



Yale College Council
Menstrual Hygiene
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INTRODUCTION

The 2017 YCC Fall Survey polled students about their use of and access to menstrual hygiene products. This data preliminarily showed that (1) the purchase of menstrual hygiene products posed a financial burden for approximately half of Yale students, and (2) there is significant interest in an increase in the availability of menstrual hygiene products on campus. Using these findings, this report will assess the details of students' preferences for product availability and location.

BACKGROUND

This report exists within a growing national conversation concerning the cost of essential menstrual hygiene products and whether these products should cost anything at all. For those who use these products, they are as necessary as toilet paper, a product that is distributed for free in every public restroom. In support of this sentiment, in 2016, the president of the National Organization of Women, Terry O'Neill, stated: "Feminine hygiene products are not a luxury. They're as essential as toilet paper, just ask anyone who has ever struggled to obtain or afford them. Students' participation in school should not be hindered by insufficient access to this basic necessity. Universities around the country should follow suit." Not only is toilet paper replenished by custodial services for free in all residential bathrooms and public restrooms at Yale, but other health products that individuals usually must purchase--such as condoms, dental dams, and personal lubricant--are also distributed in residential and academic buildings for free because the university understands the crucial public health need that these products fulfill. The same thinking must be applied to menstrual hygiene products. Some student-run groups, like the Yale Women's Center, offer menstrual hygiene products for free to students, but they tend to be low-quality (because it would be cost-prohibitive for these small groups, who are financing the projects themselves, to buy higher-quality products), inaccessible for most students due to limited locations of distribution, and not readily available in "emergency" situations.

PEER INSTITUTIONS

In 2016, Brown University made national headlines¹ by instituting a program providing free pads and tampons in nonresidential building restrooms. The products are distributed in women's, men's, and non-gendered restrooms to be inclusive of

¹ [Washington Post - 2016](#)

transgender students, an important consideration for any similar program undertaken at Yale. Conversely, Columbia University cancelled a semester-long, product distribution pilot program in 2016, citing “lack of student interest.”²

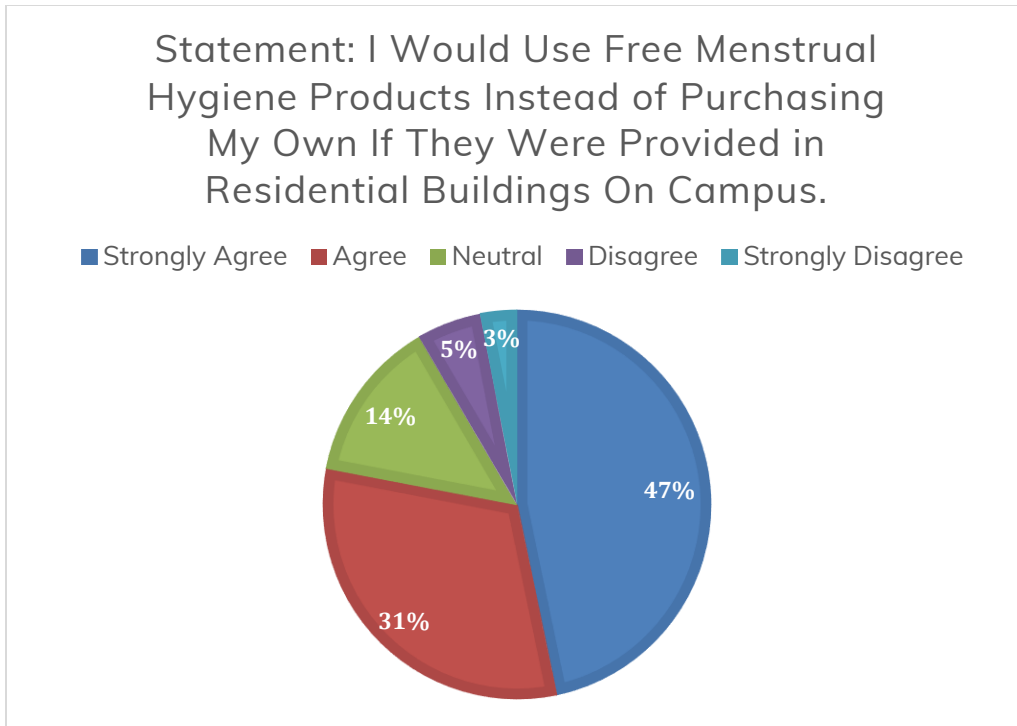
Unlike the Brown model, the Columbia program only offered free tampons and pads for students to pick up at one location on campus (their health center), not offering the free products in academic or residential buildings. To rectify the failures of the Columbia program and build on the success of the Brown model, we propose that free menstrual hygiene products be made regularly available in multiple residential and academic buildings so that they are the most accessible and utilized by students who need them.

DATA ANALYSIS

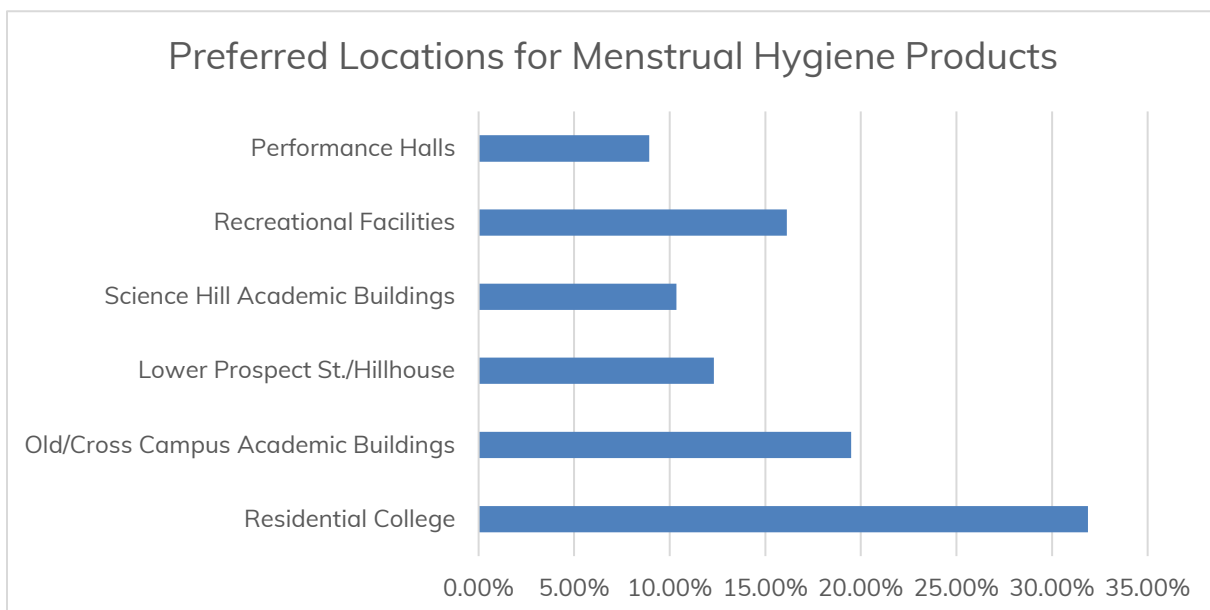
The 2017 YCC Fall Survey asked undergraduate students to describe their use of, purchase of, and access to menstrual hygiene products. Of the 1,300 individuals surveyed, 776 (61%) use menstrual hygiene products. When asked to identify whether the purchase of menstrual hygiene products (MHPs, as they will be referred to throughout) imposed a financial burden, 46.4% of those purchasing MHPs indicated that it presented some degree of burden. This figure includes a majority (63.5%) of self-identifying low-income students and 40.1% of other Yale undergraduates.

The MHP-using population overwhelmingly assented when asked if they would use Yale-provided MHPs instead of purchasing their own, if these products were made available in residential and other buildings on campus. 78% of relevant respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would make use of such a program, including 84.8% of self-identifying low-income students.

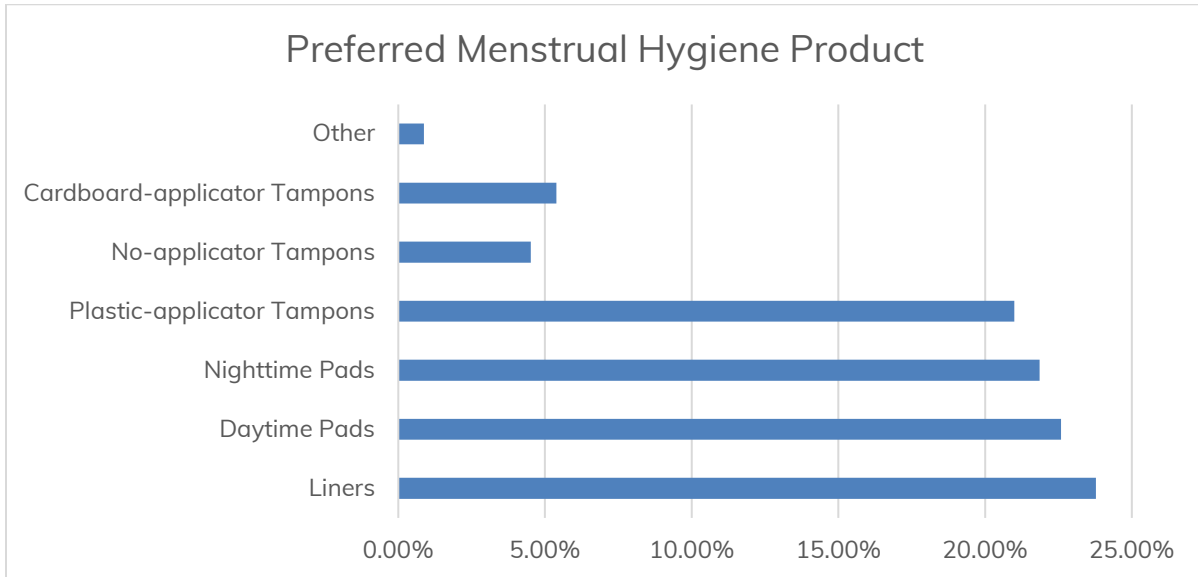
²<http://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2016/09/12/columbia-health-stops-providing-free-tampons-pads-students/>



The previous set of data revealed the strong desire for free MHPs to be made more widely available on campus. Next, the students were asked about their preferred locations for free products, and the following three locations or areas on campus were indicated to be optimal for the placement of MHPs: residential colleges (31.88% of responses), Old/Cross Campus academic buildings (19.49%), and recreational facilities such as Payne-Whitney Gymnasium (16.12%). Other notable areas indicated were Lower Prospect Street/Hillhouse Avenue buildings (12.30%), Science Hill buildings (10.35%), and performance halls such as Woolsey Rotunda (8.93%). Please note that respondents could select more than one location option.



There is a wide variety in the type and quality of MHPs available for purchase and distribution, but when asked which MHPs they would use, between 59% and 70% of MHP users favored the following four products: plastic-applicator tampons, night time pads, daytime pads, and liners.



All data considered, Yale students who menstruate have overwhelmingly expressed a desire for free MHPs to be made more available on campus.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several approaches, small- and large-scale, can be taken to increase availability of free MHPs throughout Yale:

1. A pilot program of free product availability (addressing the concerns of the Columbia model) in three or more residential colleges; to be paid for by YCC, YCDO, or other willing parties
2. A corporate sponsorship for MHP provision and distribution, similar to Yale Athletics' agreement with Under Armour
3. A MHP restocking system run by Yale Facilities, operating similarly to that of purchasing/replacing toilet paper
4. A system in which individual academic departments and/or residential colleges use discretionary funds to provide small baskets of MHPs in their own restrooms, modeled off of a service that currently exists in Sloane Physics Laboratory
5. A program of MHP purchase and distribution led by one of the women's advocacy or sexual health organizations on campus, similar to the CCEs' condom distribution service

CONCLUSION

Yale is a trailblazer not just in academics but also in social change and progressive reform. Many of Yale's custodial, residential, and wellness services that students sometimes take for granted far exceed those available at any other institution, and Yale continues to take measures to make the university a more inclusive space for students.

Providing free menstrual hygiene products in residential and academic buildings on campus would not only ensure that the cost of these products is not a financial burden, especially for low-income and first-generation students, but would also allow Yale to reaffirm its commitment to shaping social progress by recognizing that equal access to menstrual products should be a right, not a privilege. We look forward to continuing this vital conversation and collaboration.

APPENDIX

Q68 - Do you use menstrual hygiene products?			
	Answer	%	Count
	Yes	61.05%	776
	No	38.95%	495
	Total	100%	1271
Q69 - On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being no burden at all and 10 being a significant burden, how would you rate the financial burden of purchasing your own menstrual hygiene products while a student at Yale?			
	Answer	%	Count
	0 (No burden at all)	17.34%	133
	1	6.78%	52
	2	10.30%	79
	3	11.86%	91
	4	7.30%	56
	5	11.08%	85
	6	12.91%	99
	7	10.04%	77
	8	6.39%	49
	9	2.35%	18
	10 (Significant burden)	3.65%	28
	Total	100%	767
Q70 - I would use free menstrual hygiene products instead of purchasing my own if they were provided in residential buildings on campus.			

Answer	%	Count
Strongly Agree	46.73%	357
Agree	31.28%	239
Neutral	13.61%	104
Disagree	5.37%	41
Strongly Disagree	3.01%	23
Total	100%	764

Q71 - I would use the following menstrual hygiene products if they were provided for free (check as many as apply):

Answer	%	Count
Liners	23.78%	521
Daytime Pads	22.59%	495
Nighttime Pads	21.86%	479
No-applicator tampons	4.52%	99
Cardboard-applicator tampons	5.39%	118
Plastic-applicator tampons	20.99%	460
Other	0.87%	19
Total	100%	2191

Q72 - I have difficulty discreetly disposing of menstrual hygiene products:

Answer	%	Count
Never	11.37%	87
Rarely	22.75%	174
Sometimes	37.12%	284

	Often	20.65%	158
	Always	8.10%	62
	Total	100%	765

Q73 - I would take free menstrual hygiene products from (select all that apply):

	Answer	%	Count
	My residential college (for example, common basement restrooms)	31.88%	718
	Old/Cross Campus academic buildings (for example, LC, WLH, Phelps)	19.49%	439
	Lower Prospect St./Hillhouse (for example, Luce, Watson, SSS, CEID)	12.30%	277
	Science Hill Academic Buildings (for example, SCL, SPL)	10.35%	233
	Recreational facilities (for example, Payne-Whitney Gym)	16.12%	363
	Performance Halls (for example, Woolsey Rotunda)	8.93%	201
	Other	0.93%	21
	Total	100%	2252

Q74 - I would want menstrual hygiene disposal bins added in (select all that apply):

	Answer	%	Count
	My residential college (for example, common basement restrooms)	24.01%	632
	Old/Cross Campus academic buildings (for example, LC, WLH, Phelps)	18.28%	481
	Lower Prospect St./Hillhouse (for example, Luce, Watson, SSS, CEID)	14.51%	382

	Science Hill Academic Buildings (for example, SCL, SPL)	13.64%	359
	Recreational facilities (for example, Payne-Whitney Gym)	15.24%	401
	Performance Halls (for example, Woolsey Rotunda)	12.42%	327
	Other	1.90%	50
	Total	100%	2632