

February 21, 2007

Student Government Leaders
Oregon Community College Student Association

Dear Student Government Leaders:

We heard from the American Lung Association of Oregon that some of your Colleges are addressing tobacco and secondhand smoke on campus through the Oregon Tobacco-Free College Initiative. Here at Western Technical College (in Wisconsin) we recently became a 100% tobacco-free campus. We would like to share our experiences and perspective as student government leaders who worked on this issue – perhaps this will be helpful as you consider this issue.

At Western the “smoking issue” was a discussion item at nearly every Student Government meeting. Concerns about this issue included health complications from secondhand smoke exposure, smoky areas at building entrances, the presence of minors on campus, and unsightly litter of cigarette butts.

At the Student Government General Session on November 7th, 2005, the students voted to start a committee to look into the issue. This “Smoking Committee” did a number of things to research the issue. We reviewed our current policy, researched campus policies elsewhere, studied results from a campus smoking survey from October 2004, investigated the cost of building smoking shelters, and researched enforcement options.

The Student Government adopted a proposal at their General Session on February 6th, 2006. It basically stated that the Student Government would like to see Western Technical College’s La Crosse Campus (there are several campuses in the District spread across several counties) go entirely smoke-free with the exception of two designated smoking areas. This was passed by a vote of 55 to 4.

The report was then taken to the campus’ Executive Committee and approved to be taken to the District Board (or Board of Trustees). The District Board supported the Student Government proposal, but because of numerous factors (area businesses were taking their property tobacco free and the College was training their work force, pollution issues, health issues, campus image concerns, expense of the smoking shelters, etc.) the Board felt that they should take the proposal a step further, and recommended that all property owned and operated by Western go tobacco free.

This new recommendation went to the Student Government in the spring of 2006. The follow up vote to support the recommendations of the District Board, that all campuses go tobacco-free, was passed by a vote of 22-9 with 6 undecided.

On January 1st, 2007, after eight months of planning and several months of intense educational campaigns to inform students and the community of the new policy, the campus implemented its tobacco-free policy.

From all the research we did, eight months is very fast to implement something like this as change tends to be difficult for everyone. We mention this because timeline is something that is important. Western's policy may have had less success if two of the largest employers in the area (hospitals) had not implemented the same policy at the exact same time.

All in all the new policy seems to be working for our College. On a whole, smokers and non-smokers are respecting the policy. It is not the intention of the policy to infringe upon a person's choice to smoke. This policy is about promoting an idea that will help students to succeed in an increasingly tobacco-free workplace.

It is also about promoting health. In fact, when the policy was implemented low-cost cessation products were made available and Quit-Line information was given out. Students can still choose to smoke or chew tobacco, they are just being asked not to do so in a place that affects the health of others.

We understand that the enforcement question will be a big one on any campus. All of the Colleges that have this policy deal with it differently. At our College, we have linked enforcement of the policy with the enforcement procedures for any violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

Congratulations to all of you for addressing this important issue, and best wishes moving this forward. Our "smoking issue" at Western was addressed and ultimately resolved through the work of student leaders responding to the requests of the student body. What a great idea to address this issue statewide and with the support of the Lung Association so you are not forced to reinvent the wheel with all the research. The task may seem daunting, but if your campus is full of students who would like to literally breathe easier, then your work is almost done for you.

Feel free to let us know if you have any questions about our experience going tobacco-free by calling our Student Government office at (608) 785-9085. A great resource for you on our campus regarding the implementation of the tobacco-free policy would be the Student Development Manager, Ms. Shelley McNeely. She can be reached by phone at (608) 785-9880 or by email at mceelys@westerntc.edu.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Pickar

Vanessa Pickar
Western Technical College
Student Government Governor
StudentGovernor@westerntc.edu

Joel Richardson

Joel Richardson
Western Technical College
Student Government Treasurer
StudentTreasurer@westerntc.edu