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How do you feel the PCC decision to become a tobacco-free campus?

I feel really good about this decision. When I first started working at PCC in 2006, I couldn't understand why I had to walk through clouds of cigarette smoke every time I wanted to go somewhere on campus. It seemed as though PCC was doing a disservice to students who would smoke together on breaks from class. We were innocently facilitating a culture of tobacco use on campus – the exact opposite of what we would have wanted our students to come away with! So I'm very happy that I can walk around campus today and very rarely have to breathe someone else's cigarette smoke. It makes for a healthier, friendlier, and more accessible environment in which to learn and work.

What role have you played in this issue at PCC?

I got interested in this issue when I started working at PCC in 2006. I couldn't understand why an enlightened educational institution, dedicated to inculcating healthful and positive behaviors in people of all ages, took such a casual approach to second-hand smoke. So I decided to get involved and try to change the situation. I reviewed existing policy and was surprised to learn that implementation of the smoking policy was haphazard and confusing. I wrote to the president of the faculty senate and eventually to my campus president and the college president. I got involved in the college's multicultural tobacco-free task force. And I also got the faculty union involved with the issue. I did encounter opposition from some quarters, but largely the response was positive. Many people felt the same way I did but felt timid about speaking up and being labeled a "smoking Nazi." Looking out for your own and others' health and well-being isn't being a "Nazi." If you don't let your students sniff glue on your campus, why allow them to smoke?

What would you say to administrators at other colleges who believe faculty won't support a policy prohibiting smoking on campus?

I would quote Gandhi: "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." Many faculty choose their line of work because of the freedom it affords them in their working and personal lives. Because faculty cherish and carefully guard this freedom, they are loath to impose restrictions on others. They say, "Live and let live – and if that means breathing someone else's cigarette smoke, then it's the price we all have to pay for freedom." But that's a false choice: freedom doesn't mean everyone can do anything. No college administrator would set up "glue-sniffing areas" for students and staff. Dangerous and unhealthy practices don't merit the protection of "freedom" – especially when they endanger innocent bystanders. So to those administrators I would say: Stand up for what is right. It's what you're being paid to do. If you're not willing to do it, step aside and let someone else take the lead. And don't fear the inevitable backlash. You'll be surprised how many people agree with you.

Do you know of any fellow faculty or academic professionals who you think would factor campus smoking policy into their decision to work for one college or another?

Perhaps, but a tobacco-free culture is the kind of culture we want at this institution. One of my co-workers quit smoking on his own about six months ago and has been tobacco-free ever since. He didn't want to quit on someone else's timetable, so he did it on his own. He has never felt, looked, or smelled better! And even though he still grumbles about having to quit, I think that he will one day thank the college for motivating him to quit. I truly believe that a tobacco-free policy is one of the best ways we show concern for our co-workers. Giving them "freedom" to smoke anywhere and anytime is a way of showing we don't care about their health.

What would you recommend to colleagues elsewhere who would like to see their college go tobacco-free?

I would say be patient, but not too patient. And be persistent. And be upbeat and positive. The reason to go tobacco-free is to show care and concern for others, not to "take away the rights of others." Frame the debate positively and avoid the negative. Seek allies in your community wherever you can (you'll sometimes find them in the unlikeliest places!), and then nurture these alliances. And never, never, never, never give up! At my college we had about 32 setbacks before the tobacco-free policy became a reality.