

Period Poverty and The Bronx: Addressing a Worldwide Problem Locally

In 2017, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 39.7 million Americans lived at or below the poverty line. Furthermore, the [household poverty rate for The Bronx is 28.4 percent](#), and the household poverty rate for all of New York City is 18.4 percent. With these figures in mind, it is likely that many Manhattan College students might be living in poverty, and this can manifest as something called “period poverty.”

The effects of poverty are all-encompassing and far-reaching. It can impact people in ways we might not even consider. One of these “less-observed” effects is [period poverty](#), which is defined by Global Citizen as “the lack of access to sanitary products, menstrual hygiene education, toilets, hand-washing facilities and/or waste management.” Period poverty is a very real issue facing people who menstruate. Even for people who can afford menstrual products, menstruation is still uncomfortable, and that discomfort is only exacerbated if someone who menstruates is living in poverty. Continued period poverty can pose health risks such as reproductive infections and urinary tract infections, which would result in more money being spent by the person in poverty. Furthermore, it is estimated that [one in five Americans have missed school due to a lack of period protection](#).

Manhattan College has previously addressed period poverty in The Bronx, most recently in the annual “Period Project” drive hosted by the Just Peace club, when students donate sanitary products which are then donated to local Bronx charities. But the time has come for Manhattan College to bring that concern home to its campus. We should not assume the socioeconomic class of any student, especially when it comes to considering whether those students are personally or indirectly affected by period poverty. **Therefore, I propose for Manhattan College to allocate appropriate funding toward providing free menstrual products in all public bathrooms across campus. In addition to free menstrual products, information regarding period poverty should be provided to be distributed alongside the products.**

By introducing this program, the college would address the following issues:

- **Directly intervene in period poverty:** In the same way Jasper Food Share directly addresses food insecurity on campus, by providing clean bathroom facilities with free menstrual products, students will be able to menstruate as comfortably as possible. In addition, students who can regularly afford menstrual products will be able to have access to them in the case of an emergency.
- **Provide education on period poverty:** I propose leaving informational brochures with the menstrual products in bathrooms in order to provide education about period poverty and its effects. Furthermore, I believe providing that information might serve as a deterrent to people who might feel inclined to abuse the access to free menstrual products.

- **Allow Manhattan College students to focus on their education:** Simply stated, college is hard enough as it is. The primary focus for a student should be education, not whether a biological process outside of their control will hinder that.

Looking Forward (or, Ways to Possibly Expand the Program if Successful)

- Tying into Jasper State of Mind’s interests in sustainability and inclusivity, the products provided could possibly expand from pads and tampons to supplying more environmentally-friendly options (ie: menstrual cups). Furthermore, the information I hope to distribute with the products can educate students about more environmentally-friendly options available to them.
- While I agree with only having the products available in bathrooms most frequented by students to begin with, I would like to have the program eventually expand to all public bathrooms across campus.
- Extending from the above point, when I say “all” public bathrooms, I believe information regarding where students can obtain free menstrual products should be available in men’s bathrooms as well. These locations include the Lasallian Women and Gender Resource Center, as well as (we’re hoping) select faculty members identifying themselves as transgender allies who would have free products available in their office. This would serve the needs of transgender students, as well as male allies who could obtain the products from people who might need them.

Trial Bathrooms on Campus

- **De La Salle Hall:** first floor
- **Hayden Hall:** second floor
- **Kelly Commons:** all bathrooms
- **Leo Hall:** second and third floor
- **Miguel Hall:** first floor
- **Thomas Hall:** second and third floor
- **RLC:** first and second floor

First Expansion: Residence Halls

- **Lee Hall:** first floor
- **Horan Hall:** second floor
- **Jasper Hall:** third and fourth floor (will change depending on school year)
- **Chrysostom Hall:** second floor (will change depending on school year)
- **Overlook Manor:** first floor

Second Expansion

- **Alumni Hall:** all bathrooms
- **De La Salle Hall:** fourth floor

- **Miguel Hall:** fourth floor
- **Memorial Hall:** all bathrooms
- **O'Malley Library:** all bathrooms
- **Smith Auditorium:** first floor/basement
- **Thomas Hall:** fourth and fifth floor

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