



Student Government Association

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **DENVER**

Menstrual Products in CU Denver Restrooms Proposal

Student Health on the CU Denver Campus

In light of recent initiatives of the CU Denver administration to create a ten-year plan for student health and wellness, as well as the university's staunch commitment to diversity and equality on campus, it is essential that female and transgender health and wellness receive significant consideration when determining the budget for such an important initiative.

Additionally, recognizing the 2008-2020 CU Denver Strategic Plan, and in particular, taking into account Objective 5.3.3 and Objective 5.3.4 which focus on facilitating effective interactions among units focused on health and educational disparities as well as, pioneering strategies to eliminate geographic and ethnic health care disparities; improve the prevention, cure, and the amelioration of disease; and develop systems to enhance health and wellness.

Context: Menstrual Product Accessibility and Affordability

The 2018 Always Confidence & Puberty Survey reveals that nearly one in five American girls have either left school early or missed school entirely because they did not have access to menstrual products. Menstruation is a normal bodily function, affecting a quarter of the world's population. Menstrual management is a fundamental human right, yet cultural customs and stigmas and lack of resources often prevent girls and women from dealing with their menstrual needs with dignity.

CU Denver Student Body Demographics

On our campus, female undergraduate students make up 54% of the CU Denver undergraduate student body and female graduate students make up 58% of the CU Denver graduate student body. Additionally, in Fall 2018, approximately 38% of CU Denver undergraduate students were Pell Grant recipients and came from low-income families. These statistics highlight the importance of menstrual products to the health of a significant percentage of students on our campus.

Poverty, Homelessness, Transgender and Female Demographics

Access to menstrual products is not only a matter of necessity but a matter of equity. In Denver, Colorado, females ages 25-34 represent the largest demographic living below the poverty line, with females ages 18-24 representing the third-largest group living in poverty. Additionally, a Colorado State Report on the experience of Transgender people found that 30% of the respondents were living in poverty, while 34% had experienced homelessness at some point in their life. However, this is not only a state issue, but rather it directly affects and impacts our student body population. The 2018 Real College Survey conducted by The Hope Center for CU Denver, found that 30% of our transgender students have experienced homelessness while 17% of our overall student body has experienced homelessness. The survey also highlighted how female and transgender students on our campus face disproportionate amounts of food and housing insecurity, while transgender students face homelessness at significantly higher levels than the rest of the student population. As is apparent from the statistics above, unequal access to menstrual products disproportionately affects the female and transgender students at CU Denver.

Accessibility and Affordability of Menstrual Products at CU Denver

CU Denver students in need of menstrual products currently have a few minimal options. First, the CU Denver Wellness Center offers menstrual products in the Food Pantry located on the third floor which is only accessible with a current CU Denver ID. However, for a student leaving class to access menstrual products, walking from many of the CU buildings to the Food Pantry and back to class will take upwards of 25 minutes thereby forcing the student to miss a significant portion of learning time.

Out of the six CU Denver buildings, only one building offers menstrual products for purchase- North Classroom. The remaining five buildings- Business, CU Building, Student Commons, Wellness Center, Lawrence Street do not have menstrual products available in both the female and gender-neutral bathrooms.

The menstrual products available in the North Building bathrooms cost 15 cents apiece; however, many students do not carry small coins on them and are thus unable to access the products which are essential for their health and wellness.

Menstrual Products as a Matter of Necessity

Of US women ages 18-54 years that have ever been out in public and unexpectedly started their period, a national study commissioned by Free The Tampons shows: 86% started their period in public without the supplies they needed. 79% improvised by "macgyvering" a tampon or pad out of toilet paper. 62% went to a store immediately to buy supplies. 53% asked another woman for period products. 48% obtained their supplies from a tampon/pad dispenser in a public restroom, although only 8% say that in their experience these machines work all the time. Finally, 34 % went home immediately to obtain period products. Inadequate access to this fundamental commodity can lead to women getting UTIs, infection, and cervical cancer.

Rationale for Providing Free Menstrual Products

First and foremost, providing this necessity demonstrates the administration's high regard for the health of their diverse student body, employees and faculty. In a feasibility study that was conducted, "Provision of menstrual cups and sanitary pads for approximately one school-year was associated with a lower STI risk and a lower bacterial vaginosis risk" for students.

Secondly, as a matter of gender equality, the university administration must ensure menstrual products are as readily available as toilet paper, toilet seat covers and soap.

Finally, in the words of Emily Wilson, director of the campaign group, Irise International, "The global decision-makers are men, and when they are not men, they are wealthy women whose experience is far removed from that of a woman living in poverty. The rise of menstrual hygiene management as an issue has come from an increasing recognition of the need to enable marginalized women and girls to speak rather than to assume we know their needs. Alongside the recognition of women as people comes the need to listen to their voices." As an institution which is wholeheartedly and unquestionably dedicated to diversity and equality, it is imperative that we listen to our marginalized students, empathize with their struggle and provide access on campus to basic menstrual products that are rudimentary for students health and wellness.

Aims and Objective

The objective of this proposal is to reach 100% availability of free menstrual products in all CU Denver student buildings and bathrooms. Through this proposal we aim to increase the availability of menstrual hygiene products to 100% for menstruating female and transgender students on our campus, thereby increasing overall student wellness and health, as well decreasing the amount of time students are forced to miss from class as a result of their menstrual cycle.

By providing free menstrual products to our students, we will eliminate the additional monthly cost from their budget and thus lighten the financial burden our students face while simultaneously showing our students that the university administration cares about female and transgender student health, wellness and basic needs.

Program Structure

Menstrual product dispensers will be placed in the women's, men's, all-gender, and family restrooms at all the CU Denver buildings: Student Commons, Lola and Rob Salazar Wellness Center, Lawrence St, CU Building, and the Business Building. These dispensers will be restructured to dispense menstrual products for free.

Outcome

We foresee that the success of this initiative will push the entities of the Auraria campus to install similar programs around readily accessible menstrual products in campus restrooms. With this initiative, we require that an educational campaign be conducted to educate better and inform the Auraria campus and in particular, the CU Denver community about those who menstruate, the necessities that arises from menstruating, the financial burdens that are faced, the impacts on wellbeing, and the stigmas around menstruating and menstrual products. The overarching objective of this project is to provide a basic necessity to students, faculty, staff, and community members and thus ease of multitude of stresses and complications that come up with the normal biological process of menstruating.

Case Studies

Stanford University, Stanford California, November 2017:

The Women's Coalition and the Associated Students and Stanford University (ASSU) reinstated a pilot program to offer free menstrual products in the female, gender-neutral, and male restrooms in their Arrillaga Family Dining Commons, the Graduate Community Center, and the Kennedy Commons building.

The program is currently financed by ASSU's executive teams discretionary budget. This is not financially sustainable as future executives can retract and reallocate funds for new initiatives. The ASSU is looking to expand the program by collaborating with building management and the university's higher administration.

To prevent potential misuse of resource and to educate the student populations, installation of signage in bathrooms helps users understand the principles behind the initiative and the purpose of the supplies.

The ASSU argue that the lack of free menstrual products in bathrooms hinders student productivity, education, and comfort and hopes to address inconveniences that students face while menstruating.

They are exploring options to offer both tampons and pads and are currently purchasing organic cotton tampons from a wholesale vendor who donates a portion of their profits to homeless and low-income menstruators.

Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO September 2017:

"You Matter...Period" is a pilot program that provides free tampons and pads in 33 all-gender restrooms at CSU Campus. The initiative was created by the Division of Student Affairs and is designed to support employee and student success on campus.

The Vice President for Student Affairs, Blanch Hughes, created a campus task force that began researching the need, opportunities, and options for providing free period products on campus in the fall of 2017. The task force was composed of the Associate Students at Colorado State University, administrative profession council, classified personnel council, facilities management, Divisions of Student Affairs and External Relations, and the President's Office. This task force argued that the lack of access to menstrual products has an impact on both students and employees. Both have reported leaving campus when they unexpectedly start their periods

during the middle of the day, thus missing valuable time in class or at work. The task force evaluates feedback gathered from the pilot program and will generate recommendations for an ongoing campus service model.

Testimonies

"Our task force sees the You Matter...Period initiative as a way of supporting student and employee success. Menstruation is a natural biological process, experienced by over half of the student body, and it should not be a barrier to getting a quality education."

- Erin Patchett, Associate Director of Campus Recreation

"Supplying free period products supports general health and wellbeing on campus like other standard supplies offered free of charge in our campus restrooms - toilet paper, paper towels, and hand soap." - Neal Lugan, Task Force Chair

Yale University, Connecticut April 2018:

The Yale College Council launched a pilot program to provide free menstrual products in three residential colleges. They first began the pilot program with Morse and Silliman colleges and are now expanding to Berkeley college just a few weeks after its first launch.

A report was conducted on the findings of a YCC survey on the pilot program and found that 46.4% of the 776 people surveyed who bought menstrual products stated that it presented a degree of financial burden.

During the month-long program, menstrual products were placed in three to four areas in each residential college, each of which requires swipe access. The YCC restocked products every two to three days, keeping track of how often the locations need to be restocked, as well as which products are used.

Testimonies

"Our main, overarching, very optimistic goal is that this will usher in a total shift in ideology- a shift in how we view these products. So, reframing how we think about menstrual hygiene products - not as a luxury, not seen as a commodity, but as a necessity on campus." - Lorna Chitty, Co-author in the 2018 report

"Great step to promoting gender equity on campus" - Kaley Pillinger, student at large

New York City, March 2018:

New York City launched a pilot program installing free menstrual products in one school last spring, then gradually expanded it to 25 schools. "By the time girls and boys show up for the first day of school on September 8, free menstrual products will be available in many schools, and by mid-November, the rollout will be complete. "Students must feel comfortable during their classes so they can focus on learning, and having free, easy access to menstrual products is essential," says a Department of Education spokesperson."

CU Denver Student, Staff and Faculty Testimonials

Free feminine hygiene products should be implemented in all restrooms at CU Denver because women's education is affected due to a lack of it. The menstrual cycle can be regular or irregular for women and it can strike at any moment. Women who are unprepared for this situation (especially women with irregular cycles) are often faced with the dilemma of skipping class to take care of the unexpected arrival of this cycle. If feminine hygiene products were provided in all restrooms, women wouldn't have to jeopardize their learning to take care of a normal, human bodily function.

The cost of feminine hygiene products may also be too much for individuals coming from low-income families, which would limit their access to such necessary and sanitary products. Providing them at school for all to use would be a great load off of one's shoulders and one less thing to worry about so that students can focus on learning and getting as much as they can out of their time at CU Denver.

Katrina Agudo, CU Denver Student

- I believe that all school campuses should offer free menstruation products because of how expensive they are as well as the unpredictability of menstrual cycles. The substantial amounts of money we spend on tuition goes towards making campus life enjoyable as well as improve academics. I believe that part of making campus safe and enjoyable for all students would be to offer free menstruation products in campus bathrooms.

Ashlin Lorenzo, CU Denver Student

- Why is it important to provide free feminine hygiene products in all CU Denver bathrooms? To that I pose this question: Why do we have a food pantry? The answer is simple, no? Because food is necessary for all human beings. So why is it that period products are not held in the same regard? Women, regardless if they are menstruating or not, require period products. Just because men do not share this biological process and do not have to think about access to period products, does not make it ok to disregard their importance all together. Period products are necessary. "Eighty-six percent of non-homeless women report having started their period in public without supplies and 79% have been forced to use toilet paper or some unhealthy and unsafe object because their period started without hygiene products" (Parillo & Feller, 2017). This problem is only magnified for homeless women. Women who may be forced to choose between food or tampons. Women who may be forced to simply go without period products. With nearly 150 CU Denver students identifying as homeless, why are the needs of these women being ignored? Homeless women need more than just food. CU Denver should support its female population; students, faculty, and administration alike, homeless or affluent. Women and their needs matter, and if the University actually cared about the women on this campus, it would provide free period products in all of its restrooms. Thank you. (Parrillo, A., & Feller, E. (2017). Menstrual hygiene plight of homeless women, a public health disgrace. Rhode Island medical journal, 100 12, 14-15.)

Vannesa Campuzano, CU Denver Student

- One day last fall I went into the women's restroom on the second floor of the Student Commons Building. There was a young woman in one of the stalls, and she called out for help because her period had started unexpectedly. She did not have adequate equipment to manage the situation, and she was stuck in the restroom instead of being in class. I no longer use feminine hygiene products and had recently given my supply to another student in need. I had to go up to the third floor to find an office with a woman in it who had some supplies on hand.
- That said, I'm not going to argue for free supplies across campus for several reasons. For one, there are two managing institutions relevant to the buildings our students frequent, AHEC and CU Denver. As you may know, AHEC is notoriously difficult to work with. All four institutions, including AHEC, CU Denver, Metro, and CCD, would have to collaborate.
- On the other hand, I can imagine success in placing dispensing equipment in the buildings

that are predominantly used by CU Denver students. Even then, making supplies free would entail a great deal of expense, and I don't think it is necessary to solve most of the emergency problems I have witnessed. Simply having dispensing equipment with supplies sold at cost in the washrooms would solve that. Installing and stocking the equipment would have nontrivial costs, and covering the cost of supplies would still not cover the costs of installing and maintaining the equipment.

Pamela Laird, History Professor Emerita, CLAS Director of Digital Initiatives

- The lack of feminine hygiene products in the bathrooms on the Auraria Campus has been a source of stress for me many times since I began working here. Given that it is impossible to predict the onset of menstruation with any real precision, and that human beings can sometimes be distracted and forget to pack necessary items in their work bags, I find it inconsiderate and unjust that we don't have tampon dispensers in the bathrooms. Inconsiderate because more than half of the campus population is female. Unjust because women are placed at a disadvantage relative to men in this regard (men don't have to rush around frantically looking for tampons, making themselves late for class and sometimes unable to attend for fear of leaking blood all over our clothes and chairs). And unjust because we're on a campus that caters to poor and working class students--feminine hygiene products are expensive. Even further, if you do happen to have money to buy them, they are not available for purchase on campus, not in stores in the Tivoli, not in the little market in North. And, you can't find these products as you move into downtown to the north of campus (the real estate is pretty expensive here, making it hard for anything other than upscale retailers and eateries to set up shop). We need free feminine hygiene products on campus. Plenty of offices on campus give away condoms, helping all members of our campus community tend to their reproductive health and protect their reproductive rights. Feminine hygiene products should be viewed in the same way.

Sasha Breger Bush, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science

- "The only place I am aware of on campus to get any period products is the Tivoli, "i lov iT" market, where I can buy one single tampon only, with a plastic applicator, wrapper, and full plastic packaging on top of it. I don't want to walk all the way across campus to buy one single product with so much waste for only 3-6 hours use. I want applicator-free period

products available in ALL buildings in a place where anyone can access (not just the women's bathrooms) because trans men deserve the same access I have."

- "To have period products that are healthy and sustainable would be lifesaving! You can't choose when a period comes and sometimes you forget until it surprises you and if you are unprepared that can be the worst thing. I am in support for sustainable and healthy products so that a girl can live a comfortable day under uncomfortable circumstances."
- "The idea for sustainable feminine products on the Auraria campus is absolutely amazing and would help both the environment and females alike."

Jennifer V. Richards, CU Denver Student

- "In support for free tampon opportunities on the CU Denver campus. Important for human hygiene."

Yael R., CU Denver Student

- "Feminine products are crucial to provide female students on our campus a way in which they don't have to worry about their biology when bettering themselves intellectually. The need for feminine products is not a choice for women, so as a progressive campus, we are responsible for helping our women. No student, no matter their sex, deserves to be limited by their biology."
- "These products are necessary for women so we should ensure that these products aren't contributing to the global problem of waste that we face."
- "I will support a zero-waste free feminine hygiene products initiative on campus! This is a great idea because providing green products could decrease the amount of waste prone products that women purchase. Also, waste from individual packaging would decrease and help out our lovely janitors."

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