high need of pads and tampons. These bathrooms include those in busy libraries, dorm lobbies, and high-traffic study areas. On multiple occasions of restocking Butler's 2nd floor women's restroom this spring, I saw someone grab a pad or tampon as I was still rearranging the 17-9 combo neatly in the box. Twice, the woman who did gave me a passing thank you, noting something along the lines of, "Oh wow, phew, I didn't have one in my bag here." Studying in Butler regularly throughout the week, I observed the supply dwindle rather quickly, far before the next "check day," and often noticeably so within hours of the fresh stock.

Other women's and gender-inclusive bathrooms especially, in popular areas throughout Mudd, Northwest Corner, or Lerner (even Carman and McBain lobbies where many study sessions, classes, and open events occur), reveal nothing different. Financial barriers to feminine supplies still exist and need to be tackled in a larger-scale endeavor, one that exceeds a realistic student government budget. However, that doesn't change the fact that CCSC's pilot program has

evidently shown an explicit need for offering pads and tampons, particularly in areas that aren't currently equipped to help someone who may unexpectedly find themselves in a natural situation. In other words, when I am stranded in x-building or location with no feminine sanitary product or no one to ask, it does not matter if I have a huge stash under my bed or business-hour access to the drawer at Health Services.

In fact, the reason I avidly volunteered throughout the semester to stock was because (like any person who menstruates) I've had my share of experiences over time where I've been woefully blindsided and unprepared with no sanitary product. At Columbia specifically, I've had to leave a building for this purpose, in a case where I was working at night at an hour after the building's doors lock to the public/undergrads, thus surrendering my study environment. It is unfair to let this dynamic in any way skew the experience of Columbia students, particularly on such a scale that affects the University's entire population, even more so by such a biologically uncontrollable metric.

Grant Pace, CC'20

The new tampon initiative is critical for LGBTQ+ inclusion on campus. The program's involvement with gender-inclusive and men's restrooms provides basic fundamental hygiene to trans and gender-nonconforming students at minimal cost. Equally as important, it sends the message to these students and their allies that Columbia cares about all queer and trans students. Holding these identities can make navigating institutions designed around gender binaries difficult and degrading. Reforms such as these are essential for breaking down boundaries and creating functional and hospitable environments that destigmatize trans experiences.

Christina Hill CC'19

I have needed tampons on campus and haven't had them. At least 3 times a month. I think having these would be beneficial because it's such a basic necessity for female and many classmates. We would be able to concentrate on our studies more if we didn't have to worry about where we're going to buy expensive tampons. It reflects poorly on Columbia that they can't provide students pads or tampons for free—it seems as if Columbia does not care about its students' well being nor does it care about basic needs. Instead it focuses on more trivial expenses.

Rebecca Magid CC'19

There have been several times throughout my four years at Columbia when I have urgently needed a tampon/pad but have not had one on my person at the crucial moment. It can be pretty awkward to have to ask a stranger for an extra, especially since there is a high chance that they might not have one. It would be incredibly helpful to have access to tampons/pads on campus. Honestly, it is pretty surprising that Columbia does not have this resource already. As it is,

tampons/pads are so overpriced at pharmacies. The fact that the university does not provide them further punctuates this injustice. It is a health and sanitary issue at the end of the day, and one that the university should address.

Liz Myrus, CC'21

To be in the middle of class in a building without access to common feminine hygiene products is ridiculous, and throws off your whole day. It is such an easy thing for this school to provide, and would make the lives of so many students across campus so much easier. It's a simple fix that Columbia ought to pursue.

Madison Harden CC'20

It would address a lot of communities' needs (for example, First Generation and Low Income students). On a smaller level, the practicality of it is so clear. Getting your period is something you can't control, and it would be so much nicer to know that these products are much more easily accessible in a moment of need.

Sam Safari, CC'19

For the sake of inclusivity, four men's bathrooms were also stocked during this pilot program. There are several different issues that must be considered when evaluating the data from the men's bathrooms. First, the tampons and pads were often used in non-intended purposes. This includes students simply playing with the tampons and then throwing them away or using the tampons or pads as a hand drying tool. Second, only one of the four tampon and pad boxes remained by the end of the program (Lewisohn). In terms of student feedback, i received mixed comments from various students. Some were overjoyed by the push for inclusivity and some questioned the rationale behind placing the tampons and pads in men's bathrooms. With that being said, as one of the main people who stocked the men's bathrooms, I would argue that even if one student was aided in an emergency situation then our efforts were worth it.

CCSC also conducted a survey to assess student's reactions to the program. With over 90 responses, many students commented that they were happy with the program's implementation. Many more said that they wished more bathrooms were stocked and that they were stocked more frequently.

Request

The pilot programs have confirmed that placing tampons and pads in bathrooms across campus is a worthwhile policy initiative that improves student welfare and promotes equitable access to resources.

Based on data for the program, we recommend that these bins be placed in high traffic bathrooms, including, but not limited to, buildings such as Butler, Lerner, Carman, Lewisohn, Mudd, Hamilton and Northwest Corner.

We request the school year budget of \$14,766.90 indicated for the 17 bathrooms we proposed, for these pads and tampons to be placed in proper dispensaries in the noted bathrooms, and for locations to be stocked via logistics coordinated by the University. This bare minimum request could perhaps be expanded to include more locations, as well as any possible upgrade in the type of tampon/pad provided.*

(*To note, many discussions with students, as well as data that pads are used more than tampons and general knowledge as users of such products, indicate that cardboard tampons are not the tampons of choice due to maintaining physical comfort.)

Appendix

Notes:

We understand one week may not be the largest, ideal sample size of time for the bi-daily pilot, but we underscore that full-time students with schoolwork, jobs, council commitments, and everyday lives were sacrificing the time needed to make this project happen. Even with that being said, we believe our numbers are indeed a fair assessment of an upper bound approximation of usage, and we use this daily data to help estimate a budget. Because usage was generally parallel between different locations, we find the data admissible for budgeting purposes.

We regret to report that the box fixtures holding the sanitary items in some men's bathrooms were removed during the process of this project. For these locations, some of the data is inconclusive, but we include our estimates of these locations in the budget, too.

We believe the provision of such products in all bathrooms, include "men's" ones, is critical in abiding by Columbia's mission as a haven and home for those of all gender identities. There are members of our community who bleed and identify with using men's bathrooms, and we feel it incredibly wrong to exclude anyone from the mission of this project.

We recognize that this proposal covers the financial cost of the products only – not dispensers – and that it does not account for the labor of filling the bathrooms. That being said, we believe the items are as necessary as is toilet paper in a bathroom, and we hope the product can be implemented into normal bathroom upkeep routines with that in mind.

Authors:

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