



## Our Path to Tobacco-free

In 2001, after evaluating the effectiveness of the current designated smoking area policy, students submitted a petition to the Mt. Hood Community College (MHCC) Board of Education with over 2,000 signatures urging for the creation of a “Smokefree Campus.” Discussions continued throughout the next several years, resulting in the designated smoking areas becoming more and more restricted. In early 2009, a student once again presented a request to the Board of Education that MHCC become tobacco-free. The Board then requested that administration look into the feasibility of a tobacco-free policy.

Public hearings were held over the next two months and testimony was presented on both sides of the issue. The District Board of Education approved the College becoming tobacco free in May 2009. While we had discussed the possibility of a smokefree policy, we felt that a tobacco-free policy was more comprehensive in its ability to protect our campus community from all forms of tobacco use and exposure. A broad committee—including students, faculty members from various departments, staff members and other key stakeholders—was established to explore a policy change and its implementation.

### Our Rationale

There were many factors we considered as part of this process. Ultimately, our mission to provide a healthy and safe environment for *all* students, faculty and staff was predominant. For people with asthma and other health conditions made worse by smoke, the clouds of secondhand smoke on campus made it nearly impossible to access our facilities. Even with designated smoking areas in place, frequent complaints about exposure were received and the MHCC Board of Education determined it was necessary to change our policy.

### Preparation

For nine months, the College provided various programs to prepare for the transition including posters, educational activities and a count-down sign next to all campus clocks. We relied on the great leadership of key members of our student body to champion the issue and be messengers to their peers about the importance of the policy change.



As we prepared for the policy to go into effect, we were not sure what to expect from employees and students once they faced the reality of not being able to smoke on campus. Thus, the outpouring of support that came from students, employees and our surrounding community was very rewarding. We know that our quick, broad and consistent communication about the policy change was fundamental to our success. The College continues to make sure our policy is clearly communicated, especially with new students and employees, and include it in all vendor contracts so clear expectations are set. Our messaging emphasizes our desire to create healthier environments, not to punish smokers.

## Challenges

Since the policy's implementation, our only real challenge has been staying on top of heavier smokers who find new places to smoke, especially with our limited public safety staff. We knew, though, that enforcement wouldn't be perfect right from the beginning. Students have been a tremendous help, and one group of students has undergone training with public safety in order to assist in patrolling the parking lots and campuses to alert public safety of any problems. Groups of students also volunteer to pick up the cigarette butt litter left by people smoking on the public sidewalks. We have worked with Metro (the regional government for the Portland metropolitan area) to ensure there are signs placed on the undeveloped wooded property behind the Gresham Campus, part of which we sold to Metro some years ago.

## Advice

Ideally, we would be able to provide free cessation services for smokers who want to quit. Unfortunately, adequate funds are not available due to state funding cuts. We encourage other institutions to consider providing those resources as far in advance as possible if they can. Information is provided on the MHCC website to inform employees of tobacco cessation resources available through health insurance benefits and the employee assistance program and to ensure students and others are aware of the Oregon Tobacco Quit Line.

We suggest disseminating information and updates about the policy change quickly and to as many stakeholders as possible. Consistent and broad communication is key in keeping everyone informed so there are no surprises. It also provides a good reminder of the policy, which helps with self- and peer-enforcement.

## The Outcome

The process took a lot of preparation, communication and flexibility, and we are thrilled with the result: a happier, healthier and more productive campus community.

We feel reinforced in our decision as a growing number of workplaces, including other colleges and universities, adopt smokefree and tobacco-free policies on their entire premises. By establishing a tobacco-free environment at MHCC, we are helping students prepare to succeed in this new reality after they graduate.

