



Our Path to Tobacco-free

In December 2009—with input from students, staff, faculty, the local medical community and the general public—the board of Tillamook Bay Community College adopted a policy to make the campus tobacco-free. The board further directed staff to create administrative rules relating to the management of the policy, to include tobacco education programs and dissemination about proven cessation treatment options.

Then-college president Jon Carnahan had participated in a similar process at another community college, and had sat on the boards of three different hospitals during the processes that converted them to tobacco-free campuses. So, he came to Tillamook Bay Community College understanding the benefits of a tobacco-free policy and was already moving in that direction when the decision was made to build a new facility in Tillamook, providing the perfect opportunity to adopt the new policy.

Our Rationale

We understood the health reasons for going tobacco-free, and we believed that going tobacco-free on our campus was the right thing to do.

Fortunately, we were in the process of planning a new building. And we thought it made sense to change the policy before taking occupancy of the new building and before old behaviors become entrenched in our new facility.

Preparation

We're a small community college, so the process involved was fairly straight-forward. The president facilitated a meeting with staff to discuss the possibility of going tobacco free. With buy-in from staff, the president took the policy recommendation to the board along with research data on the effects of exposure to secondhand smoke. The board also heard presentations from the local health department and others. Ultimately, the board approved the policy.

Tobacco users inquired about whether special accommodations would be made for them, such as the creation of a dedicated place for tobacco use on-campus. We decided against that, because it would have sent the wrong message (namely, that we were OK with tobacco use as long as we couldn't see it).

Even more valuable, we provided information to students about the health effects of smoking, and links to smoking cessation programs and providers for those who wanted to use the transition as an opportunity to finally quit.

Challenges

Like any community college, we have adult students, and some of them have been using tobacco for a long time. So, getting them to adjust their behavior—let alone, to consider quitting—was a bit of a challenge.

The first problem we had was with cigarette butts. Tobacco users congregated just off-property and tended to litter the surrounding area with cigarette butts. To address this issue, we formed groups to pick them up, put them in clear jars and put them outside so people could see the litter they were leaving behind. We also purchased 500 pouches for smokers to use in collecting their cigarette butts rather than leaving them strewn on the ground.

Now, with self-policing—and occasionally with a reminder from someone on staff—the tobacco-free culture is a part of who we are. This allows our students, faculty and staff to work, learn and socialize free from exposure to deadly secondhand smoke.

Advice

Pick the right time to make the change when you're most likely to be able to get the buy-in you need to move the policy forward. For us, the timing of the new building was helpful, but we would have gone tobacco-free regardless.

The other important piece of advice we would share is about the importance of relationships. If you do a good job building and maintaining relationships with faculty, staff, students, and the community, you'll be in a much stronger position to move a policy like this forward. You'll never get 100 percent agreement, so don't expect it. But if the relationships are strong, even those who don't necessarily agree will be more constructively involved in the process.

The Outcome

We feel good about sending the message that we value the health of our students, our faculty, our staff, and the broader community. We're providing a campus not just for healthy learning, but for healthy living. And we're better preparing our students to succeed in other environments where smoking and tobacco use are likely to be prohibited.

From a practical standpoint, students and faculty report that they're relieved to not have to walk through clouds of smoke to get to and from their classes. And our maintenance crew tells us the campus is much cleaner. That's not the most important reason to make the policy change, but it does make a difference.

We love the way our new building looks and it still smells almost new after almost two years.

