



SPECIAL ISSUE: TO THE BVG

Issue of Collegian Dedicated to Ideas, Student Perspectives

As happens once or twice each year, the Board of Visitors and Governors will be meeting on the Annapolis Campus throughout the end of this week. Often, this occasion is either missed entirely by students, or treated as an inconvenience to usual use of spaces on campus. This semester, however, I hope to contribute towards changing this and ensuring student involvement in the decision making of the College. After all, the Polity is at its core a tightly knit community of learners, including, students, tutors and staff, and its governance should take into account the myriad of perspectives that compose it.

In this issue of the Collegian, a variety of proposals and perspectives on the future of the College and progress that can be made going forward are presented: Helen Felbek makes a case for free menstrual products on campus, Peter Boersema reflects on enrollment, and Andy Manne reports on break housing, where the College's decision to have a sliding scale fee should be applauded, and taken as a model for other fees on campus.

For my part, I would like to use this slim column to also raise ideas and concerns students have raised in previous issues of the Collegian that I hope any Board member reading will notice, think about, and seek further student thoughts on from the many students around campus who are glad to share their perspectives.

A major issue this semester has been tutor pay, which is almost universally seen by students to be low to the point at which it poses a danger to the College. Additionally, staff pay has been neglected for just as long, and makes it difficult to keep our grounds kept up, are buildings cleaned and students fed. Funding salary increases should be one of the board's top priorities, and if cuts need to be made to student experience to fund such increases, so be it.

Additionally, students have written about instituting an honor code, an issue which still divides the student body, and housing prices, where the new tiered system of pricing has drawn much ire. Concerns have been raised about how it will increase inequity on campus, breaking apart our community, and will add to the high cost of attendance. So many things, from laundry costs to meal costs, have been increasing, without proportional increases to *(Cont. on page 2)*

IMPROVING ACCESS. IMPROVING WELLBEING.

The case for free menstrual products on Campus

An oftentimes overlooked issue to student wellbeing is the issue of period poverty. The NIH's National Library of Medicine cites papers which define the term as "as the lack of access to safe and hygienic menstrual products during monthly periods and inaccessibility to basic sanitation services or facilities as well as menstrual hygiene education."¹ This issue is oftentimes not associated with developed countries. This, however, is a misconception. In the US 1 in 4 women struggle to purchase period products due to a lack of income.² At least, residents in Maryland do not have carry the additional burden of the so called "period tax" or "tampon tax" (when menstrual products are taxed the same way as luxury good are) as period products are tax exempt since 1975.³ When we think of the issue, we usually think of demographics such as unhoused people or incarcerated individuals who encounter difficulties to access needed products. But college students too suffer from period poverty.

According to a study recently conducted by the intimate health brand INTIMINA 1 in 5 (19%) female college students (from public and private colleges and universities across the country) felt forced to decide between buying period products and paying for food or other expenses.⁴ Additionally, nearly half (48%) said they have struggled to access menstrual products due to costs or other barriers.⁵ Other data by a 2021 study in the medical journal BMC Women's Health suggests that 14% of menstruating college students struggle to access period products on a regular basis.⁶

So, if we believe that St. John's represents American society at all we have to assume that at St. John's too some menstruating students are experiencing period poverty with all the negative ramifications that come with it. These side effects include but are not limited to health issues due to improper use of products such as Toxic Shock Syndrome and social repercussions such as social isolation which can among other things impact the ability to attend classes regularly. These negative effects even go as far as an increased risk of depression as a study published in the Indiana Journal of Law and Social Equality found.

Thankfully, the college has identified this issue. RAs receive some menstrual hygiene products to distribute to their residents and the Health Center offers free period products as well. This is a good start but not sufficient to fully address the problem.

There is no list of how many of the nearly 6,000 universities and colleges in the US provide menstrual products at no cost but there is a growing movement initiatives. In Maryland, HB 205 requires local boards of education to ensure that each public school provide free menstrual hygiene products via dispensers. This bill went into effect in 2021.⁷ Anne Arundel County Public Library provides free menstrual products to patrons.⁸

In higher education there are no state requirements. However, in February of last year the University of Maryland proudly proclaimed "Necessities at No Cost. Period." Sharing the happy news that free period products were distributed to hundreds of UMD bathrooms. The cost for installation and dispensers amounted to a total cost of \$135,000 with the student government contributing \$48,000.⁹

But the University of Maryland has 40,813 at their College Park location alone.¹⁰ Thus, their cost does not compare at all to the initial investment necessary to bring dispensers to bathrooms at St. Johns' Annapolis campus. According to the cost calculator of Aunt Flow, a women-owned company on a mission to ensure every person has access to sustainable and free period products, whose products, and dispensers I first encountered in a restroom at Princeton University, dispensers in 70 bathrooms would cost approximately \$22,050 (\$315 per dispenser). According to their calculations, the maintenance would be comparatively cheap with an annual operating cost of \$800 (to provide 300 menstruating people with products). There are presumably some hurdles such as questions of who should restock the dispensers. But perhaps it is worthwhile to reach out to institutions that have successfully managed to establish free period product programs and learn from their expertise. It seems like a worthy endeavor as part of our never-ceasing efforts to make campus more welcoming to everyone.

Helen Felbek

1 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10372806/>
2 https://cdn.b12.io/client_media/HJ1wIVtI/e5c8dfb4-95f9-11ea-a54f-0242ac110003-Maryland_APS_Period_Poverty_Fact_Sheet_052020.pdf
3 <https://www.governing.com/archive/gov-tampon-tax-states-utah-california.html>
4 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/debgordon/2023/10/10/20-of-female-college-students-cant-afford-period-products-new-survey-shows/?sh=218c8ce549f1>
5 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/debgordon/2023/10/10/20-of-female-college-students-cant-afford-period-products-new-survey-shows/?sh=218c8ce549f1>
6 <https://www.npr.org/2023/09/19/1200291452/should-menstrual-products-for-women-on-college-campuses-be-free>
7 https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2021RS/fnotes/bil_0005/hb0205.pdf
8 <https://www.aacpl.net/blog-entries/aacpl-supporting-menstrual-health>
9 <https://today.umd.edu/necessities-at-no-cost-period>
10 <https://research.umd.edu/who-we-are/facts-and-figure>

This Week in Seminar

Freshman:

- 2/22: Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, Books VI, VII
- 2/26: Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, Books VIII, IX

Sophomores:

- 2/22: Shakespeare: As You Like It
- 2/26: Montaigne: Essays; To the Reader, Of Cannibals, Of Cruelty, Of Repentance

Juniors:

- 2/22: Kant: Critique of Pure Reason (see official list for selections)
- 2/26: Locke: Second Treatise of Government, Chapters I-IX

Seniors:

- 2/22: Conrad: Heart of Darkness
- 2/26: Freud: "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through," "Mourning and Melancholia"

Friday Night Lecture:

Dan Harrell: Being a Book. FSK, 7:30 pm

Upcoming Events:

Saturday, 2/24

- 11 am, Studio Theater: Board of Visitors and Governors Meeting Plenary Session
- 4 pm, Mitchell Museum: Exhibition Celebration for Sampling a Sampling Sampler
- 9 pm, Mellon Hall Lobby: Archon Gala

Wednesday, 2/28

- 5 pm, Conversation Room: Film Discussion: Harry Smith's Untitled Animation of Seminole Patchwork

HOW BIG SHOULD ST. JOHN'S BE?

On Enrollment, Budget, and Community

The Board of Visitors and Governors meets here in Annapolis on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Enrollment is sure to be a subject of discussion.

According to reporting from this publication, enrollment was a concern at recent BVG meetings. Last summer, President Demleitner stated that "low enrollment means stagnant class size, which means stagnant tuition, which means low compensation for faculty and staff." (See "Board of Visitors and Governors Holds Summer Meeting") Enrollment concerns were brought up again at the October BVG meeting in Santa Fe. (See "Board of Visitors and Governors Meets in Santa Fe" from Collegian Vol. 1 Issue 6)

Enrollment is an important challenge for St. John's. As of last fall, the college projected a deficit of around \$5 million for each of the next three fiscal years. More money must be raised to close this gap even before the college can consider spending on other projects, such as increasing pay for staff and tutors. One way to do this is to enroll larger freshman classes, thereby increasing tuition revenue. This is what President Demleitner was pointing to in her summer comments. The fact that the number of high-school graduates is expected to begin declining in the next few years only makes these concerns more pressing.

But enrollment growth, at least on the Annapolis campus, poses obvious issues. Seminars and tutorials already have about as many students as possible in them, so an increase in enrollment would require a proportional increase in the number of tutors. I need not mention the college's inability to pay adequate faculty salaries, which has been much discussed this year.

This year has also featured a housing shortage on campus. The reopening of Campbell Hall next year—which will by then be called Edensword Hall—will certainly alleviate it in the near term. But apartments in downtown Annapolis have become much more expensive in recent years. I see no reason for this trend to reverse. As off-campus rents continue to increase, a greater proportion of upperclassmen will need to be housed on campus. The number of dorm rooms imposes a limit on how much enrollment can increase. St. John's can't grow indefinitely. The student body should be able to remain at a sustainable size.

We should also ask how greater enrollment would impact the nature of the college. On the one hand, a larger student body could support more diversity and a greater range of student activities. On the other hand, the admissions department must recruit larger

classes that are composed of students that are well-suited for the St. John's program. Is the intimate nature of the campus community essential to the college's education mission? I don't think it is, but I'm open to hearing other opinions.

If enrollment is a subject of discussion at this week's meeting—I'm sure it will be—members of the Board of Visitors and Governors must ask and answer the question of how big St. John's should be. This means finding a size that is both sustainable and conducive to the college's educational purpose.

Peter Boersema

Correction:

In last issue's article on the College Creek Connector forum, some statements from Eric Leshinsky appeared to be responding to statements from the forum. Leshinsky was not present at the forum, and there has been no official response from the Campus Planning Committee to the city on this topic. The interview for the Collegian was conducted before the forum.

NEW CHANGES TO SPRING BREAK HOUSING POLICY FOLLOWING RELATED CSL FORUM

If you were an international student, a student otherwise planning to stay on campus over spring break, or just someone who reads all of their emails, you may have noticed an email regarding changes to the College's spring break policy last week. According to Jen Cline, the new policy stands that any student may request to stay on campus over spring break—provided that it is a last resort due to safety or financial concerns (of course including the usual issues facing international students). Additionally, while the standard fee of \$150 per week remains the same, there is now a sliding scale for students whose official Estimated Family Contribution falls below \$10,000. These changes are expected to be implemented on a trial basis for this upcoming break and will be evaluated at the end of the year to determine if they will be sustained.

This change comes just a few weeks after the Committee on Student Life held a robust forum with students and administrators on the issue of break arrangements. Many of the students who attended conveyed an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction with the then status quo, putting particular emphasis on the difficult position that it placed international students in. With limitations on how many hours they can work, distant and disconnected family, and potential safety risks associated with returning to their home, many international students are put in a challenging position to provide for themselves over break—much less to afford the extra housing fee. While the question of who bears the responsibility for providing housing, the college or the student, is one that bears a longer discussion, it remains that the college's position states that as of now they cannot afford to house students over break without

additional fees. Even without running the dining hall or many other services, the cost to keep buildings open and necessary staff on campus during breaks is not covered by the annual fee.

In the course of the discussion a few potential solutions were bandied around: the question of host families was quickly vetoed due to logistical complications, and similarly the thought of imposing a smaller fee on all students to cover those who stay over break. The possibility of a sliding scale was received much more favorably, however, as was the overall level of concern expressed by the students present. While it is impossible to say how much of an effect the CSL forum had on the new changes, it is gratifying to see that the college is trying to meaningfully address the issues facing students. As was remarked in the forum, if the college is going to encourage international and financially disadvantaged students to attend, then they need to make a point of helping them when they struggle—something that this spring break policy will hopefully help accomplish.

Andy Manne

BVG, Cont. from page 1.

scholarships or financial aid. The task before the board, to balance reducing the burden of high cost of attendance with the need to pay faculty and staff better is difficult, but is essential. Only this balance can ensure the future of the College, and students have many ideas how to reach it. All you need to do is ask us.

El'ad Nichols-Kaufman

ABOUT THE ST. JOHN'S COLLEGIAN

The St. John's Collegian is the weekly newspaper of St. John's College Annapolis. We work to bring quick and timely coverage of important events going on, to help develop a more informed student body. If you're searching for more in-depth investigations and reporting, as well as essays, art and culture, check out the Gadfly, our affiliated publication, which is published once every three weeks.

Want to submit an article? We always need more writers, whether for opinion or reporting! Submissions for news articles should be between 400-600 words, while opinion should be kept short at 400 words. A longer, journalistic piece may be up to 1,200 words. Just email eanicholskaufman@sjc.edu with your article, and we will work to get it in print! Longer form articles and more in-depth exploration of ideas should go to the Gadfly, which accepts submissions at lbriner@sjc.edu.

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Pensee of the Week

We call our loved ones baby.

What do we love more, their innocence or powerlessness?