

The Promotion of a Smoke-Free Campus

Smoking endangers a person's health and exposes others to secondhand smoke. Because of the negative aspects of smoking, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) has recommended that college campuses should be smoke-free. To assess the effectiveness of a smoking policy on campus, smoking and non-smoking students at a large university in the Midwest were interviewed. Their responses showed that the existing smoking policy was weak and often ignored. Students suggested that the university should do a better job of implementing the policy and also provide help for those who want to quit smoking.

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Introduction

Smoking endangers a person's health and it also exposes others to secondhand smoke. Non-smokers exposed to secondhand smoke have a 25 to 30% increased risk of developing heart disease and a 20 to 30% increased risk of developing lung cancer (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse [CASA], 2007). Since May 1988, CASA has promoted the adoption of a smoke-free campus as an obligation (not an option) for colleges and universities. However, only 75 institutions out of 4,200 colleges and universities are entirely smoke-free (American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, 2007).

Over time, Purdue University's policy on tobacco has been modified. In February 1991, the Indiana Clean Indoor Air Law prohibited smoking in classroom buildings, except in designated smoking areas. In August 2005, Purdue University implemented a non-smoking policy, which prohibited smoking in University facilities, defined as buildings, shelters, indoor and outdoor athletic facilities, and indoor and outdoor theatres as well as within a 30 foot perimeter of the University facilities (University Non-Smoking Policy, 2002).

Recent data on smokers at Purdue University was extracted from the spring 2007 University Wellness Survey. The sample consisted of 3,112 undergraduate students. Tobacco use in the last 30 days showed that: 17.5% smoked cigarettes, 11.9% smoked cigars, cigarillos, or little cigars, and 18.7% smoked hookah (personal communication, November 15, 2007). The Survey showed that the percentage of students who smoked cigarettes in the last 30 days decreased from 24.4% to 17.5% between 2003 and 2007. This was encouraging news although there was no explanation for the decrease in smoking. Furthermore, the Wellness Survey did not include questions about the smoking policy which was enacted in 2005. Clearly, there was a lack of information available from the general student body to determine the effectiveness of the policy. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to conduct a qualitative study to learn the opinions of Purdue University students in regard to a smoke-free campus and to define the most effective way to implement a smoke-free policy.

Review of Literature

The transition from high school to college is likely to be a time of profound change as students are exposed to new ideas and surroundings. To encourage students to maintain a healthy lifestyle, colleges need to address issues that affect students' health such as the effect of smoking. In general, research indicates that students who smoke experience a negative effect on their health even before reaching adulthood (Alexander, Piazza, Mekos, & Valente, 2001; Sax, 1997; Trinidad & Johnson, 2001; Wayne, Aycicegi, & Harris, 2003; Wechsler, Rigotti, Gledhill-Hoyt, & Lee, 1998).

Research findings on the effectiveness of smoking policies are mixed suggesting that additional research is needed. While bans on smoking in public places and comprehensive geographic restrictions have reduced smoking (Chaloupka & Wechsler, 1997; Czart, Pacula, Chaloupka, & Wechsler, 2001), a study with a student sample in the United States and Canada indicated a non-significant result for the effect of geographic smoking restrictions (Lewit, Hyland, Kerrebrock, & Cummings, 1997). In contrast, banning the sale of cigarettes on campus was associated with increased levels of smoking (Chaloupka & Wechsler, 1995; Czart et al. 2001).

The only study that assessed the effectiveness of a smoke-free policy on campus was conducted by Indiana University-Purdue University in Indianapolis (IU-PUI). This university (IU-PUI) implemented a smoke-free policy in August of 2006. Six months later, IU-PUI reported a significant decrease in the overall smoking prevalence

among students, professionals, and staff, and 9.6% of former smokers had quit smoking after the policy was implemented (Ryker, 2007).

Method and Sample

This study used a phenomenological framework to explore students' opinions about the existing smoking policy on the Purdue University campus in West Lafayette, Indiana. The phenomenology paradigm acknowledges that people think, learn, have reasons for their actions, and interact with the world in order to find meaning (Creswell, 2003, Neuman, 1997, Schwandt, 2000). The authors conducted field observations on campus to observe smoking behavior and to interview students.

The sample consisted of three smokers, four non-smokers, and one ex-smoker. The sample consisted of one freshman, three sophomores, one senior, and three graduate students. There were five women and three men. The interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes each. The interview questions are included in the Appendix.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This study was guided by the following questions: 1) What knowledge and thoughts did students have about the current smoking policy, 2) How did the students feel about the campus becoming entirely smoke-free, and 3) What measures would be needed to implement a smoke-free policy. Questions 1 and 2 were relevant for both smokers and non-smokers, but question 3 was designed specifically for non-smokers.

The findings were consistent with the previous literature in regard to the effectiveness of the smoking policy. As in previous studies, support for the smoke-free policy was strongest among non-smokers and weakest among smokers (Loukas, Garcia, & Gottlieb, 2006; Rigotti, Regan, Moran, & Wechsler, 2003). The five major themes are described as follows with smokers' opinions presented first followed by the non-smokers' opinions.

Theme 1: Knowledge and Beliefs about Effectiveness of Policy

All of the smokers were familiar with the university rule that there should be no smoking within 30 foot of the buildings. Two of the three smokers did not like the rule:

"I don't mind the 30 foot smoking policy because I don't think it's really being enforced."

"They (administrators) didn't consider our opinions. The graduate students and undergraduates said we do not want this ban. And they pushed it through anyway. It is a pain when it is cold or raining because there is no shelter for that."

All of the non-smokers knew that the 30 foot regulation existed, but they did not know how far away from the building smoking was allowed:

"You see people standing half the distance away from the building. As long as they understand they can't smoke inside the building, it doesn't really bother me."

"There is no way to police that to make it effective. It seems people are pretty considerate of others. They try to do it out of the way, but sometimes, they just don't care."

"As an ex-smoker, I really don't know the policy is gonna force to you to not smoke. You have to make that decision yourself. It's effective in preventing people from smoking in front of the door. But in terms of people quitting, I don't know if it will be effective."

Theme 2: Smoking Ban off Campus

Although the discussion of smoking off campus was not included in the original set of questions, several students volunteered their opinions about a recent smoking ban in the nearby city. A non-smoker said that the city regulation would have a greater influence than the campus policy because the city ban was enforced. The smoking ban in the city was a positive change for the non-smokers:

"I don't think it has hurt the business at all. I've noticed that the nightspots in the other city (across the river) have become a lot smokier. It seemed like everyone migrated across the river."

Theme 3: Extension of Freedom of Speech

When asked about the campus becoming entirely smoke-free, the smokers were in agreement. They thought that adopting a smoke-free policy was unrealistic and that it would not happen:

“I don’t want to have to leave campus to smoke. If they ban it on campus completely, I would be upset, but I’d probably have graduated by then.”

“I would probably be in some kind of protest with all of the other smokers.”

Non-smokers, except for the ex-smoker, preferred the non-smoking policy.

“I can’t stand the smell of smoke. If smoking were to be banned completely, I’d be fine with it.”

“I think it would be more beneficial for us and the community. It would be a good recruiting thing too.”

The ex-smoker encompassed both non-smokers’ and smokers’ perspectives:

“I feel the current policy is fine. I think it’s reasonable. I don’t like telling anybody’s rights for too much of anything. Because it just sets a bad precedence. If we start with this person’s right, then we can take everybody else’s rights away.”

Theme 4: The Smokers’ Rights

All of the nonsmokers acknowledged and respected the smokers’ rights:

“They (smokers) have the right to smoke. To me, it’s just an extension of freedom of speech, where you have the right to say anything as long as it isn’t harmful or detrimental to something else. But if you and I are sitting in close proximity, then I don’t feel that you have the right to make the decision about what the air that surrounds both of us is clouded with.”

The ex-smoker said that alcohol is as bad as smoking in terms of health effects. She said she did not understand why banning alcohol had not been mentioned. In her opinion, drinking too much caused more harm than smoking because it had “socially bad effects.”

Theme 5: Measures to Implement a Smoke-free Policy

Only non-smokers were asked this question. Most non-smokers were unsure on how to enforce a smoke-free policy. Several said that a smoke-free policy might make smoking less prevalent, but they didn’t think it would eliminate smoking. Some suggestions to implement the policy were to not tolerate smokers who evade the rule. Instead, those who broke the rule should get tickets or citations. They acknowledged that there would be a cost to monitor smokers and that this would upset smokers. Two of the non-smokers talked about how to make the university a smoke-free environment through education:

“I think that overtime with more education and the fact that this does hurt you and hurt the people around you, people will basically be guilt-tripped into not doing it.”

Summary and Implications

The findings indicated that the current policy (not smoking within 30 feet of buildings) on this campus was weak and often ignored by students. Suggestions to improve the policy included the need to move all ashtrays 30 feet away from the buildings and to post no-smoking signs in a more prominent position on doors. Also, students felt that the purpose of the smoking policy on campus should be clearly stated since they were not sure if the policy was intended to make smokers quit or to prevent them from smoking in front of doors. Some students believed that an educational approach could change the smokers’ attitude and help them understand the policy. They said, if smoking were to be banned completely, the University should show support for smokers by providing services such as: smoking cessation programs and support groups.

Appendix

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been at Purdue University?
2. What do you know about the current smoking regulation?
3. How has the smoking regulation affected you?
4. How do your peers and colleagues feel about the smoking regulation? Have they been affected by the smoking regulation?
5. Why do you think schools have a smoking regulation?
6. What can change in the current smoking policy?
How can it be more effective? (*non-smokers only*)
7. Do you go to bars regularly? How about after the smoking ban?
8. What are the ways to increase awareness of the smoking policy? (*non-smokers only*)
9. What are the ways to encourage students to comply with the smoking policy? (*non-smokers only*)
10. What suggestions on the smoking situation do you have for Purdue to better serve the students?
11. What are your thoughts on making the campus entirely smoke-free?
If any, what concerns do you have and how can they be addressed? (*non-smokers only*)

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Endnotes

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