

FROM THE INSTRUCTOR

This was the first video that Elizabeth ever independently produced. Her first exposure to digital editing software (iMovie) came at the beginning of the semester during a small group video project. That should be heartening to any student or instructor feeling curious about but overwhelmed by the idea of digital projects.

For this assignment, students remediated their research papers into an increasingly popular genre: the video Op-Ed. *The New York Times* describes the mission of the video Op-Ed as “a new kind of journalistic commentary that will explore the most divisive and defining issues of the day. We want to engage our audience in rich debate using emotion, humor, tension, controversy, and creativity.” Everyone from rapper and activist [Meek Mill](#) to former labor secretary [Robert Reich](#) has tried their hand at this new genre.

Our class had 3½ weeks for the remediation assignment, and they could use any digital tool of their choice. Elizabeth opted for iMovie again. We began by studying models, storyboarding, and scripting. Elizabeth drew on many of the same popular and scholarly sources that she used in her research paper, but from the first line of her video—“Let’s be real”—you can feel the new voice that the Op-Ed genre invites.

To use Elizabeth’s video as a teaching tool, you might do the following:

1. **Start with her script (see below).** Students can analyze its argumentative structure, use of evidence, pacing, and prose. The economy and persuasiveness of Elizabeth’s script remind us that this digital assignment is not about video production value; it’s about producing a strong argument appropriate to the genre and audience.
2. **Examine the visuals.** Elizabeth said the hardest part of the assignment was choosing from the more than 100 images and clips that she had assembled. What might have been added? What might have been replaced?
3. **Consider music.** Video Op-Eds often include music and/or supplementary sound effects. Elizabeth was one of the few students who elected not to include either. What is gained and lost by this choice?

Marisa Milanese

WR 152: Writing, Research, & Inquiry with Digital/Multimedia Expression

FROM THE WRITER

Shortly after second semester began, I started volunteering for the Menstrual Products Initiative (MPI), which is a student-led organization working to supply campus restrooms with pads and tampons with funding from the Student Government Association. As a volunteer, I'd make runs to various bathrooms on campus and restock bins with free period products. I started volunteering with MPI around the same time that our WR 152 semester-long projects were starting up, so, I decided to do my project on providing free menstrual products at BU! My project investigated past perceptions of periods, modern movements to increase awareness, and current initiatives working to strengthen inclusivity. I've never been a very good writer, so the video op-ed assignment was a great chance for me to communicate an idea to an audience with an alternative genre. I'd like to thank Marisa Milanese for genuinely engaging with my project and encouraging me to step outside of my comfort zone for this project.

ELIZABETH NELSON grew up in Maryland. She is a rising sophomore majoring in biochemistry and molecular biology and minoring in business administration and management.

BRINGING FREE PERIOD PRODUCTS TO BU

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT:

Let's be real. Talking about periods can be a little awkward. A lot of people don't want to openly talk about menstrual care. But it's important to recognize the necessity of products, like pads and tampons, and discuss if people have rightful access to these products.

Pads and tampons are essential for menstrual care and good hygiene, much like having toilet paper or hand soap [in a bathroom]; however, these sanitary products aren't being provided in public restrooms anymore. Dispensers are being vandalized and often neglected, so in unexpected or emergency situations, women often turn to unsanitary modes of management such as toilet paper or paper towels. In a study done by Free the Tampon, it was found that 86% of women unexpectedly start their period, unprepared, in a public restroom; and of that, 79% improvised their method of care. In addition to the lack of public services, menstrual products are currently taxed as "luxury items" in 36 states. In Elizabeth Montano's scholarly essay, she explains that an individual is likely to spend up \$5,000 on menstrual products in their life, alongside paying between 4.7% and 10.3% in tax. I think a lot of people can agree that being on your period is NOT a luxury and having to spend so much on products can be a burden.

A lack of open conversations about periods leads to this unfairness and misunderstanding, that scholars refer to as "menstrual inequity." In her scholarly article about menstrual inequity, Jorene Ooi, a professor at Northeastern University School of Law, states that, "Even opponents of the tax appear to suggest that the decision is not [a] symptom of overt, malicious sexism, but rather a product of male-dominated legislatures." At a legislative level, this issue needs to be talked about more in order to have more inclusive services, and it could be left out of conversation due to a lack of diverse representation.

Menstruation isn't a choice, and having adequate services in place for proper menstrual care should be a right. It's not a question of whether or not people need menstrual hygiene products, but what legislative action is working towards providing individuals with said products.

Campaigns like Free the Tampon are starting to encourage more open conversations about periods, and promote providing free pads and tampons in public restrooms. Other organizations like PERIOD also aim to raise awareness about the financial burden on students.

In response, universities like UC Berkley and Brown recognize the necessity of menstrual care and fund services to supply free pads and tampons in campus bathrooms. Having products in campus bathrooms may alleviate some of the financial burden or embarrassment in emergency situations for students and faculty. Acknowledging and meeting diverse student needs is important for fostering an environment where all students can thrive.

However, Boston University is a little late to the game. BU's undergraduate student body is about 61% female and 39% male. Which suggest that a majority of the student body experiences menstruation. But, at BU, the cost and availability on menstrual products on campus is pretty limited. On campus, the closest places to dorms to buy pads and tampons is BU's City Convenience. At city co, there's about 5 options available to students. A 10 pack of tampons is priced at about \$6. Conveniently located for sure, but not conveniently priced. Further locations, like CVS, have A LOT more options at varying prices, as low as \$4.79 for a pack of 18 tampons. So, BU is charging more for less product.

Aside from the costs, there's also a lack of services at BU to provide students with pads and tampons. BU offers **free** services through Student Health Services to promote good student health, such as a Good Night's Sleep care package delivered right to your dorm. There's also a fan-favorite, the Condom Fairy, which provides a pack of free condoms along with plenty of brochures on staying safe and healthy. While these services are great for encouraging student well-being, they're not entirely inclusive. So, what makes a condom more necessary than a tampon?

The discrepancy in BU's services and neglected bathroom dispensers haven't gone unnoticed. A student group at BU started the Menstrual Products Initiative after receiving funding from BU Student Government. The goal? To provide a rightful service to help students maintain good hygiene. With the help of student volunteers for distribution, MPI is working to supply women's and gender-neutral bathrooms at BU with free pads and tampons, all while raising awareness for BU's lack of initiative.

Boston University administrators aren't unaware of the issue by any means. In fact, in a BU Today article by Megan Woolhouse, BU's assistant vice president for operations and services, Bill Walter, says past efforts to supply restrooms with menstrual products were "*problematic*," due to demand. Shouldn't this be reflective of the need for the service? For a university with a \$2.2 **BILLION** endowment, it's hard to believe funding this service is at all "problematic."

So, BU's administration isn't immediately responding to the movement. Fine. But, BU's mission statement ends with, "With the support and oversight of the Board of Trustees, the University, continually innovates in education and research to ensure that we meet the needs of students and an ever-changing world." The Board of Trustees is made up of 42 members, and 31 of whom are *men*. So, about 75% of the people representing student needs, don't have periods! It's not to say they're neglecting menstruation, but it's not unreasonable to think that a lack of diversity within the board leaves this topic out of conversation, leading to menstrual inequity at BU.

Having a more diverse board and more inclusive services to meet student needs is necessary for a more inclusive environment. Hopefully, with a rise in awareness and groups like MPI, the menstrual inequity at BU will be recognized and assessed. What we hope to see in the future at Boston University? Funding for facilities to provide students with rightful sanitary products.

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Sign the Petition | Boston University Petition for Free Menstrual Products

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