

Executive Summary

An evaluation of the first year of OSU's smoke-free campus policy: Results from the Corvallis campus survey

January 2014

Purpose

To evaluate the OSU Corvallis smoke-free campus policy at the end of its first year, and to gauge the reactions of students, faculty and staff, including both nonsmokers and smokers.

Background

Oregon State University's main campus in Corvallis became completely smoke-free on September 1, 2012, joining a rapidly growing number of university campuses nationwide that have become either smoke-free or completely tobacco-free. During the first year of smoke-free implementation, several issues were identified as needing additional attention, including communication and signage about the policy, enforcement of the policy, and trash and refuse at campus boundaries. A campus-wide survey was designed to gather important information about these and other issues.

The major policy evaluation questions that were addressed with this survey study were the following:

- What is the level of awareness on campus about the policy, among students, faculty and staff?
- What are the levels of support for the new OSU policy among students, faculty and staff? What are campus attitudes about secondhand smoke? What are opinions among students, faculty and staff about how the policy should be enforced?
- What has been the level of compliance with the smoke-free campus policy? What are the current levels of exposure to secondhand smoke?
- What is the current prevalence of cigarette smoking among students, faculty, and staff on the Corvallis campus?
- How have smokers on campus reacted to the smoke-free campus policy? How have they adjusted their smoking habits? Has the smoke-free campus policy affected their overall smoking levels or motivations to quit smoking?

Methods

Eligible students were those taking at least one credit on the Corvallis campus during spring 2013, as well as participants of the INTO program for international students. Eligible faculty/staff were those working on campus at least .20 FTE, including INTO employees. Survey questionnaires for students, faculty and staff were administered online. The invited samples included 22,141 students and 4,820 faculty and staff. The survey took place in May-June 2013. Each potential respondent received an e-mail invitation from the President's office, containing a web link that connected directly to the questionnaire. Response rates were 25.7% for students and 42.6% for faculty. In order to minimize potential nonresponse bias due to the differential response rates across demographic groups, a nonresponse adjustment rate was used in the data analyses.

Findings

Among students, awareness is high, but not universal. 89% of students overall, including 90% of smokers, reported that they know about the policy. If a goal is for all students, and certainly all smokers, to be aware of the policy, then there is room for improvement with regard to campus communications. Awareness is higher among faculty and staff, with 93% of respondents, including 99% of smokers, expressing awareness of the policy.

Overall, OSU's smoke-free policy is strongly supported by the campus community. Overall, 72% of students and 77% of faculty expressed the opinion that the OSU campus should be 100% smoke-free. Respondents expressed aversion to outdoor secondhand smoke, and they are largely

satisfied with the smoke-free environment. The perspective of smokers, representing 13% of the student body and 5% of faculty and staff, is different from that of nonsmokers, with far fewer smokers expressing support for the policy.

Small fines and referrals are preferred enforcement strategies, overall. With regard to policy enforcement, nonsmokers expressed greatest support for small fines and referrals (either to student conduct or to one's employment supervisor, as appropriate). In contrast, strong majorities of smokers, among both students and faculty/staff, favored not having an enforcement strategy.

The majority of smokers report that they have complied fully with the smoke-free policy. 57% of student smokers and 80% of faculty/staff smokers have not smoked on campus at all since the policy went into effect. Of those students who have smoked on campus, 32% reported doing so a few times or less, while 11% reported smoking many times or daily.

Exposure to secondhand smoke is highest near the campus boundaries. Near campus building entrances, 29% of students and 18% of faculty/staff reported some exposure in the previous two weeks. Unfortunately, comparable baseline data from previous years are not available to assess the degree of improvement. Exposure to secondhand smoke near the campus boundaries is high (77% of students and 54% of faculty/staff reported some exposure), and is clearly an issue that requires attention.

Smoking prevalence within the OSU Corvallis community is low. Among students, 4.4% reported daily smoking and another 8.4% reported occasional smoking. Among faculty and staff, 1.6% were daily smokers and 3.0% were occasional smokers. These numbers are considerably lower than the smoking prevalence levels reported for Oregon as a whole (17.9%).

Smokers' most frequent accommodation strategy has been to go off campus to smoke. This has produced significant problems in the campus perimeter areas. In addition, however, 33% of student smokers and 23% of faculty/staff smokers reported that they do not have a problem in refraining from smoking while on campus, so the policy has not presented difficulties for them.

Primary Recommendations

- 1. Implement permanent signage around the campus.** The OSU Smoke-free Task Force should work with Facilities Services and University Marketing to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for permanent signage. This will provide a consistent and visible message about OSU's smoke-free status and will reduce the occurrence of policy violations.
- 2. Expand and diversify communication efforts.** Other forms of communication, in addition to signage, are needed on an ongoing basis for campus visitors and new members of the campus community. A comprehensive marketing and communications plan will be an important step toward ensuring successful implementation.
- 3. Increase and target the campus's attention to trash pick-up.** To date, the most common complaints regarding the smoke-free policy have involved cigarette-related trash, especially cigarette butts. Specific problem areas on campus are along Monroe Avenue between 23rd and 26th Streets, along Western Boulevard near the International Living-Learning Center, and at the clock tower near the Valley Library. The pick-up needs to be more frequent and more attentive to identified problem areas, which will reinforce the "clean and green" environmental image consistent with OSU's vision.
- 4. Decide on a strategy for policy enforcement.** The present enforcement plan for the smoke-free policy may need to be strengthened. The OSU Smoke-free Task Force is in the process of developing an overall recommendation on this issue, following which the university administration should act quickly to review it, make a final decision, and put an enforcement plan into place.