



**A REPORT ON THE STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION'S
MENSTRUAL EQUITY TASK FORCE TRIAL AND SURVEY**

"A MONTHLY REMINDER THAT THE UNIVERSITY CARES"

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
Menstrual Equity Trial Results	4
Overview	4
By Location	7
Feedback From Student Survey	10
Recommendations	17
Paying For The Products	17
Choosing A Dispensing Machine	17
Conclusion	20



Introduction

The Student Government Association's Menstrual Equity Task Force implemented a five-week trial in the women's bathrooms across the Catholic University campus in main and academic university buildings from October 11th to November 19th, 2021. The motivation behind this five-week trial was to estimate the usage of free menstrual products by female Catholic University students. This trial would provide the data necessary for the University to determine if it is feasible to provide these products free of charge in the women's bathrooms for those who need them over the course of an entire academic year. The data presented is an analysis of the number of the products distributed and used throughout the five-week trial period as well as student feedback after the trial was completed.

In the Spring of 2019, the idea of providing free menstrual products in the bathrooms on campus was first initiated in the Senate by Senator Gemma Del Carmen. She brought forth a piece of legislation that urged the University to offer these products in order to support their female students on an emergency use basis. The term "emergency use" serves as an important clarification to the purpose of the resolution and trial that would follow. We are not asking the University to provide products to support each and every woman's entire, individual menstrual cycles, but rather instead to create a safety net for women who are in a bind and are unable to obtain a menstrual product from their bag, home, or a friend. Furthermore, according to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, "14% to 25% of women have irregular menstrual cycles", which can often result in an unexpected period.¹ If Catholic University is representative of this national data, then as many as 1 in every 4 female students experience irregular menstrual cycles that could impede their educational and social experience. Offering these products opens an opportunity for the University to support its students in one of the most stressful and panic-inducing experiences of an unexpected period.

Through meetings held with university personnel after the passage of her resolution, it was decided that a trial needed to be conducted in order to assess the usage and cost of the full-scale implementation of the resolution. As

¹ <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/menstruation/conditioninfo/irregularities#:~:text=For%20most%20women%2C%20a%20normal,from%2021%20to%2035%20days.&text=However%2C%2014%25%20to%2025%25,other%20problems%2C%20like%20abdominal%20cramps>.

detailed in this report, the information collected demonstrates that there is a significant need for emergency use feminine hygiene products on our campus. Furthermore, the survey we launched underscores that if the administration were to enact this initiative, female students would feel significantly more comfortable and supported by their university.

In pursuit of executing this trial, the Executive Director of the Menstrual Equity Task Force, Isabella Pardino received a generous grant from The Pad Project, a nonprofit organization that focuses on issues related to menstrual equity. These funds were utilized to purchase products and materials for the distribution vehicles as well. This project was led by Isabella Pardino and her team of committed peers: Justin Ancheta, Nicole Campos, Catherine Darcy, Jordan Gehrig, Claire Keller, Adriana Kwiatkowski, Julia Pandolfi, and Maisy Sullivan. Each one of these Task Force members played an integral role in collecting data on the usage of products and restocking the women's restrooms with pads and tampons throughout the course of the trial. Oversight of the execution of the trial, creation, and distribution of the survey, and writing of this report was conducted by Vice President Monica Wallace.

Menstrual Equity Trial Results

OVERVIEW

As mentioned in the above introduction, the trial was conducted over a period of five weeks in women's restrooms throughout campus in both academic and recreational buildings. The restrooms that were stocked with menstrual products include those in the following buildings: Pangborn, McCort-Ward, Crough Center, Gowan, Maloney, McMahon, Leahy, Salve Regina, Ward, O'Boyle, DuFour Center, Aquinas, Caldwell, Hannan, Columbus School of Law, Pryzbyla Center, McGivney, Mullen Library, and Shahan. This list totals to nineteen buildings on the Catholic University campus and 42 bathrooms. Given that the purpose of providing these products is for emergency situations, we specifically chose to place the products in all of the buildings that classes are taught in. Further, we supplied menstrual products to the buildings that are traditionally used as student spaces for leisure, student organization events, or athletics. We did not supply the products in residential buildings, because students would have access to their own personal supply of products in these locations. The goal of this project is to prevent any woman from having to miss out on class or

events or disrupt their peers’ learning experience to ask for products due to having an unexpected period in a public University location.

The total number of products used across all of the buildings on campus over the course of the five weeks is 4,204. The number of pads used is 2,064 and the number of tampons used is 2,143. These values are summarized in the table below.

Results of the Trial	
Total Number of Pads Used	2,061
Total Number of Tampons Used	2,143
Total Number of Products Used	4,204

Figure 01: Total Usage During the Trial

An important observation to note is the number of pads and tampons used overall only differed by 82 products, meaning that there is equal demand for both types of menstrual products. This discovery contradicted a hypothesis held by the Task Force before starting this initiative that tampons would be more often utilized. Many women due to preference, religious beliefs, and past traumatic experiences choose to utilize pads instead of tampons and the product offerings from the school should reflect that.

The data can also be understood through the lens of usage over time. The figure included below summarizes how the usage of products in total and in each type of product changed across the course of the trial.

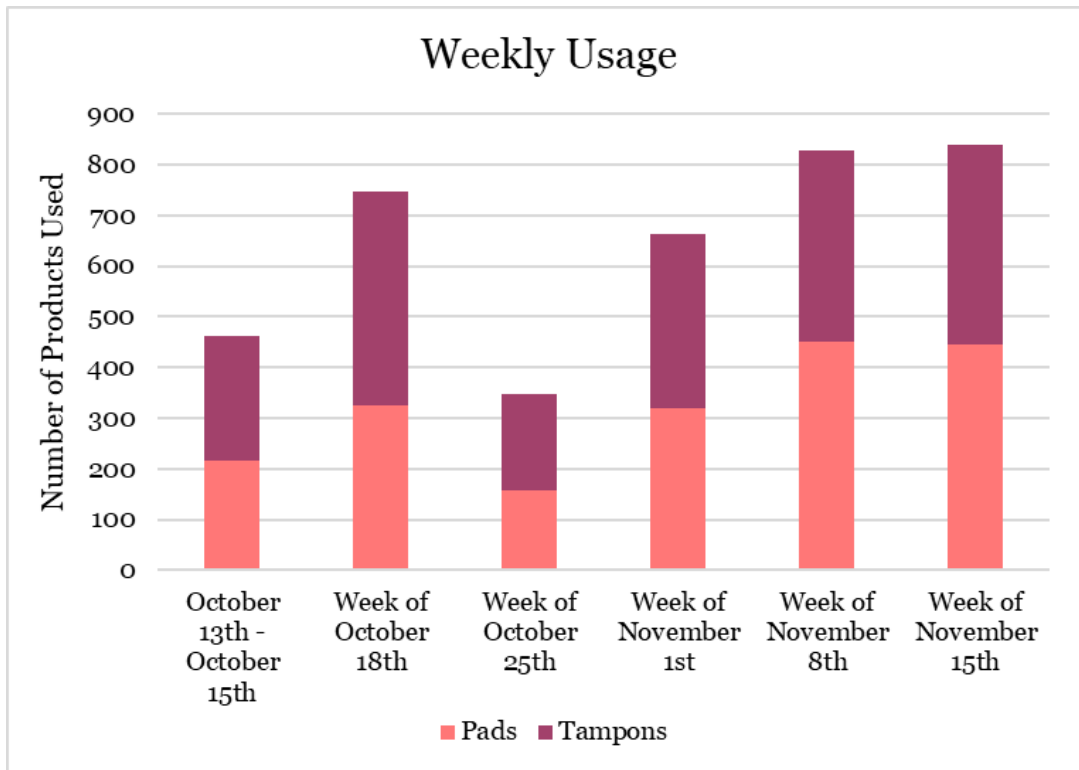


Figure 02: Weekly Usage

In order to fully understand the trends presented in the figure, insight into the execution of the trial itself must be explained. First, the first bar in the graph represents only half of a week due to problems that the Task Force faced in setting up the baskets on Columbus Day. Secondly, the week of October 25th shows much lower values for the number of products used because not all of the baskets were stocked at full capacity due to our waning supply and shipping delays when delivering the second round of products to the University. With both of these facts in mind, the usage of products over the course of the trial was fairly stable. The highest number over the course of a week was 840 during the last week of the trial and the lowest of 348 products occurred during the week of October 25th primarily for the reason stated above. The average usage in a single week across all weeks is 648 products. We believe that the average is a fairly representative number for the usage in a week because it balances the increases seen due to this initiative being new and exciting with the low supply seen during the week of October 25th.

Consequently, with the information present in the bar graph, the University can calculate the cost of providing this service on campus over an entire academic year with the price points of different brands and products. According to the University's Academic Regulations for Undergraduates as published on its website, "an undergraduate program of instruction generally includes a minimum of 30 weeks of classwork and exams per calendar year."² With the addition of weeks for Orientation, Thanksgiving Break, Spring Break, and finals, the products would have to be provided for an estimate of 35 weeks for an entire academic year. Using the estimated usage per week of 648 products, that would be 22,680 products over the course of an entire academic year.

To provide a further breakdown, the average number of pads used per week was 319 and the average number of tampons used per week was 329. The total number of pads over the course of a year would be 11,171 and 11,509 for tampons. Using cost estimates provided by the University from their vendor, a package of 250 pads is \$34.88 and a package of 500 tampons is \$67.38. To provide products for the entire year, the University would have to purchase at least 45 boxes of the pads and 23 packages of the tampons. The total approximate cost for pads for the year is \$1,558.58 and \$1,550.95 for tampons. At a unit cost of \$0.14 per pad and \$0.13 per tampon and given the usage data provided by the trial, it would cost the University a total of \$3,109.53 to purchase enough menstrual products to provide them in the female restrooms in all of the academic and recreational buildings on campus. This figure does not capture the additional fixed costs related to purchasing and installation of dispensing machines or expenses that result from facilities workers having to restock and check these machines regularly.

BY LOCATION

The number of products used varied greatly depending on the frequency and quantity of students visiting that building. As you may have guessed, the building with the greatest quantity of products used throughout the trial was the Pryzbyla Center. All three of its bathrooms ranked as the top three bathrooms for the most products used and comprised 32% of the total products utilized. The second floor of the Pryzbyla Center saw the highest number of products used at 475 in total. The top ten bathrooms are given in the table below.

² <https://policies.catholic.edu/students/academicundergrad/acregsfull.html>

Bathroom	Number of Products
1. Pryzbyla 2nd Floor	475
2. Pryzbyla 3rd Floor	439
3. Pryzbyla 1st Floor	417
4. Dufour Center Locker Room	187
5. Dufour Center 1st Floor	155
6. Leahy 1st Floor	139
7. McMahon 2nd Floor	139
8. Mullen 1st Floor	136
9. Law School 1st Floor	126
10. McMahon 1st Floor	120

Figure 03: Bathrooms with the Highest Level of Usage

As seen in the chart, the bathrooms with the fourth and fifth most utilized products were both located in the DuFour Center. Consequently, funding this initiative is an important way to support our female athletes. The DuFour Center is far away from the rest of campus, especially for residents living in Centennial Village and Gibbons, and typically there is not enough time to walk all of the way back to these locations before a practice or game begins. Therefore, an unexpected period could cause athletes to miss practice or games vital to the team's success.

The table below orders all 19 buildings by the number of products used in their bathrooms. The buildings with the most frequent usage have the highest number of bathrooms and tend to be student study, activity, and fellowship spaces. In summation, the buildings that students visit the most held the bathrooms in which the most products were used. This chart again highlights the Pryzbyla Center as an outlier in the data with 1,331 products used in total. This number compares with a range of 342 to 12 for the other 18 buildings. Two-

thirds of the buildings lie between the range of 260 to 100 products, which provides a realistic understanding of the usage in moderately trafficked student spaces such as Mullen Library or Leahy and higher trafficked academic buildings such as the Law School, Maloney, and the Crough Center.

Building	Number of Products Used
Pryzbyla	1331
Dufour Center	342
McMahon	259
Mullen Library	253
Leahy	223
Law School	218
Ward	207
McGivney	202
Maloney	176
McCort-Ward	168
Caldwell	148
Crough Center	148
Pangborn	144
Shahan	105
Hannan	97
O'Boyle	83
Aquinas	50
Gowan	38
Salve Regina	12

Figure 04: Level of Usage by Building

FEEDBACK FROM STUDENT SURVEY

To identify the primary reasons for usage and assess the impact of the trial, the Task Force launched a survey at the beginning of the Spring semester. This survey was a joint effort between the Undergraduate Student Government Association, Graduate Student Association, and the Student Bar Association to reach all female students on campus. In total, the survey received 556 responses. Out of those respondents, 87% of these students used at least one product throughout the duration of the trial. The results are summarized in the pie chart below.

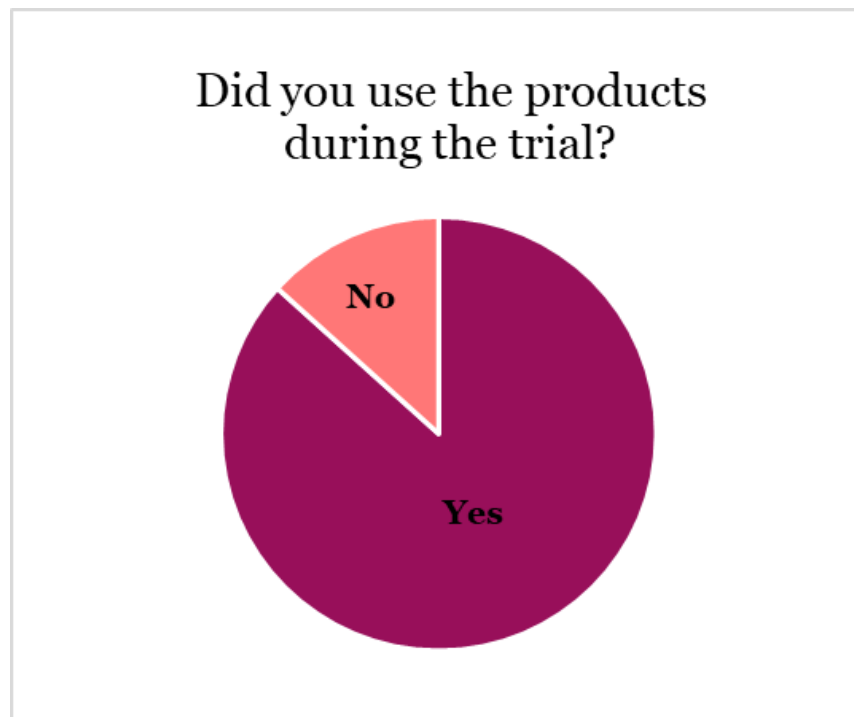


Figure 05: Usage of Products During the Trial

The following questions aimed to uncover whether offering free products in the bathroom primarily served as a resource in case of an emergency because that was their intended purpose. The chart below shows the number of times that each respondent used the products provided by the trial.

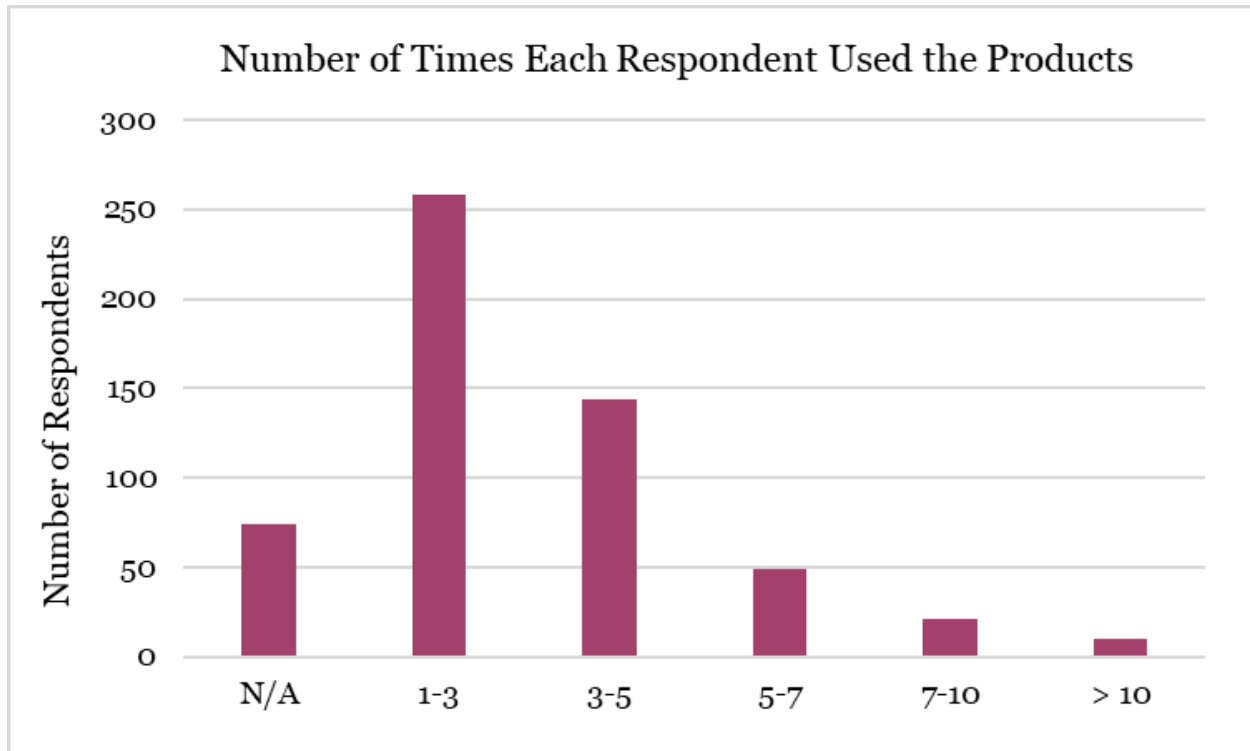


Figure 06: Number of Times Used per Respondent

54% of those who used the products at some point during the trial responded that they used them 1-3 times. 83% of respondents answered between the range of 1-5 times. Altogether, the results yielded that 86% of the respondents either did not use the products at all or used them less than 5 times. These findings support our goal for the project to demonstrate that students would use the products primarily on an emergency basis and would not rely on these products for an entire cycle. Further, it is important to note that this data most likely has a bias towards a higher number of times used per student rather than less. This is because students that did not use the products would have been less likely to fill out the survey because it did not directly impact them. Our intention is not to have every single female student use these products; instead, it is to have them as an option in times of an unexpected period.

The next questions focused on uncovering the utility of the trial itself and continuing this initiative in the long run. The bar graph given below demonstrates how useful respondents found the availability of free menstrual

products in the restrooms. These calculations include respondents that used the products and those that did not.

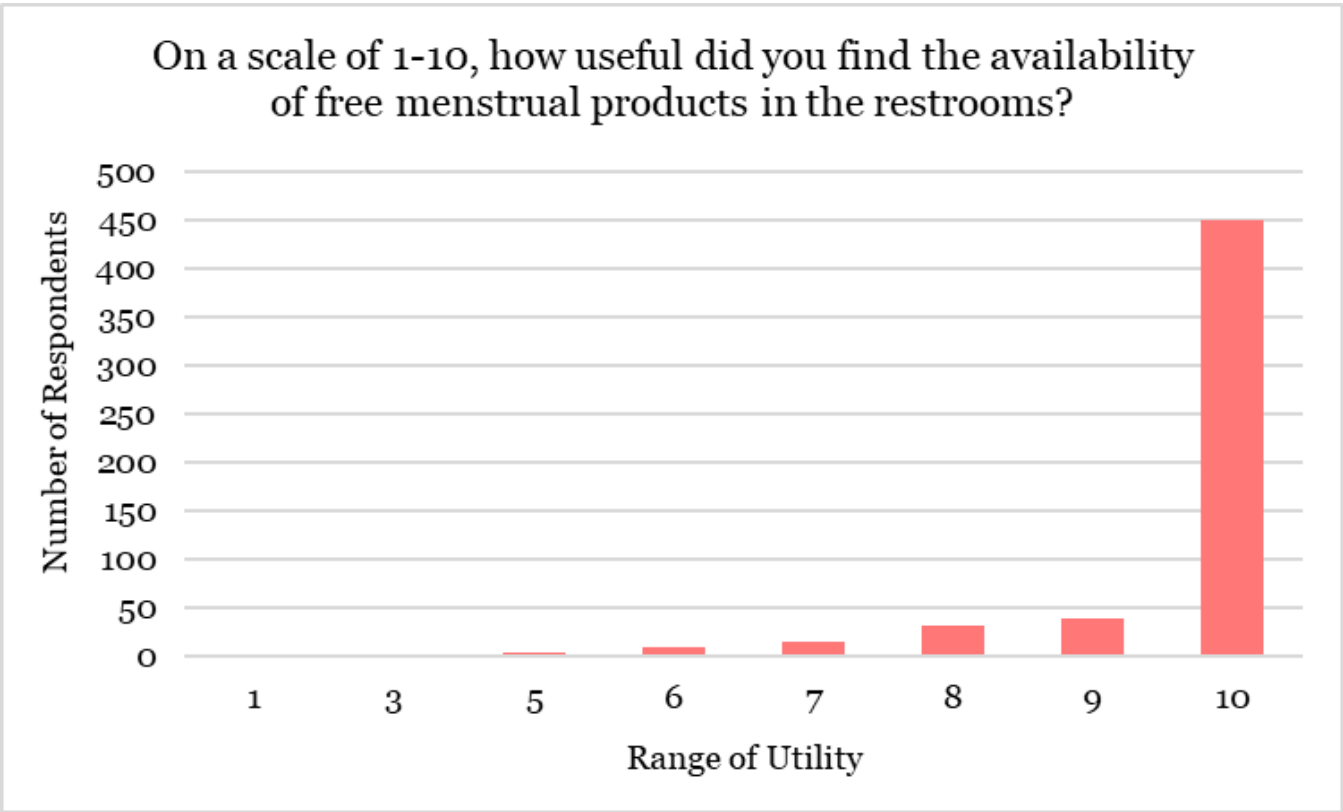


Figure 07: Utility of the Program

As you can see by looking at the graph itself, 81% of the respondents answered that they found the availability of free menstrual products to be most useful (10). 97% of the responses were between the range of 7-10. These statistics demonstrate resoundingly that this initiative was incredibly useful during its five weeks, even for students that did not use the products themselves. Having the products there in case of an emergency provides a sense of relief that comes from knowing that an unexpected period would not prevent you from missing classes or events. Further, the presence of these products prevents the potentially embarrassing or stressful experience of traveling across campus trying to find menstrual products after an unexpected period has occurred.

The following chart details the primary reasons why respondents used the products during the trial. The respondents that answered that they did not use

the products at all were removed from the calculations made to create this figure.

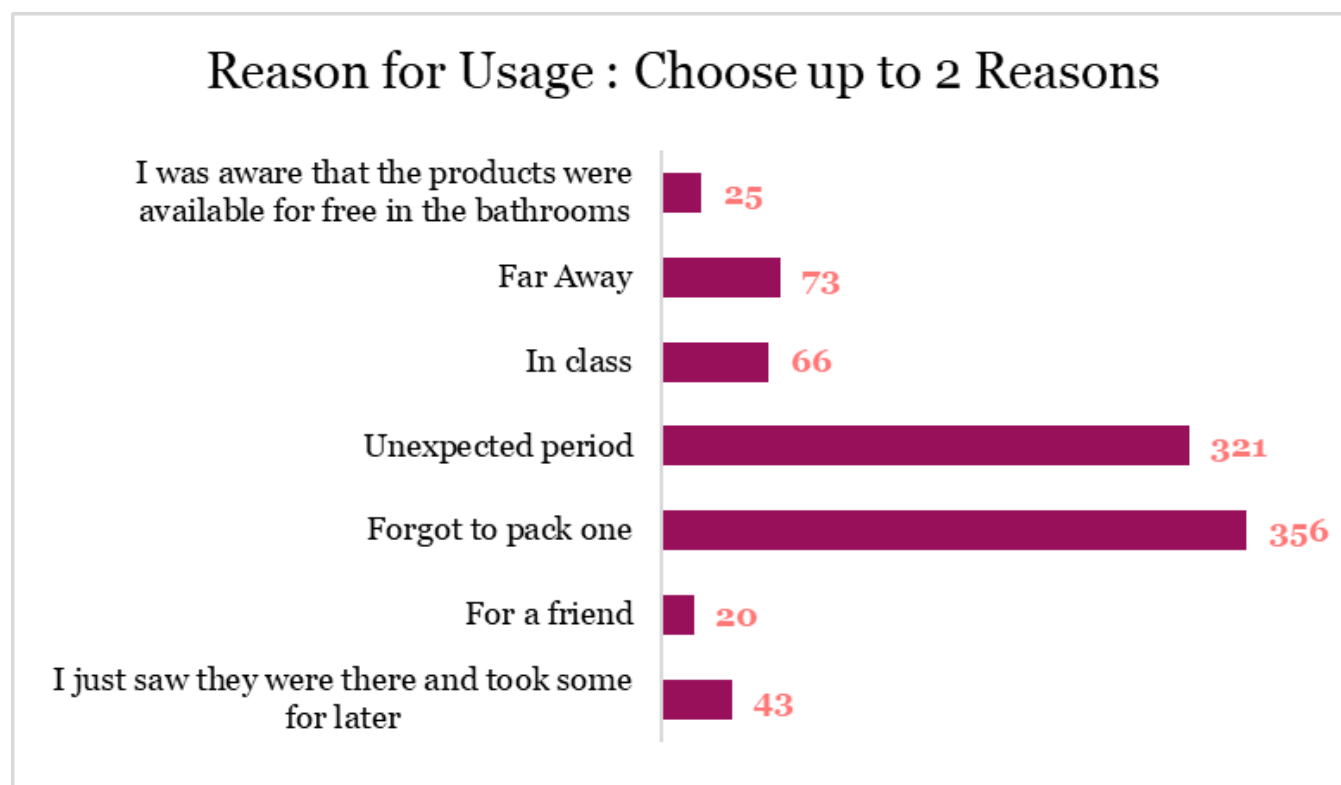


Figure 08: Reason for Usage

75% of the respondents chose the top two reasons: unexpected period and forgot to pack one. Both of these common scenarios are examples of emergency situations in which not having access to a menstrual product can be a barrier to our female students being present in classes and other functions. Furthermore, an impressive 90% of the respondents chose the top four reasons, which included being far away from a dorm and in class. All four of these justifications clearly fall within the purpose of the trial itself. The vast majority of students respected the role and purpose of the trial and only took products when it was necessary. This result was also aided by the intentional notice left on the wall above the products which read, "These products are for emergency use. If you have a greater need for menstrual products, please go to the Cardinal Cupboard in Pryz Room 107 or email the director of the Cardinal Cupboard, Jaclyn Searle @searlej@cua.edu."

Another aim of the survey was to capture the impact of the trial that extended beyond just providing a product on a single day. Offering women the security and support of knowing that these products are in the bathrooms serves as a tangible and powerful sign of how the University treats and cares for its female students. In the survey, we asked students, “If these products were provided by the University, would that availability change the extent to which you feel supported by the school?” The responses are shown in the bar graph below.

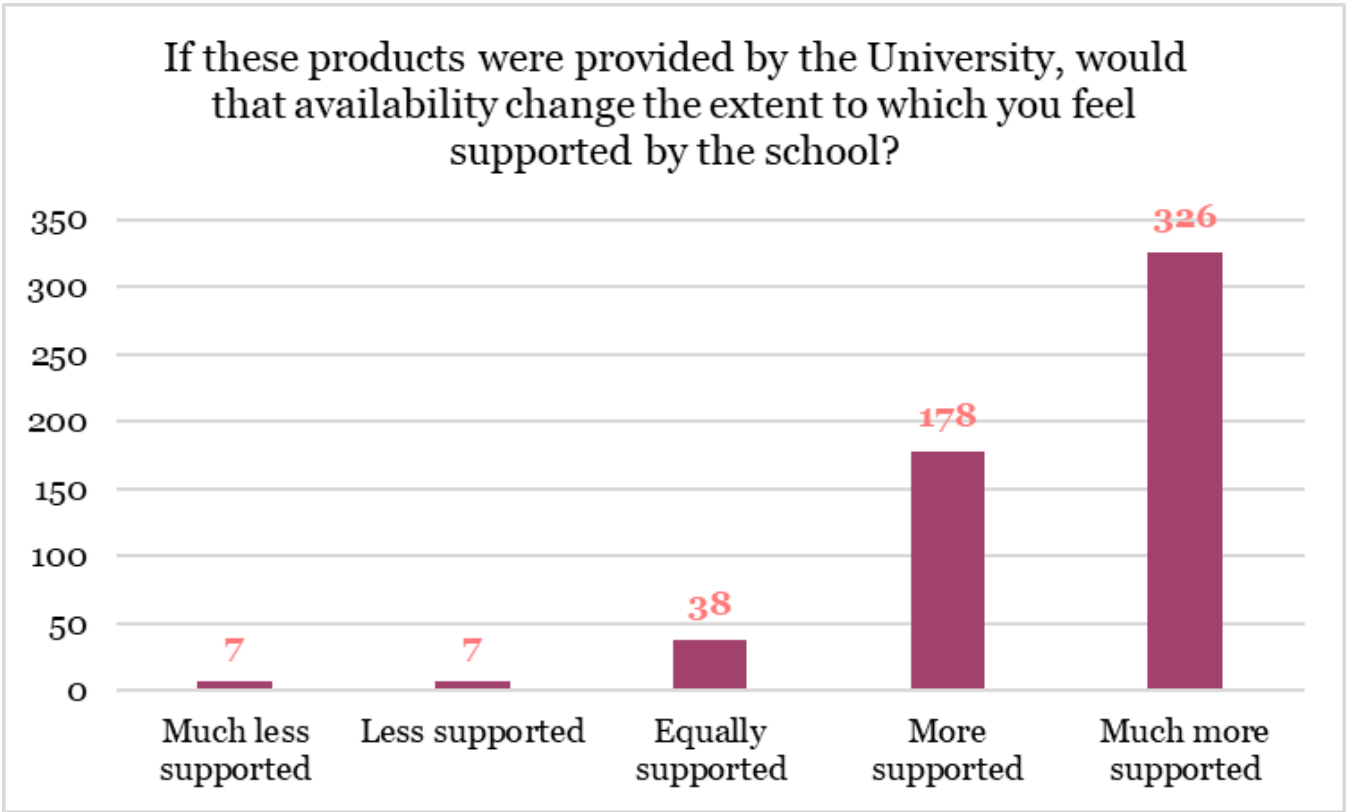


Figure 09: Change in Level of Support

As you can clearly see, the results are definitive. 91% of the respondents answered that if this initiative were taken up and executed by the University that it would increase the level of support that they felt from the school itself. This finding reveals that the impact of executing the initiative is not contained in the interaction that a student has with the dispensing machines in a bathroom one day. Instead, just knowing that the University made the financial investment to support its female students in this way significantly improves students’ perception of how much the institution cares about and supports them, even if

they are not the ones personally using the products. Further, considering that the University is majority female, this survey question responses demonstrate that taking up this initiative would directly increase the feelings of support felt by over 55% of its student body. That conclusion is incredibly significant, given the countless events, organizations, and opportunities that the University currently invests time and money into to produce this same result. It is very rare to find an example of one of these initiatives that reach such a large number and range of students. This is seen through the numerous comments left on the survey that underscores how this initiative does not just impact a small, niche group of women, but instead extends support to female students with all different types of backgrounds and on-campus experiences. A student-athlete wrote, “thank you so much for implementing this trial last week. I have been saved multiple times while at practice in the Duf — it’s very far from my dorm & I didn’t have anything with me. I know many other athletes who would say the same. In addition, I was with a friend who didn’t have any supplies, and she was relieved when she heard that there were supplies available. I truly hope this program is continued!”

Commuter students also uniquely benefit from this initiative, because without it, they would have to travel all of the way back to their homes in order to retrieve menstrual products. One of the commuter students wrote, “I am a commuter and twice my period came unexpectedly. I don’t have many friends due to COVID so I wasn’t able to make many girlfriends to ask personally if I could get a pad. I’m also very introverted and have social anxiety so asking another girl for something like that would be extremely difficult for me. The free pads in the bathroom really saved me from having bloody and ruined pants as I didn’t have any extra sets of clothes in my car, as again, I am a commuter who lives an hour away. I was so extremely grateful for whoever’s idea it was to put them there.” Her comments strongly underline how funding this initiative could provide substantial support to a group of students on campus that already have a more difficult time integrating into the community because they do not live in the residence halls with their classmates.

Throughout the comments left by women in the survey, the theme of support emerges over and over again. As mentioned in the introduction, 14% to 25% of women experience irregular menstrual cycles that can very often result in expected and painful periods. This experience was also reflected in the responses to the survey we conducted. One student wrote, “I personally have a

bleeding disorder so when I get my period unexpectedly or use up all my tampons I packed for the day, this was a lifesaver. Not only did it come in handy hygienically, but saved me a lot of embarrassment I'm used to due to having a bleeding disorder." Another woman in a similar situation wrote, "it's good for women on campus, especially women like myself who have PCOS [Polycystic Ovary Syndrome], because I can't really tell when I'm going to get my period since it's so irregular. It's nice to know the bathrooms on campus have period supplies just in case I didn't bring any. It's a peace of mind I won't have to use toilet paper or a paper towel as a temporary band-aid until I can get back to my dorm later in the evening after class." These stories are not unique by any means. They capture the real experiences that women on this campus have every day and showcase why funding these products would have such a powerful impact on the way that female students feel supported by their university.

The final question asked by the survey inquired as to whether the brand of product provided would impact students' usage of the products. The pie chart below summarizes these results.

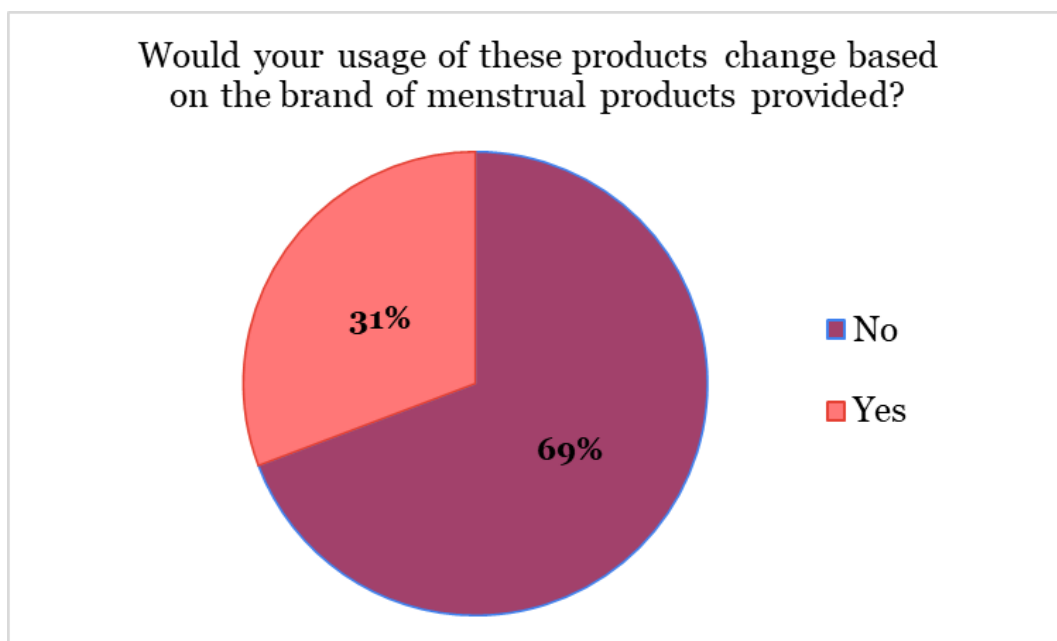


Figure 10: Impact of Brand on Usage

For more than two-thirds of the respondents that used the products, the brand would not impact their usage. Most women have a preference for certain brands; however, in the case of needing an emergency product, they would be willing to use any product available. This would not be the case for women who do not have the flexibility to use any brand due to either a heavy flow or susceptibility to infection, which accounts for many students in the 31%.

Recommendations

Making this Trial a Long-Term Reality

PAYING FOR THE PRODUCTS

Based on the analysis of the usage data and survey responses, we strongly advocate that the University takes up this project in the long term over the course of the entire academic year. Based on the usage behavior over the course of our five-week trial and the cost projections from facilities, the total cost to purchase the menstrual products for the entire year would be \$3,109.53. It is important to recognize that this is an estimation that does not include the costs of shipping, taxes, or purchasing the distribution vehicles. This number is also taking advantage of purchasing in bulk by using unit costs of \$0.14 for pads and \$0.13 for tampons. If these unit prices changed due to preference for a different brand or provider, then the overall estimated cost would change as well.

CHOOSING A DISPENSING MACHINE

One of the largest obstacles to implementing this project is the one-time upfront fixed cost of purchasing and installing the distribution machines for the products in the bathrooms. The University could continue to distribute the products via the baskets used by Student Government; however, due to health and safety concerns, these products needed to be individually wrapped with a seal. This task requires human labor and additional costs to execute that the University may not have.

Another longer-term option is to purchase the dispensers and install them in the bathrooms. The chart below will present three different options for the University to consider in its evaluation of this project. All three options offer the products free of charge and consequently do not have the ability to insert payment, such as a quarter, in exchange for the product. This choice was made

to reinforce the purpose of the initiative itself as well as the practical reality that very few people carry coins around anymore.




Options for Product Dispensers			
	Aunt Flow Model E - Tampon & Pad Dispenser	Hospeco EVNT#-WM No-Touch Napkin Tampon Dispenser	Sustainable Supply ASI o864-F Surface Mounted Sanitary Napkin/Tampon Vendor
			
Cost Per Unit	est. \$300	\$349	\$404.80
Total Cost (42 bathrooms)	\$12,600	\$14,658	\$17,001.60
Number of Products Held	50 tampons 50 pads	22 tampons 16 pads	27 tampons 30 pads
Dimensions	26"(H) x 16.25"(W) x 7"(D)	26 3/16" (H) x 13 3/4" (W) x 6 1/8" (D)	26 1/8" (H) x 11 3/4" (W) x 6 1/2" (D)
Accessibility	Push one of the two buttons to release the products.	Touchfree design allows the user to simply wave a hand for dispensing	Turn one of the two dials for release of product
Important Notes	Easy to restock. Can view products inside. You have to stock the dispenser with the Aunt Flow products. Products are 100% organic.	Has a 5 second delay between dispenses to discourage misuse & over dispensing. There is a mini version that costs \$332.60.	Free shipping on orders over \$99

Figure 11: Comparison of Product Dispensers ³⁴⁵

The chart provides a brief overview that highlights the advantages and drawbacks of each option. The Aunt Flow Model outperforms the other options

³ <https://www.goauntflow.com/products/estrogen-model-e-dispenser>

⁴ <https://www.airdelights.com/EVNT3-WM.html>

⁵ <https://www.sustainablesupply.com/products/asi-0864-f-surface-mounted-sanitary-napkin-tampon-vendor-coin-free-c1967975?variant=34119332790316&href=rp-pp-bt>

on every measure, especially the number of products that can be stored inside of the dispenser. Facilities staff would not have to restock or check the products as often due to the large number of products it contains and the visibility of the products through the clear panel. However, it would require the school to purchase Aunt Flow products so they will fit compactly inside the machine and the cost of brand products may make this option much more expensive in the long run. Additionally, it was difficult to assess the exact price of Aunt Flow products, because you need to meet with a representative from the company to get an exact quote. The Hospeco Model has a mid-range price and the helpful feature of touch-free dispensing. The model also offers a five-second waiting period in between dispensing, which would discourage any attempts to take more products than a student needs in an emergency situation. The dispenser from Sustainable Supply provides a more traditional model and does not have any special features. It can hold more products than the Hospeco though. Through the lens of a student, it is difficult to assess which option is most suitable for our university due to our limited understanding of the school's internal operations and finances. Consequently, the Task Force hopes that providing these options and analysis can be a useful starting point for selecting the best distribution vehicle.

In pursuit of that goal, we also wanted to recommend several options to pay for the dispensers. First, looking into organizations, such as Period the Menstrual Movement, Helping Women Period, With U, and She Can By Kotex, that work with Universities to support initiatives similar to this one and applying for another grant. The Menstrual Equity Task Force has already worked with one of these organizations, the Pad Project, and received a grant so we know that this is a realistic option. Second, the Student Government Association has a history of partially funding initiatives as a joint effort with the University to jump-start them until the projects demonstrate value and the school decides to cover the costs fully. Two examples of this are the Rave Guardian App and the tracking system for the University Shuttle. In collaboration with the next Executive Board, Student Government could use its funds to help support this high upfront cost. Finally, money could be redistributed from other projects that reach fewer students over a smaller period of time. The Menstrual Equity project serves over half of the student population at the school during their entire time at the University. An analysis could be completed to see if there are other less productive projects that funds could be reallocated from to pay for this one-time upfront cost.

Conclusion

Funding the Menstrual Equity Initiative is an investment in the success of current and future Catholic University students. It would create a safety net that lifts the ever-present stress and anxiety of an unexpected period off the shoulders of every single student who experiences a menstrual cycle at this University. It would serve as a monthly reminder to these students that they attend an institution that cares about them as a whole human person. It would signal to potential incoming students as they visit the University on Odyssey Day and Cardinal Preview Day the extent to which this school sets up its students to be successful here and after graduation. Each one of these results is reflected in the usage of the products throughout the trial and responses left in the survey. One of the survey respondents wrote:

“I was so excited to see free menstrual products being provided in every single bathroom I visited on campus! The fact that they were brand name products that I personally use made the initiative feel genuine and important. There is always a fear of forgetting menstrual products on your period or having an unexpected accident. But with free products available in the bathrooms, I would never have to worry about that. It also eliminated the embarrassment some women feel towards asking other women for products in the case of an emergency. Overall, I believe it also works to eliminate the shame and taboo nature of menstrual cycles. Something as simple as free, public menstrual products makes me feel more confident and comfortable while on my period. Periods are natural and should be discussed more often. We as women need to stick together on this one!”

Her sentiments echo the reasons why Senator Del Carmen presented her resolution in the Senate three years ago and two years of Menstrual Equity Task Forces have worked to bring this project to fruition. All of these dedicated individuals recognized the importance of creating an environment on campus in which women do not face a barrier to participating in campus events, activities, and classes due to the natural biological process of menstruation. Considering the reasonable cost of this project in the long term coupled with the massive increase in support felt by female students on campus and the

practical need for these products, Catholic University should continue with the Menstrual Equity Initiative into future academic years.