

Reframing Arguments Against Tobacco Policy

There may be opposition to efforts to create a tobacco-free campus. Some of this opposition could be from students, faculty or community members and may be delivered in the form of letters to the editor, emails, phone calls to the health or wellness office, classroom and residence hall discussion, or campus gossip. Below are questions often asked regarding tobacco-free policies on campuses, answers that may create the opportunity for educational discussion and further support for this campaign. Expect opposition and be prepared to combat it with factual and empowering information for your campus.

It's my right to use tobacco! / You're taking away our right to smoke.

- The campus administration is responsible for providing a safe environment for the campus students, staff, visitors and property. Prohibiting smoking in campus buildings eliminates indoor smoke thus protecting all on campus from secondhand smoke, a known carcinogen. Prohibiting smoking near entrances also protects people from having to pass through smoke when entering or exiting buildings.
- Smoking policies allow everyone on campus the right to breathe fresh air and not endure risks to their health.
- Colleges and universities are owners of the campus property. That means the administration has the right to regulate how the property is treated. Prohibiting tobacco in rooms is one more facet of preventive maintenance just like not allowing candles in rooms or tape on the walls. Smoke damage requires extra cost in cleaning and possible damage due to fires. Spit tobacco use and improper disposal can permanently stain carpet and furniture, as well as creating extra work for custodial staff.

Who really cares? It's only harming me.

- Secondhand smoke is a Group A carcinogen, meaning it causes cancer. Any amount of exposure to secondhand smoke is harmful. Smoking in residence halls and other buildings can also cause a significant fire risk.
- A 2007 Stanford University study confirmed that even outside, people were at risk of secondhand smoke exposure when near burning cigarettes and/or those exhaling tobacco smoke.

What's the big deal about tobacco advertising?

- The tobacco industry spends 9.6 billion dollars a year advertising their addictive product. Tobacco ads are not articles; many are messages created specifically to target the 18-24 year old population in hopes that this population will get hooked on cigarettes and continue to buy their product. Internal tobacco industry documents prove that they have been selling an addictive product for years and continue to create marketing schemes such as bar promotions and free giveaways to increase college smokers. Research has documented that the top three most advertised brands are the top three used by the college population, so marketing does impact smoking behavior on campus.

Cigarettes are a legal product, so why can't they be sold on campus?

- Tobacco is not a product of choice; it is a product of addiction. Some students think it is no big deal and they can quit any time. The addictive nature of tobacco makes this an unlikely outcome of cigarette use. Selling tobacco, with its potential for addiction and later-life health consequences, jeopardizes the quality of life for future college graduates.

What's the problem if I dip or chew? It's in MY mouth.

- Spit/smokeless tobacco has similar addiction potential as smoking. Colleges have a responsibility to protect the overall health and well being of their students. The use of one tobacco product over another is an illogical and inconsistent health message.
- In addition, spit tobacco often creates unwanted, sometimes hazardous waste and byproducts. Campus staff members then have to dispose of the waste.

If we become a tobacco-free campus, enrollment will go down and/or people will not want to work here.

- Looking at other institutions that have gone tobacco free, there is no evidence to support this concern. There have been no reports of any school suffering a reduction in student enrollment or employees due to a tobacco policy.

Who is going to enforce the policy?

- With proper education and awareness, most tobacco-free policies have high rates of compliance. Everyone on campus will have a role in ensuring compliance with the new policy.
- Peer enforcement and enforcement officers will oversee compliance, review enforcement procedures, and serve as the judicial board for people found violating the policy.
- The tobacco policy stresses support for tobacco users, not punishment.