

Executive Summary
Evaluating Oregon State University's tobacco policy:
Results from the Corvallis campus survey
May 2019

Purpose of the study

To evaluate the status of the OSU Corvallis smoke-free campus policy (implemented in 2012), and to gauge opinions from students, faculty and staff about strengthening the policy to include all forms of tobacco, in addition to combustible tobacco.

Background

Oregon State University's main campus in Corvallis became completely smoke-free in September 2012, joining a rapidly growing number of university campuses nationwide that have become smoke-free or tobacco-free. This survey was conducted as part of an initiative to consider whether OSU should become fully tobacco-free. The major policy evaluation questions addressed with the survey study were the following:

1. What are the levels of support among students, faculty, and staff on the Corvallis campus for the current policy (100% smoke-free) and a potential stronger policy (100% tobacco-free)?
2. What are the current levels of exposure to tobacco use and secondhand smoke on campus?
3. What is the awareness and understanding of students, faculty, and staff about the current smoke-free policy?
4. What are opinions among students, faculty and staff about how the policy should be enforced?
5. What is the current prevalence of different types of tobacco use among students, faculty, and staff on the Corvallis campus?
6. How do tobacco users on campus accommodate the smoke-free campus policy?
7. What has been the level of smokers' compliance with the current smoke-free campus policy?

Methods

Eligible students were those taking at least one credit on the Corvallis campus during fall 2018, as well as students enrolled in INTO OSU. Eligible faculty and staff were all those actively employed on the Corvallis campus. Survey questions differed only slightly for students and faculty/staff. The survey was administered online in October-November 2018. The invited samples included 23,558 students and 5,234 faculty and staff. Response rates were 25.1% for students and 40.0% for faculty/staff.

Key findings

- Support within the campus community is strong for both the current smoke-free policy (students 75%, faculty/staff 84%) and the proposed tobacco-free policy (students 63%, faculty/staff 68%).
- In addition, comparing the findings from 2013 and 2018, support has grown among both populations (students and faculty/staff) for both the current smoke-free campus and a proposed tobacco-free campus.
- Tobacco use prevalence: Among students, vaping is now considerably more common than cigarette smoking (20% of respondents reporting vaping in the past month vs. 11% smoking). Among faculty/staff, cigarette smoking is more common than vaping, with both being low (4% vs. 2%). Past-month smokeless tobacco use is also relatively low (5% of students, 1% of faculty/staff).
- About a third of respondents report exposure to secondhand smoke outdoors on campus within the past 2 weeks, and more than half (67% of students, 58% of faculty/staff) report exposure near the campus boundary during that same period.
- Knowledge of what the policy says is reasonably high with regard to smoking on campus, though certainly with room for improvement (students 74% correct, faculty/staff 82% correct). However,

knowledge is low with regard to vaping (students 59% correct, faculty/staff 52% correct), and extremely low with regard to smokeless tobacco use (students 11% correct, faculty/staff 14% correct).

- The majority of smokers (including cigarettes and/or e-cigarettes) report that they **do not** need special strategies to refrain from smoking while on campus (students 69%, faculty/staff 54%). Of those who did report an accommodation strategy, the most frequent was to go off campus to smoke.
- Compliance with the current smoke-free policy is high for faculty/staff (only 6% of smokers / vapers reported doing so on campus at least once in the past year) but lower for students (40% of smokers / vapers doing so at least once in the past year).

Primary Recommendations

- 1. Adopt a 100% tobacco-free policy.** Substantial majorities of students, faculty, and staff on the OSU Corvallis campus believe that the campus should be 100% tobacco-free. Major public health organizations also recommend that universities take a comprehensive approach by fully integrating all tobacco products, including smokeless tobacco, into their policies. Moving to a comprehensive tobacco-free policy would align well with OSU's commitment to overall health and wellness.
- 2. Improve the visibility of the policy through a comprehensive strategy for communication and promotion.** This strategy can include web resources, publications, and promotional events. Policy information can be incorporated into campus tours, student application forms, orientations, athletic scoreboard displays, parking permits, official documents for contractors on campus, and other venues. More prominent signage, both permanent and temporary, will provide a consistent and visible message to OSU students, faculty, staff, and visitors.
- 3. Support tobacco cessation efforts on campus.** Implementation of a tobacco-free or smoke-free policy should be coordinated with actions to help current tobacco users quit. Information and resources to support tobacco cessation should be made available to students and employees.
- 4. Promote policy compliance primarily through education and communication to strengthen tobacco-free campus norms.** Tobacco policies have their strongest impact through the establishment of social norms that discourage tobacco use on campus. OSU could consider "ambassador programs," which have been used with some success by other universities.
- 5. Addressing policy violations: Review and evaluate the current strategy for policy enforcement, and revise it as needed.** As noted above, best practices to promote policy compliance tend to focus on education, communication, and changing campus norms, but policy enforcement is a critical part of the implementation process as well. The current enforcement procedures, focusing on referral to the Office of Student Conduct (for students) or to primary supervisors or Human Resources (for employees), have been inconsistently applied. There needs to be a consistent and well-implemented strategy for policy enforcement, which should be developed jointly by primary campus units including Public Safety, Student Conduct, Human Resources, University Housing and Dining Services, and other departments.
- 6. Ensure that tobacco trash on campus is cleared on a regular basis.** The accumulation of trash over long periods of time can create an exaggerated impression that the policy is not working. More satisfactory clean-up efforts will reduce this perception and promote compliance. The smoking hotspots on campus where cigarette smoking most typically occurs tend to accumulate cigarette butts and other tobacco trash. These need to be monitored and cleared on a regular basis. Resources for clean-up should be allocated, especially for known problem areas.
- 7. Create an overall plan for policy implementation.** A workgroup or task force should be appointed to develop a comprehensive plan to guide implementation of the OSU tobacco policy. This plan can address the elements mentioned above. The workgroup should also develop a timeline and a general plan for evaluating the policy's implementation in future years.