



## Free the Tampon movement takes the University by storm

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The “Free the Tampon” movement is in full swing on campus, as free tampons and pads are now offered in non-residential women’s and gender-neutral bathrooms. Bucknell Student Government (BSG) had wanted to pursue the initiative at the end of the spring 2016 semester, which Meghan Belinsky ’18 spearheaded during her tenure as BSG Vice President of Administration.

At the beginning of this semester, all of the current dispensers were changed from a coin vend to a free vend. If the initiative is successful, the University will look into purchasing other dispensers for bathrooms that don’t have them.



Belinsky heard from John Marbach ’80 about how progressive Ivy League schools such as Brown and Cornell University had begun taking part in “Free the Tampon” movements, who, along with University President John Bravman, encouraged BSG to move forward with the idea and turn it into a reality.

“[Marbach] was a great contact because he is in the business and has pertinent information that we lacked,” Belinsky said.

Marbach is the Northeast Director of Sales at Hospeco, a leading manufacturer of personal care and hygiene products. Through Marbach, Belinsky and BSG were able to secure tampons for the University.

The response to the initiative has been “overwhelmingly positive,” and “the University is really hoping that it takes off,” Belinsky said. “We really want to advertise this initiative to students so that they can take advantage of the amazing service. The movement is really spreading across the



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nation and it is pretty amazing that Bucknell is spearheading this initiative along with other top universities,” Belinsky said.

Free the Tampons is a national campaign dedicated to ending “restroom inequality and freeing the tampon.” The group believes that every bathroom outside the home should provide freely accessible items that women need for their periods. They contend that “women shouldn’t have to worry about an unexpected physical need becoming an overwhelming emotional ordeal.”

By promoting their brand to business owners and within the public policy arena, the foundation has been working to overcome barriers. The organization is dedicated to “providing education and resources that empower advocates to create change for women nationwide.”

Tamara Hijazi ’17, Alexander Murph ’18, and Maxine Charles ’19, students in a feminist theory and practice class, were working on a research project surrounding the issue of free feminine hygiene products on college campuses. They had conducted surveys and interviews. Realizing that they had a common goal, BSG and these students came together to collaborate and raise awareness of female health issues and their medical struggles.

Belinsky believes that this initiative has provided the University with a great opportunity to join the movement that’s sweeping the nation. A law was recently passed to provide free sanitary products in restrooms for public school systems in New York City. And in Wisconsin, there is talk of passing a state law on the initiative.

BSG has been working this week to advertise and educate the campus on the movement and its benefits. A lot of men both on campus and across the country didn’t and still don’t understand why the products are needed, and the stigma surrounding discussion of periods and tampons hasn’t helped in the education process.

The new initiative “makes [menstruation] less taboo of a subject, because it shouldn’t be taboo. It is a natural process that every woman goes through. There shouldn’t be any embarrassment talking about it,” Belinsky said.

Belinsky also commented on the importance of providing free products.

“Not all women’s bathrooms have dispensers and the ones that do have dispensers offer products anywhere from \$0.10 to \$0.25—there is no consistency and not to mention, who carries around



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change? Searching for pocket change or someone with a tampon is a disruption to your day, and it shouldn't be, considering half of the population deals with menstruation," Belinsky said.

BSG President Amanda Battle '18 echoed the significance and importance of the initiative.

"It empowers equality! Condoms are available at no cost for students on campus—which is a great thing—but why not tampons, too?" Battle said. "Menstruation is not always predictable, and getting your period at an unexpected time can be very stressful, so if students are in an emergency situation and need menstrual products, BSG and President Bravman wanted that to be available for them at no cost and with no stress," Battle said.

"About damn time. Menstruation is a reality, not a choice. So the items that women need for their period are not a luxury but a necessity," Amanda Relick '17 said.

"Ultimately, if a student is in class or studying in the library, a physical need should not have to be on the forefront of their mind. Period. It's time we end the silence around these issues," Battle said.

Free the Tampon is currently funded by the President's Office with BSG support. BSG will assess the effectiveness of the program to determine long-term funding and the possibility of additional dispenser locations.