

Knowledge and Behaviors Associated with a Campus Tobacco-Free Policy

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Nearly half of U.S. colleges/universities have implemented tobacco-free campus policies. This study analyzed knowledge, attitudes, and practices associated with the tobacco-free policy at a large public university. It is important to study public university tobacco policies to determine the most efficient and cost-effective way to reduce tobacco related disease due to tobacco use and exposure.

Methods: This study used a cross-sectional, campus-wide electronic survey distributed in November 2016. The primary outcomes of interest included 1) correct knowledge of the tobacco-free policy, 2) community member willingness to approach observed violation of the policy, and 3) a positive opinion of the policy's effectiveness. Descriptive statistics and logistic regression were used to examine the impact of demographic factors on the outcomes.

Results: After analysis, the team found that 23% of university faculty, staff, and students had incorrect knowledge about the campus tobacco-free policy. Almost 70% of the university community reported not having approached a smoking violator. Males were significantly less likely to understand the tobacco-free policy in full, approach a violator, or have a positive opinion about its effectiveness. Staff had better knowledge of the policy, a higher likelihood of approaching a violator, and a better opinion about the policy's effectiveness compared to graduate and undergraduate students.

Conclusions: Interventions are needed to increase awareness and confidence regarding implementation and enforcement of the tobacco-free policy on campus, particularly among faculty and students. This paper expands on the currently increasing knowledge of tobacco-free policy enforcement and benefits.

KEYWORDS

Campus; Tobacco Regulation; Tobacco; Secondhand Smoke; Cross-Sectional Survey

INTRODUCTION

Environmental tobacco exposure (ETS) research has demonstrated the public health externalities to second hand smoke.^{1,2} Exposure to second hand smoke increases the risk of lung cancer, heart disease, and respiratory symptoms and illnesses for nonsmokers.³ E-cigarettes are often included in tobacco-free policies as well because they still contain nicotine, which could possibly lead to future tobacco use in other forms, such as cigarettes.⁴ All of these increased risks have led to tobacco-free policies in numerous public settings, including universities.⁵ Between 2011 and 2017, the proportion of 2- and 4- year public and private colleges and universities that had implemented 100% tobacco-free policies increased by more than 300%.⁶

Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of tobacco-free campuses in reducing tobacco use and changing smoking behavior.⁷⁻⁹ Most students, faculty and staff report that they have been exposed to second hand smoke on campus;¹⁰⁻¹⁴ many of these individuals report that they believe this exposure is harmful and that the university has a responsibility to curb secondhand smoke exposure via campus tobacco-free policies.^{12,13,15} The purpose of tobacco-free policies is two-fold: the bans decrease ETS but also de-normalize smoking as a socially acceptable behavior.¹⁶ This is especially important for young adults, who have the highest smoking rate of any age group in the United States and who are targeted by tobacco industry advertising.^{17,18} Self-reported smoking rates among college students range from 9% to 25%, with rates in the United States being the highest among universities in the South.^{10,11,15,19}

Smoking prevention efforts such as tobacco-free policies can lead to the shifting of social norms regarding tobacco use, which include socially acceptable practices.²⁰ Formal policies, such as tobacco-free policies on college campuses, can enforce new behaviors through stigmatizing smoking.²¹ Tobacco bans stigmatize spaces, increasing the segregation of smoker and non-

smokers.²² Stigmatizing smokers may have positive results by increasing the level of social unacceptability and the acceptability of tobacco-free policy enforcement.^{21,23} This may be critical for young adults, for whom the initiation of smoking may not fully take hold for several years.²⁴

A nationally representative survey of 4-year colleges and universities in the United States showed broad support (over 75%) for tobacco-free campus policies regardless of smoking status.²⁵ Other smaller studies have reflected this level of support, although current smoking status tends to reduce support and female gender consistently increases support.^{10-15,19} Longitudinal studies on the impact of smoke-free campus policies have found mixed but generally positive results: one found significantly reduced smoking behavior among students on a campus with a smoke-free policy,⁸ another found that strict enforcement of the policy increased policy compliance,²⁶ and a third found that although the policy was not effective at reducing general smoking prevalence among students, it did reduce self-reported second hand smoke exposure on campus.⁹

Few studies have examined the enforcement of tobacco-free policies on college campuses.²⁶ None have focused exclusively on the influence, compliance, or enforcement of a tobacco free campus in the Southern portion of the United States, where young adults are more likely to be heavy smokers than their counterparts in other regions of the country.²⁷ The purpose of this study was to analyze knowledge, attitudes, and practices associated with the tobacco-free policy at a large public university in South Carolina.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Context

Following the American College Health Association's 2009 recommendation for all colleges and universities to implement a tobacco-free campus policy,²⁸ the University of South Carolina (USC) in Columbia, SC implemented a campus-wide ban on all tobacco products (including e-cigarettes) on January 1, 2014.^{29,30} Prior to the campus-wide ban, numerous policies that limited smoking at specific locations were in place, discouraging tobacco use on university property. Specifically, tobacco use was explicitly prohibited within 25 feet of university-owned and -leased buildings, vehicles, and equipment operated other than vehicles.^{29,31}

The policy was announced on the university website,³¹ references to the policy were added to student handbooks, and signs were posted conspicuously around campus on buildings, trashcans, and posts along walking paths. A Tobacco Free Task Force, comprised of USC students, staff, and faculty, worked to craft, finalize, and promote the campus-wide tobacco ban in partnership with Healthy Carolina, a part of the campus health system.^{29,31}

The Tobacco Free Task Force assigned the enforcement of the tobacco-free policy to the Carolina community, which consists of students, faculty, staff, and volunteers, rather than university police or security.^{29,31} Enforcement consists of volunteers bringing the smoking policy infraction to the attention of the person(s) committing the violations.²⁹ If the person(s) violating the policy does not respond to this reminder, then the student, faculty, staff, and/or volunteer may report the violation to five different entities on campus: the Office of Student Conduct, the Office of Business Affairs, law enforcement, and/or the violator's unit head, immediate supervisor, or director, depending on who is reporting and who is committing the violation.³¹ Various citations can be handed to the violator by these entities. If the person wants to quit smoking, he/she can be referred to tobacco cessation services through USC.³² If there is no intent to quit and verbal reminders are ignored, there are a range of possible consequences, including a written report kept on record for students, a \$50 fine, a report to a supervisor (faculty, staff, contractors, and vendors), or law enforcement involvement (campus visitors).³¹ After the enactment of this policy in 2014, there were continued reports and sightings of tobacco use on campus. A NCHA assessment in 2012 resulted in 68% of the student body at the time supporting the current tobacco-free policy and staff assessments conducted in 2011 found 84.9% of faculty/staff support the current tobacco-free policy.²⁸ Providing evidence of the overall appeal the current tobacco-free policy has to faculty/staff, and students.

This study used a cross-sectional, campus-wide electronic survey distributed in November 2015. A web-based survey (thereafter referred to as the Healthy Carolina Survey) consisting of 25 items related to the campus tobacco-free policy was distributed to all USC faculty, staff, and students via an email invitation from the university president and Healthy Carolina. The survey was based off a tobacco-free policy survey used in the past by Florida State University, which was credited as a reliable survey regarding the current tobacco-free policy. Florida State University has the same tobacco-free policy as the University of South Carolina, which includes the ban of all forms of tobacco including e-cigarettes. The survey was only open to participants who had a valid University of South Carolina email address. There were controls in place to ensure that the survey was only taken once per email address to offset the possibility of participants taking the survey more than once. One reminder was sent out on November 17, 2015. The survey was available from November 2, 2015 to December 6, 2015. To encourage survey completion, incentives of various amounts, including gift cards, school event tickets, and other miscellaneous items, were provided to a limited number of respondents. The winners of incentives were randomly drawn from completed surveys.

Variable	Survey Participants N (%)
Status	
Freshman	870 (14.7)
Sophomore	823 (13.9)
Junior	852 (14.4)
Senior	977 (16.5)
Graduate Student	941 (15.9)
Staff	1,030 (17.4)
Faculty	427 (7.2)
Gender	
Male	2,089 (40.4)
Female	2,935 (56.7)
Transgender	26 (0.5)
Prefer Not to Respond	125 (2.4)
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	270 (8.6)
American Indian or Alaskan	29 (0.9)
Asian or Pacific Islander	120 (3.8)
Hispanic or Latino	88 (2.8)
White	2,494 (79.8)
Other	125 (4.0)

Table 1. Demographics of Healthy Carolina Survey Participants (N=5,920)

Note: Number of responses varies per question and may not equal the full sample size. Proportions reported based on sample size for each respective question.

Measures

The school in 2015 had 39,995 faculty, staff, and students (freshman, sophomores, juniors, seniors, graduates, medical school, pharmacy school, and law school) combined. All 39,995 had University of South Carolina email addresses and received invitations to complete surveys. Once the survey ended the total sample size N=6876, which did not account for missing data. Once missing data for question 4, which asked if participants knew current tobacco-free policy, and question 8, which asked how many days participants were exposed to second hand smoke were removed, N=5504 observations. When the missing data for gender, race or status are removed N=2916 observations.

We defined a respondent as having accurate knowledge about the campus tobacco-free policy if he/she chose the responses that described the current policy (N=5771), namely “The use of all tobacco products are prohibited on all campus property” and “[Yes], electronic cigarettes are considered a tobacco product and thereby prohibited by the university’s tobacco-free policy”. Confidence/experience approaching violators was defined as respondents who stated, “[Yes], since January 1, 2014, I have informed a person using a cigarette, cigar, pipe, smokeless tobacco, hookah, or an electronic cigarette on campus that the use of these products is prohibited.” A positive opinion of the tobacco-free policy was defined as “[Yes], I feel the university’s tobacco-free policy has reduced the use of tobacco and tobacco-derived products on the Columbia campus.”

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were produced from de-identified survey data for respondent demographics, as well as survey responses. Multiple logistic regression models were used to examine the association of respondent characteristics (gender, class or employment status, and race) with three separate outcomes: accurate knowledge about the campus tobacco-free policy,

confidence/experience approaching violators, and positive opinion of the tobacco-free policy effectiveness. Covariate categories were collapsed as necessary to ensure valid estimates. Statistical significance was based on a 0.05 alpha level. All analyses were performed using SAS Version 9.3 (SAS Institute, Cary, NC).

Human Subjects Approval Statement

Prior to data collection, the USC Institutional Review Board reviewed and deemed the study protocol for this project as exempt (Pro00044066).

RESULTS

The Healthy Carolina Survey had N=6876 respondents with a complete or partially complete data, equivalent to approximately 17% of the University of South Carolina community. The response rate was evenly distributed between faculty, staff, and students based on the University of South Carolina population (**Table 1**). There was a slight over-representation of graduate students and upper undergraduates (junior and senior) in comparison to lower undergraduates (sophomore and freshman). Staff and males were also slightly over-represented.

Although 77% of the respondents correctly identified the current tobacco-free policy, only 47.7% of respondents understood the policy in full. Understanding the policy in full was measured by correctly identifying “the use of all tobacco products are prohibited on all campus property”, and that e-cigarettes were included in the policy. In total, 44.1% of respondents answered incorrectly when asked if e-cigarettes were included in the policy (i.e., an incorrect answer was either answering that e-cigarettes are not included in the policy or not knowing whether they are included). When asked about e-cigarette use observed 30 days prior to the survey, 59.6% of respondents answered they had seen e-cigarette use at least one day during that period. Survey results also revealed that 93.5% of people have observed tobacco being smoked on campus within the 30 days prior to the survey; thus, nearly all respondents had the opportunity to approach a violator in the past month.

Perceived enforcement of the policy was low among students (22.5%) and faculty/staff (32.5%). Only 18.7% of participants reported having approached a violator of the tobacco-free policy. Of those respondents who had approached a violator (n=1,003), 12.8% reported that the violator did stop their tobacco use after being approached, 11.3% said the violator moved to off-campus property, 52.5% said the violator did not stop their tobacco use, and 23.5% said they were unsure about the outcome of approaching the violator. The respondents who did not approach a violator (n=3,703) were asked why they did not and what might make them more comfortable doing so. Survey responders were allowed to select more than one answer on the survey question. The most common selected answers for not approaching a violator were not feeling comfortable (55.2%), not feeling like they possessed the authority (40.9%), and feeling like they would upset the person (32.2%). There was also the option to write-in answers, which n=1,111 survey respondents did (30%). The respondents indicated that seeing more signage about the policy, knowing more about consequences of the policy, and observing others enforcing the policy would increase their comfort in approaching violators. Some respondents also wrote in answers to this survey question as well (n=1319). The corrective actions for tobacco violations were not well known among respondents, with only 46.4% knowing the consequences of policy violations. Although perceived enforcement is low (22.5-23.5%, **Table 2**), 69.5% of persons surveyed believe tobacco use has declined on campus since the tobacco-free campus policy was enacted.

Results from multiple logistic regression models revealed associations between in student/employment status, gender, and race for all three outcomes modeled (**Table 3**). University staff were significantly more likely than faculty, graduate students, or undergraduates to correctly identify the current campus tobacco policy, including inclusion of e-cigarettes in the policy. They were also more likely to have approached a violator and have a positive opinion of the policy’s effectiveness, particularly compared to undergraduate and graduate students. Despite having fewer respondents with accurate knowledge about the tobacco-free policy and less experience approaching violators than their staff counterparts, faculty were significantly more likely to feel the policy was working well. Compared to females, males were significantly less likely to have an accurate knowledge of the policy in full, have experience approaching a violator, or feel positively about the policy’s effectiveness. Minority members of the USC community were more likely than their white counterparts to have intervened on an observed smoking violation, but were not significantly different in terms of their knowledge level or opinion about the policy’s effectiveness.

Survey Item	Response N (%)
Participant correctly identified current tobacco policy	Yes 4,446 (77.0)
	No 1,325 (23.0)
Electronic cigarettes are considered a tobacco product and thereby prohibited by the University's tobacco-free policy	Yes 3,075 (55.9)
	No 628 (11.4)
	I Don't Know 1,801 (32.7)
The tobacco policy is being enforced by <i>students</i> on campus	Agree 1,212 (22.5)
	Disagree 4,176 (77.5)
The tobacco policy is being enforced by <i>faculty and staff</i> on campus	Agree 1,753 (32.5)
	Disagree 3,635 (67.5)
Informed a person violating the tobacco policy on campus that the use of tobacco products is prohibited	Yes 1,003 (18.7)
	No 3,730 (69.6)
	Have Not Seen 626 (11.7)
The tobacco-free policy has reduced the use of tobacco and tobacco-derived products on the Columbia campus.	Agree 3,621 (69.5)
	Disagree 1,590 (30.5)
Observed tobacco products being smoked on campus property in past 30 days	Yes 4,538 (93.5)
	No 997 (6.5)
Number of days observed tobacco products being smoked on campus property in past 30 days	1-2 days 844 (18.6)
	3-5 days 894 (19.6)
	6-9 days 661 (14.6)
	10-19 days 628 (13.8)
	20-29 days 251 (5.6)
	Daily 1,260 (27.8)

Exposure to second hand smoke on campus from someone else’s cigarette, cigar, pipe, or hookah in past 30 days	Yes	3,779 (68.3)
	No	1,756 (31.7)
Number of days were you exposed to second hand smoke on campus from someone else’s cigarette, cigar, pipe, or hookah in past 30 days	1-2 days	1,143 (30.2)
	3-5 days	846 (22.4)
	6-9 days	576 (15.2)
	10-19 days	469 (12.4)
	20-29 days	175 (4.6)
	Daily	570 (15.1)
Observed smokeless tobacco use on campus property in past 30 days	Yes	3,031 (54.8)
	No	2,505 (45.2)
Number of days you observed smokeless tobacco use on campus property in past 30 days	1-2 days	1,192 (39.3)
	3-5 days	548 (18.1)
	6-9 days	360 (11.9)
	10-19 days	307 (10.1)
	20-29 days	113 (3.7)
	Daily	511 (16.9)
Observed electronic cigarette use on campus property in past 30 days	Yes	3,241 (59.6)
	No	2,200 (40.4)
Number of days you observed electronic cigarette use on campus property in past 30 days	1-2 days	780 (24.1)
	3-5 days	680 (21.0)
	6-9 days	534 (16.5)
	10-19 days	499 (15.4)
	20-29 days	144 (4.4)
	Daily	604(18.6)

Table 2. Selected Survey Results from the Healthy Carolina Survey, 2015

Notes: Number of responses varies per question and may not equal the full sample size. Proportions reported based on sample size for each respective question. Correct response indicated by asterisk.

	Accurate knowledge of policy, OR (95% CI)	Intervening on observed violations, OR (95% CI)	Positive opinion of policy effectiveness, OR (95% CI)
Status			
Undergraduate	0.69 (0.57, 0.83)	0.45 (0.36, 0.56)	0.37 (0.30, 0.46)
Graduate Student	0.70 (0.58, 0.83)	0.31 (0.22, 0.43)	0.58 (0.44, 0.77)
Faculty	0.71 (0.55, 0.92)	0.80 (0.58, 1.10)	1.68 (1.16, 2.45)
Staff	1.00	1.00	1.00
Gender			
Male	0.81 (0.70, 0.94)	0.79 (0.66, 0.96)	0.48 (0.41, 0.56)
Female	1.00	1.00	1.00
Race			
Non-white	0.85 (0.70, 1.03)	1.28 (1.01, 1.61)	0.90 (0.73, 1.12)
White	1.00	1.00	1.00

Table 3. Respondent Factors Associated with Selected Survey Outcomes

Note: Significant differences indicated in bold text with significance level defined at alpha=0.05.

DISCUSSION

The number of university campuses with tobacco-free policies continues to increase.⁶ In addition, many members of university communities are aware of the hazards of second hand smoke and support a prominent role for the university in preventing smoke exposure through campus tobacco-free policies.^{10-15,25} The effects of tobacco-free policies have generally been positive, including reduced smoking behavior,⁸ and reduced second hand smoke exposure.⁹ However, it is often unclear who should enforce such policies; when survey asked “If you did not approach the violator, please select the reasons why” 41% of survey respondents suggested that they did not believe they had the authority to address the issue.¹³ This points towards a cited university student belief that campus police force or equivalent should be in charge of enforcing tobacco policies.^{12,15}

The tobacco-free policy at USC puts the responsibility of enforcement on students, faculty, and staff. However, our results show many USC community members, particularly students and faculty, are not aware of the details of the current tobacco-free policy, nor do they feel comfortable with personally enforcing the policy. On the tobacco-free policy survey question 15 asked specifically, “What would make you feel more comfortable approaching a violator of the tobacco policy?” The most-often suggested solution offered by respondents was to increase tobacco-free signage on campus (N=2745). Signage is considered a passive way to address policy violations that can be ignored or vandalized. In our study, 17% of violations occurred within view of a tobacco-free or no-smoking sign. One alternative approach researchers suggested would include recruitment of “community enforcers” who have the authoritative power to address violators and issue citations. These community enforcers, who could include students, faculty or staff, would also receive special training on how to approach violators and educate them on the consequences of their behavior. There are currently tobacco-free ambassadors on the USC campus, but the training is on a volunteer basis, and awareness of the program is limited.³¹ A more prominent community enforcement program on campus may

increase other community members' confidence in approach smoking violators and would not take campus police away from their existing community safety responsibilities. In a past study analyzing a tobacco ambassador program at another southeastern university, the use of a tobacco ambassador program (Tobacco Free Take Action!) reduced observed tobacco use by 65% and 35% reduction in cigarette butts found on campus hotspots.³³

CONCLUSION

This project provided important information on the perceptions that university students and employees have regarding the campus tobacco-free policy. Tobacco use continues on campus, and many people (particularly students) do not intervene when observing violations of the policy, suggesting a need for interventions to improve confidence about approaching tobacco-free policy violators on campus. Additionally, many respondents did not know that e-cigarettes were included in the university's tobacco-free policy, indicating a need for Healthy Carolina and other administrative units to better educate student, faculty and staff about what types of products are not permitted on campus. Furthermore, university tobacco-free policies lacking clear consequences for violations and appropriate enforcement may not be sufficient in creating tobacco-free campus environments.

Limitations of this study include the inability to observe and pin observations of smokeless tobacco use on *Collector for ArcGIS*. Smokeless tobacco is often harder to observe and cannot be readily confirmed without directly approaching the violator. Additionally, we were unable to randomly assign times for volunteers to work. Because of their employment and class schedules, volunteers were asked to walk for 30 minutes to one hour whenever they were able to in a given week before 7PM (because of safety concerns). This eliminated tobacco-free violators from being observed during certain times of the day, such as early mornings, nights, and weekends.

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ABOUT THE STUDENT AUTHOR

Sarah Powell completed this study in 2016 while she was an undergraduate public health student at the University of South Carolina (USC). She graduated cum laude from USC in May 2016 with a bachelor of science degree. Since graduating, she has enrolled at the University of South Florida College of Public Health to pursue her masters of science degree in epidemiology.

PRESS SUMMARY

With the large amount of college campuses creating tobacco-free policies that restrict or prohibit tobacco use there is interest in studying college communities' thoughts, opinions, and knowledge about the new policies. This study examined the tobacco-free policy at a large urban campus using an electronic survey that was sent to students, faculty, and staff. After analysis, the community demonstrated a tobacco-policy knowledge deficiency, and a lack of confidence in approaching people who continue to use tobacco. The research team at the conclusion of the study recommends an intervention on campus to increase tobacco-policy awareness and community confidence to approach violators of the policy.