



### **Our Path to Tobacco-free**

Clark College celebrates being a tobacco-free campus for more than five years. The decision was not an easy one but necessary. Students were flagrantly violating the old policy (20 feet from buildings) and it was difficult to enforce. We had also been receiving constant complaints from students and employees about the smoke on campus. Asthmatic students said they were triggered walking in and out of our campus buildings. And, blind students also told us that they had problems navigating the crowds of smokers congregated around the doorways of our facilities.

College leadership asked the Environmental Health and Safety Committee to look at the issue. The Committee's first inclination was to move to designated smoking areas (DSAs). We felt it would be the easiest way to reduce the problem of secondhand smoke exposure on campus while not causing too much uproar from smokers. We were quickly persuaded otherwise based on testimonies from other colleges that they don't solve the problem of secondhand smoke on campus. In addition, there are the costs to purchase, install and maintain them.

A tobacco-free recommendation went to the Executive Cabinet and then the Board of Trustees, all of which voted unanimously to go tobacco-free after reviewing the data. We officially adopted a tobacco-free policy on November 22, 2005.

### **Rationale**

Making sure students, faculty, staff and visitors could access our campus without walking through clouds of secondhand smoke was central to our decision. It came down to whether our current tobacco policy was reflective of our institutional values. Allowing secondhand smoke exposure on campus did not align with our mission and, for that reason, we decided to be tobacco-free.

### **Preparation**

We started with a landscape review of other schools looking at this issue and found that many colleges had found DSAs did not solve the problem of exposure. Many students smoked from their cars to their classrooms and from the shelters to classrooms. Communication about DSAs was difficult and adding signage for the shelters in addition to the areas where smoking was prohibited was costly and time consuming.

Worse, we found, was the cost of DSAs. Our local bus system, C-TRAN, offered to give us, free of charge, their old bus shelters. Still, the cost to install the 10 to 15 shelters needed to cover our campus would have been approximately \$80,000, or more than \$5,500 each. That included funds for bulldozing, pouring in the concrete pads, and transporting and installing the shelters. It also included trash containers and ashtrays.



The Committee recommended a tobacco-free policy to the College Council, a group representing key college constituencies that provides policy advice to the president. There was concern that the policy might negatively impact our most vulnerable students, including those from low-incomes who are among the most chronic smokers. But, forums, community discussions and a representative survey all showed overwhelming support from students, faculty members and staff a going tobacco-free campus, even among smokers.

### **Implementation**

With implementation delayed until the Spring Quarter of 2006, we formed a taskforce that represented the entire college. We began by identifying all of the stakeholder groups that needed to be involved and provided them with information about the new policy through various mechanisms, from paycheck stuffers to vendor contracts to policy cards around campus. Our messaging focused on the positive aspects of a cleaner, healthier campus and discussed the process we went through so that everyone understood it was thoughtful, thorough and research-based.

We also provided tips on how to talk to people smoking on campus, which centered on assuming the person is not aware of the tobacco-free policy: "You may not know this, but we're a tobacco-free campus so you either have to put your cigarette out or move off of campus. I just don't want you to get a ticket because there is a \$25 fine."

### **Enforcement**

We had prepared for backlash at implementation but it was mostly a non-event. There is a culture of peer-enforcement in which students are just as likely to remind other students of the policy as are security officers. Although our total student headcount is near 17,000 we receive very few complaints about people violating the policy and we have issued minimal citations.

### **Challenges**

One thing the college could have done better, however, was creating mechanisms to evaluate the policy. We are now receiving some complaints about cigarette butts on the periphery of campus. We like to joke that the problem of cigarette butt litter was 125 acres big (the size of our campus) before the policy and now it's about a 3' by 10' problem in a few locations. Still, we're working to mitigate the issue and have created a "No ifs ands or butts" campaign to raise awareness about the cigarette litter problem and show how it goes against our collective desire to maintain the beautiful nature of our campus.

### **Advice**

Communication is key. Communicate often and broadly. Find opportunities to listen and answer questions, and make your process as transparent as possible. Bring together

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various stakeholders on your campus. First, understand each groups' drivers and then unite everyone under the common goal of achieving your college's mission to help students thrive. It takes courage and preparation but it is worth it.

### **The Outcome**

Our campus community was respectful and appreciative of the new policy, and appears to be more social. In the five years since we adopted the policy, the percentage of students who say they smoke has dropped from around 15 percent to 11.5 percent, according to a survey administered in our health classes. We know smokers want to quit or cut back for the most part, and we believe this policy made it easier to do so.

The policy has also reduced bark dust fires on campus. It was not unusual for us to have 10-15 fires every summer. We have had only three in the five years since going tobacco-free.